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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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KRISHNA

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
 Into this universe terrible and sweet,
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
 Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
 And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
 And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
 Life shudders with a strange felicity;
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
 Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

For this one moment lived the ages past;
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

SRI AUROBINDO

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

‘WITHOUT THEE...’

August 17, 1913

O LORD, Master of our life, let us soar very high above all care for our material preservation. Nothing is more humiliating and depressing than these thoughts so constantly turned towards the preservation of the body, these preoccupations with health, the means of subsistence, the framework of life.... How very insignificant is all this, a thin smoke that a simple breath can disperse or a single thought turned towards Thee dispel like a vain mirage!

Deliver those who are in this bondage, O Lord, even as those who are the slaves of passion. On the path that leads to Thee these obstacles are at once terrible and puerile—terrible for those who are yet under their sway, puerile for one who has passed beyond.

How shall I describe that utter relief, that delightful lightness which comes when one is free from all anxiety for oneself, for one’s life and health and satisfaction, and even one’s progress?

This relief, this deliverance Thou hast granted to me, O Thou, Divine Master, Life of my life and Light of my light, O Thou who unceasingly teachest me love and makest me know the purpose of my existence.

It is Thou who livest in me, Thou alone; and why should I be preoccupied with myself and what might happen to me? Without Thee the dust constituting this body that strives to manifest Thee, would disperse amorphous and inconscient; without Thee this sensibility which makes possible a relation with all other centres of manifestation, would vanish into a dark inertia; without Thee this thought that animates and illumines the whole being, would be vague, vacant, unrealised; without Thee the sublime love which vivifies, coordinates, animates and gives warmth to all things would be a yet unawakened possibility. Without Thee all is inert, brute or inconscient. Thou art all that illumines and enraptures us, the whole reason of our existence and all our goal. Is this not enough to cure us of every personal thought, to make us spread our wings and soar above the contingencies of material life, so as to fly away into Thy divine atmosphere and be able to return as Thy messengers to the earth to announce the glorious tidings of Thy approaching Advent?

O Divine Master, sublime Friend, marvellous Teacher, in a fecund silence I bow to Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 30-31)

A LETTER OF THE MOTHER TO MAURICE MAGRE*

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry, June 14th, 1933

To Maurice Magre, with friendly regards

YOUR letter has been communicated to me and the questions you ask in it were for me, at a certain stage of my development, of such intense interest that I shall take great pleasure in replying to them. Nevertheless, a reply which is formulated mentally, however complete it may be, can never be *the reply*, the one which silences every doubt and quietens the mind. Certitude can only come with spiritual experience, and the most beautiful philosophical works can never equal or replace a few minutes of Knowledge that is lived.

You say: "Should a man of average development, who is no longer tormented by earthly desires and who is linked to the world only by his affections, renounce the hope of not reincarnating? Is there not, beyond the human state, a less material state where one goes when one is no longer recalled by desire into the human state? This seems strictly logical to me. Man cannot be at the summit of the scale. The animals are very near to him, is he not very near to the following state?"

First of all, what maintains the relation with the earth is not only vital desire, but any specifically human movement, and affections certainly form part of this. One is bound to the necessity of reincarnation by one's affections, by one's feelings, just as much as by one's desires. However, in the matter of reincarnation as in all things, each case has its own solution, and it is certain that a constant aspiration for liberation from rebirth, together with a sustained effort of heightening and sublimation of the consciousness, must have the result of severing the chain of earthly lives, although it does not for all that put an end to individual existence, which is prolonged in another world. But why think that this existence in another, more ethereal world, should be "the following state" which, relative to man, would be what man is to the animal? It seems to me more logical to think (and a deeper knowledge confirms this certitude) that the following state too will be a physical one, although we may conceive of this physical as magnified, transfigured by the descent, the infusion of Light and Truth. All the ages and millennia of human life that have elapsed so far have prepared the advent of this *new state*, and now the time has come for its concrete and tangible realisation. That is the very essence of Sri Aurobindo's teaching, the aim of the group he has allowed to form around him, the purpose of his Ashram.

For your second question,¹ I intended to send you the translation of a few extracts

* Maurice Magre is the author of many works, in particular *À la Poursuite de la Sagesse* (Charpentier, 1936), a chapter of which is devoted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

1. See next essay.

from Sri Aurobindo's works. But when I told him that I wanted to translate some passages from *The Life Divine* to send to you, he told me that I would have to translate no less than two chapters if I wanted to convey a fairly complete reply to you. Seeing my perplexity, he of himself decided to write some new pages on this subject;² he gave them to me very recently and I immediately began the translation.

I do not wish to spoil the freshness of the beautiful pages that I shall have the privilege of translating, but in the meanwhile, until I am able to send them to you, I shall give you, if I may, my too simple and succinct view of the problem.

It seems beyond question to me that the universe in which we live is not one of the most successful, particularly in its outermost expression; but it is also beyond question that we are part of it and that consequently, the only logical and wise thing for us to do is to set to work to perfect it, to extract the best from the worst and to make it into the most marvellous possible universe. For, I would add, not only is this transfiguration possible, but it is certain. May the peace and joy of Knowledge be with you.

THE MOTHER

(*Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, February 1977, pp. 69, 71)

2. See next essay.

You have perhaps read the books of Maurice Magre; there are some in the library. He describes this; he had come here, Maurice Magre, and we spoke and he told me that he had always noticed—he was highly sensitive—he had always noticed that people who have sexual desires are surrounded by a kind of small swarm of entities who are somewhat viscous and rather ugly and which torment them constantly, awakening desire in them. He said he had seen this around certain people. It was like being surrounded by a swarm of mosquitoes, yes! But it is more gross, and much uglier still, and it is viscous, it is horrible, and it turns round and round the person and gives him no peace, and it awakens in him the desire that has formed these entities and they batten on it. It is their food. This is absolutely true. His observation was quite correct. His vision was very true. It is like that.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers*, CWM, Vol. 6, p. 279)

“THE RIDDLE OF THIS WORLD”

The Question asked by Maurice Magre:

The divine spirit, having embodied itself in form, has therefore foreseen and willed everything. But then why does it seem to pursue a goal, consciousness, since it could have realised this at the very outset? Why has it allowed pain and evil which exist in its essence? If human evil can be attributed to men, the injustice that smites animals and plants can only be attributed to the divine order. Why has the divine order not organised everything in delight? Pain does not always lead us to perfection; more often, it casts us into incurable despair.

Sri Aurobindo's Reply:

It is not to be denied, no spiritual experience will deny that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world, strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering, evil. Indeed this perception is in a way the starting-point of the spiritual urge—except for the few to whom the greater experience comes spontaneously without being forced to it by the strong or overwhelming, the afflicting and detaching sense of the Shadow overhanging the whole range of this manifested existence. But still the question remains whether this is indeed, as is contended, the essential character of all manifestation or so long at least as there is a physical world it must be of this nature, so that the desire of birth, the will to manifest or create has to be regarded as the original sin and withdrawal from birth or manifestation as the sole possible way of salvation. For those who perceive it so or with some kindred look—and these have been the majority—there are well-known ways of issue, a straight-cut to spiritual deliverance. But equally it may not be so but only seem so to our ignorance or to a partial knowledge—the imperfection, the evil, the suffering may be a besetting circumstance or a dolorous passage, but not the very condition of manifestation, not the very essence of birth in Nature. And if so, the highest wisdom will lie not in escape, but in the urge towards a victory here, in a consenting association with the Will behind the world, in a discovery of the spiritual gate to perfection which will be at the same time an opening for the entire descent of the Divine Light, Knowledge, Power, Beatitude.

All spiritual experience affirms that there is a Permanent above the transience of this manifested world we live in and this limited consciousness in whose narrow borders we grope and struggle and that its characters are infinity, self-existence, freedom, absolute Light, absolute Beatitude. Is there then an unbridgeable gulf between that which is beyond and that which is here or are they two perpetual opposites and only by leaving this adventure in Time behind, by overleaping the gulf can men reach the Eternal? That is what seems to be at the end of one line of experience which has been followed to its rigorous conclusion by Buddhism and a little less

rigorously by a certain type of Monistic spirituality which admits some connection of the world with the Divine, but still opposes them in the last resort to each other as truth and illusion. But there is also this other and indubitable experience that the Divine is here in everything as well as above and behind everything, that all is in That and is That when we go back from its appearance to its Reality. It is a significant and illumining fact that the Knower of Brahman even moving and acting in this world, even bearing all its shocks, can live in some absolute peace, light and beatitude of the Divine. There is then here something other than that mere trenchant opposition—there is a mystery, a problem which one would think must admit of some less desperate solution. This spiritual possibility points beyond itself and brings a ray of hope into the darkness of our fallen existence.

And at once a first question arises—is this world an unchanging succession of the same phenomena always or is there in it an evolutionary urge, an evolutionary fact, a ladder of ascension somewhere from an original apparent Inconscience to a more and more developed consciousness, from each development still ascending, emerging on highest heights not yet within our normal reach? If so, what is the sense, the fundamental principle, the logical issue of that progression? Everything seems to point to such a progression as a fact—to a spiritual and not merely a physical evolution. Here too there is a justifying line of spiritual experience in which we discover that the Inconscient from which all starts is apparent only, for in it there is an involved Consciousness with endless possibilities, a consciousness not limited but cosmic and infinite, a concealed and self-imprisoned Divine, imprisoned in Matter but with every potentiality held in its secret depths. Out of this apparent Inconscience each potentiality is revealed in its turn, first organised Matter concealing the indwelling Spirit, then Life emerging in the plant and associated in the animal with a growing Mind, then Mind itself evolved and organised in Man. This evolution, this spiritual progression—does it stop short here in the imperfect mental being called Man? Or is the secret of it simply a succession of rebirths whose only purpose of issue is to labour towards the point at which it can learn its own futility, renounce itself and take its leap into some original unborn Existence or Non-Existence? There is at least the possibility, there comes at a certain point the certitude, that there is a far greater consciousness than what we call Mind, and that by ascending the ladder still farther we can find a point at which the hold of the material Inconscience, the vital and mental Ignorance ceases; a principle of consciousness becomes capable of manifestation which liberates not partially, not imperfectly, but radically and wholly this imprisoned Divine. In this vision each stage of evolution appears as due to the descent of a higher and higher Power of consciousness, raising the terrestrial level, creating a new stratum, but the highest yet remain to descend and it is by their descent that the riddle of terrestrial existence will receive its solution and not only the soul but Nature herself find her deliverance. This is the Truth which has been seen in flashes, in more and more entirety of its terms by the line of seers whom the Tantra would call the

hero-seekers and the divine-seekers and which may now be nearing the point of readiness for its full revelation and experience. Then whatever be the heavy weight of strife and suffering and darkness in the world, yet if there is this as its high result awaiting us, all that has gone before may not be counted too great a price by the strong and adventurous for the glory that is to come. At any rate the shadow lifts; there is a Divine Light that leans over the world and is not only a far-off incommunicable Lustre.

It is true that the problem still remains why all this that yet is should have been necessary—these crude beginnings, this long and stormy passage—why should the heavy and tedious price be demanded, why should evil and suffering ever have been there. For to the how of the fall into the Ignorance as opposed to the why, the effective cause, there is a substantial agreement in all spiritual experience. It is the division, the separation, the principle of isolation from the Permanent and One that brought it about; it is because the ego set up for itself in the world emphasising its own desire and self-affirmation in preference to its unity with the Divine and its oneness with all; it is because instead of the one supreme Force, Wisdom, Light determining the harmony of all forces each Idea, Force, Form of things was allowed to work itself out as far as it could in the mass of infinite possibilities by its separate will and inevitably in the end by conflict with others. Division, ego, the imperfect consciousness and groping and struggle of a separate self-affirmation are the efficient cause of the suffering and ignorance of this world. Once consciousnesses separated from the one consciousness, they fell inevitably into Ignorance and the last result of Ignorance was Inconscience; from a dark immense Inconscient this material world arises and out of it a soul that by evolution is struggling into consciousness, attracted towards the hidden Light, ascending but still blindly towards the lost Divinity from which it came.

But why should this have happened at all? One common way of putting the question and answering it ought to be eliminated from the first,—the human way and its ethical revolt and reprobation, its emotional outcry. For it is not, as some religions suppose, a supra-cosmic, arbitrary, personal Deity himself altogether uninvolved in the fall who has imposed evil and suffering on creatures made capriciously by his fiat. The Divine we know is an Infinite Being in whose infinite manifestation these things have come—it is the Divine itself that is here, behind us, pervading the manifestation, supporting the world with its oneness; it is the Divine that is in us upholding itself the burden of the fall and its dark consequence. If above It stands for ever in its perfect Light, Bliss and Peace, It is also here; its Light, Bliss and Peace are secretly here supporting all; in ourselves there is a spirit, a central presence greater than the series of surface personalities which, like the supreme Divine itself, is not overborne by the fate they endure. If we find out this Divine within us, if we know ourselves as this spirit which is of one essence and being with the Divine, that is our gate of deliverance and in it we can remain ourselves even in the midst of this world's

disharmonies, luminous, blissful and free. That much is the age-old testimony of spiritual experience.

But still what is the purpose and origin of the disharmony—why came this division and ego, this world of painful evolution? Why must evil and sorrow enter into the divine Good, Bliss and Peace? It is hard to answer to the human intelligence on its own level, for the consciousness to which the origin of this phenomenon belongs and to which it stands as it were automatically justified in a supra-intellectual knowledge, is a cosmic and not an individualised human intelligence; it sees in larger spaces, it has another vision and cognition, other terms of consciousness than human reason and feeling. To the human mind one might answer that while in itself the Infinite might be free from those perturbations, yet once manifestation began infinite possibility also began and among the infinite possibilities which it is the function of the universal manifestation to work out, the negation, the apparent effective negation—with all its consequences—of the Power, Light, Peace, Bliss was very evidently one. If it is asked why even if possible it should have been accepted, the answer nearest to the Cosmic Truth which the human intelligence can make is that in the relations or in the transition of the Divine in the Oneness to the Divine in the Many, this ominous possible became at a certain point an inevitable. For once it appears it acquires for the Soul descending into evolutionary manifestation an irresistible attraction which creates the inevitability—an attraction which in human terms on the terrestrial level might be interpreted as the call of the unknown, the joy of danger and difficulty and adventure, the will to attempt the impossible, to work out the incalculable, the will to create the new and the uncreated with one's own self and life as the material, the fascination of contradictories and their difficult harmonisation—these things translated into another supraphysical, superhuman consciousness, higher and wider than the mental, were the temptation that led to the fall. For to the original being of light on the verge of the descent the one thing unknown was the depths of the abyss, the possibilities of the Divine in the Ignorance and Inconscience. On the other side from the Divine Oneness a vast acquiescence, compassionate, consenting, helpful, a supreme knowledge that this thing must be, that having appeared it must be worked out, that its appearance is in a certain sense part of an incalculable infinite wisdom, that if the plunge into Night was inevitable the emergence into a new unprecedented Day was also a certitude, and that only so could a certain manifestation of the Supreme Truth be effected—by a working out with its phenomenal opposites as the starting-point of the evolution, as the condition laid down for a transforming emergence. In this acquiescence was embraced too the will of the great Sacrifice, the descent of the Divine itself into the Inconscience to take up the burden of the Ignorance and its consequences, to intervene as the Avatar and the Vibhuti walking between the double sign of the Cross and the Victory towards the fulfilment and deliverance. A too imaged rendering of the inexpressible Truth? But without images how to present to the intellect a mystery far beyond it? It is only when one has crossed the barrier of the limited

intelligence and shared in the cosmic experience and the knowledge which sees things from identity that the supreme realities which lie behind these images—images corresponding to the terrestrial fact—assume their divine forms and are felt as simple, natural, implied in the essence of things. It is by entering into that greater consciousness alone that one can grasp the inevitability of its self-creation and its purpose.

This is indeed only the Truth of the manifestation as it presents itself to the consciousness when it stands on the border line between Eternity and the descent into Time where the relation between the One and the Many in the evolution is self-determined, a zone where all that is to be is implied but not yet in action. But the liberated consciousness can rise higher where the problem exists no longer and from there see it in the light of a supreme identity where all is predetermined in the automatic self-existent truth of things and self-justified to an absolute consciousness and wisdom and absolute Delight which is behind all creation and non-creation and the affirmation and negation are both seen with the eyes of the ineffable Reality that delivers and reconciles them. But that knowledge is not expressible to the human mind; its language of light is too undecipherable, the light itself too bright for a consciousness accustomed to the stress and obscurity of the cosmic riddle and entangled in it to follow the clue or to grasp its secret. In any case, it is only when we rise in the spirit beyond the zone of the darkness and the struggle that we enter into the full significance of it and there is a deliverance of the soul from its enigma. To rise to that height of liberation is the true way out and the only means of the indubitable knowledge.

But the liberation and transcendence need not necessarily impose a disappearance, a sheer dissolving out from the manifestation; it can prepare a liberation into action of the highest Knowledge and an intensity of Power that can transform the world and fulfil the evolutionary urge. It is an ascent from which there is no longer a fall but a winged or self-sustained descent of light, force and Ananda.

It is what is inherent in force of being that manifests as becoming; but what the manifestation shall be, its terms, its balance of energies, its arrangement of principles depends on the consciousness which acts in the creative force, on the power of consciousness which Being delivers from itself for manifestation. It is in the nature of Being to be able to grade and vary its powers of consciousness and determine according to the grade and variation its world or its degree and scope of self-revelation. The manifested creation is limited by the power to which it belongs and sees and lives according to it and can only see more, live more powerfully, change its world by opening or moving towards or making descend a greater power of consciousness that was above it. This is what is happening in the evolution of consciousness in our world, a world of inanimate matter producing under the stress of this necessity a power of life, a power of mind which bring into it new forms of creation and still labouring to produce, to make descend into it some supramental power. It is further an operation of creative force which moves between two poles of consciousness. On one side there is a secret consciousness within and above which contains in it all

potentialities—there eternally manifest, here awaiting delivery—of light, peace, power and bliss. On the other side there is another, outward on the surface and below, that starts from the apparent opposite of unconsciousness, inertia, blind stress, possibility of suffering and grows by receiving into itself higher and higher powers which make it always re-create its manifestation in larger terms, each new creation of this kind bringing out something of the inner potentiality, making it more and more possible to bring down the Perfection that waits above. As long as the outward personality we call ourselves is centred in the lower powers of consciousness, the riddle of its own existence, its purpose, its necessity is to it an insoluble enigma; if something of the truth is at all conveyed to this outward mental man, he but imperfectly grasps it and perhaps misinterprets and misuses and mislives it. His true staff of walking is made more of a fire of faith than any ascertained and indubitable light of knowledge. It is only by rising toward a higher consciousness beyond the mental line and therefore superconscient now to him that he can emerge from his inability and his ignorance. His full liberation and enlightenment will come when he crosses the line into the light of a new superconscient existence. That is the transcendence which was the object of aspiration of the mystics and the spiritual seekers.

But in itself this would change nothing in the creation here, the evasion of a liberated soul from the world makes to that world no difference. But this crossing of the line if turned not only to an ascending but to a descending purpose would mean the transformation of the line from what it now is, a lid, a barrier, into a passage for the higher powers of consciousness of the Being now above it. It would mean a new creation on earth, a bringing in of the ultimate powers which would reverse the conditions here, in as much as that would produce a creation raised into the full flood of spiritual and supramental light in place of one emerging into a half-light of mind out of a darkness of material inconscience. It is only in such a full flood of the realised spirit that the embodied being could know, in the sense of all that was involved in it, the meaning and temporary necessity of his descent into the darkness and its conditions and at the same time dissolve them by a luminous transmutation into a manifestation here of the revealed and no longer of the veiled and disguised or apparently deformed Divine.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 24-32)

“THE RIDDLE OF THIS WORLD”*—A BOOK REVIEW

SRI AUROBINDO’S LATEST BOOK

REVIEWERS, prosaic though they be, have this in common with poets: they are an irritable race, ready to bark if not bite, grudging in their encomiums, pernickety in their criteria. But dull and irrevocably lost would be the soul of the reviewer who never in his lifetime threw all caution to the winds and ran wild through his columns with Archimedes’ “Eureka” on his nib. For once or twice in the course of exasperating journalistic years there comes his way a book with a capital B, and he has either to sit dumbfounded or do his discovery the justice of unstinted praise. Such a book is “The Riddle of this World” by Sri Aurobindo.

Most riddles refuse to get solved for the simple reason that nobody knows where the crux of the question lies. The greatest of them—“the Master-Knot of Human Fate”—needs for its true handling a knowledge of what exactly is responsible for that Gordian entanglement. Why is life such an endless repetition of ups and downs, enthusiastic aspirations and heartbreaking failures? The answer of Sri Aurobindo in this recent compilation of various notes on matters Yogic and vital issues apropos of them is that the world-sphinx will always strew the path of history with corpses of high philosophies, artistic idealisms, political revolutions until we realize that the one persistent difficulty is man’s clinging obstinately to his own mental incompetence. However, to throw up his hands in agnostic despair would be on his part as hopeless a gesture as to plume himself on his “perspicacity”: the right course is a “via media”—to admit that mind cannot solve the riddle of this world because it was not a mental consciousness which first framed it, and at the same time to perceive not only that there is a supramental consciousness but also that man can rise to that luminous altitude and bring down its Promethean fire to be ensouled in a new humanity.

It is in the last essay, the longest and the one that gives the book its title, that the full implications of the world-problem are discussed. The discussion goes on in a manner at once powerful and lucid with a wealth of fathomless spiritual experience behind each simple word, which makes the exposition so perfect as to carry almost instant conviction by the breadth and depth and height of its grave clarity. Here is the unmistakable accent of the Seer and the Knower whose language is born, as it were, of the stuff of life and whose aim is to employ mental terms for elucidating eternal truths sufficiently to make the mind of man voluntarily orientate towards direct realization of what is verbally intimated. And this sense of truth lived is given not only by the concluding essay but by all the other glimpses of occult wisdom in the book. By innumerable ways the central theme is approached and the innovation of Sri Aurobindo in Yogic theory and practice made clear to the aspirant, nay, even the

* By Sri Aurobindo, published by Arya Publishing House, College Street Market, Calcutta, Price Rs. 2.

layman. It is pointed out why the great religious endeavours of the past have in spite of mighty enrichments of the consciousness failed to render permanent their acquisitions in an all-embracing integral life-activity, an establishment of the Divine in matter so as to recreate the whole sphere of human existence. Indeed it is this continual failure to divinize man's physical nature that lies at the root of that intransigence of the spirit which goes by the name of Mayavada. And Mayavada, insisting on a flight from the world-delusion to some supracosmic ineffable, would be the true wisdom if, after all, material life cannot be completely transformed: surely there are diverse stages of practical social activity to be gone through, but the last satisfying stage would be the sealed trance of Nirvana if no earthly paradise can be shaped out from the stuff of human nature. It is clear that no amount of Shavian Socialism can guide the intelligent woman or man to such a paradise, or Open Conspiracy *à la* Wells depose the Old Adam in us. The change from Scylla to Charybdis may be worth effectuating for its apparent novelties, its fresh surprises and excitements; but no step forward is taken. Similarly, as Sri Aurobindo contends, the other-worldly or Nirvanic escape is a great experiment, but that too leaves poor humanity no better as far as essential values go. Is there, then, some other masterful secret? All these hundred and nine pages of Sri Aurobindo's book are an answer in the affirmative.

One wonders whether the particular title the book bears is an intentional hint back at the classic manifesto of scientific discovery and speculation with which Haeckel celebrated the end of the nineteenth century. If there is such a hint, it is most felicitous and opportune. The fundamental outlook championed by Haeckel dies hard, even though twentieth century physics and mathematics have revolutionized science itself. For, this outlook is not indissolubly wedded to any fixed theory: it can adapt itself infinitely to suit fresh data—like the chameleon it can change colour and still remain none the less chameleonic. And the strength of the Haeckelian treatment of “the riddle of the universe” lay in its straightforward commonsense, its fusion of keen thought with practical initiative and a constant eye to living fact, to actual realization. It is also in qualities analogous to these, though on a profounder plane, that Sri Aurobindo's especial charm and force reside. After the hectic but futile recriminations of nettled religionism and tenuous or else ponderous metaphysical ingenuities which came forward unconvincingly to “heckle Haeckel”, this series of discourses are a most refreshing rejoinder. It is cool and scientific in its temper, brilliant in its analysis of the modern intellect's frequent aberrancy, pragmatic and clear-eyed in the very act of mystical revelation, beautifully controlled in its most inspired moments, patiently drawing into its focus of spiritual practicality a vast variety of significant issues, making a clean sweep of the pseudo-occult no less than the pseudo-scientific, intensely idealistic and yet insistent on results here and now—and all with a masterly ease of assured but unpretentious knowledge, with even an occasional twinkle of dry humour in the calm splendour of its style.

But where is one to begin and where end in order to sample by quotation this calm splendour? How to give an adequate idea of the manifold colour richly subdued to the purpose of elucidation? For this splendour is no monotone, and the sense so vitally evolves that it would be a violence to Sri Aurobindo’s thought to exhibit a sentence or two torn from their context. For instance, the superb passage on the relation of Art, Poetry and Music to Yoga towards the close of the chapter on “The Valley of the False Glimmer” must be cited in full if its packed and at the same time spontaneous beauty is to be felt. Then take the essay: “European Metaphysics and Yoga”—what an illuminating comparison for the philosophically inclined reader, an impressive whole of slow, subtle, multiform, compelling exposition! While “The Graded Worlds” and “The Intermediate Zone” are dense with a continuous light of variously blended occult observation, “Reincarnation and Personality” is a vivid step-by-step unbreakable development towards the essential truth of this beclouded subject. And finally, there is the *magnum opus* among these much-in-little miracles, the title-essay already spoken of—the most difficult to pick and choose from by reason of its many-sided integrality of original idea. Indeed this review might have been altogether a string of quotations—and it could not have been less than that, since no complete presentation of this book’s versatile merit would be possible otherwise; but what is writ is writ and even though it had been worthier for having given a taste of Sri Aurobindo’s *ipsissima verba*, it will not be all in vain if it sends some readers eagerly where they are to be found.

C. D. S.

(COOVERJI DHUNJIBHOY SETHNA)

[Name used by K. D. Sethna for official documents]

(The original version of this review first appeared in the March 6, 1934 issue of *Free India*.)

The involution of a superconscient Spirit in inconscient Matter is the secret cause of this visible and apparent world. The keyword of the earth’s riddle is the gradual evolution of a hidden illimitable consciousness and power out of the seemingly inert yet furiously driven force of insensible Nature. Earth-life is one self-chosen habitation of a great Divinity and his aeonic will is to change it from a blind prison into his splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 161)

THE ASHRAM OF PONDICHERRY*

A FRENCH SAVANT'S IMPRESSIONS IN 1936

(This is a translation of the chapter "L'Ashram de Pondichéry" in Maurice Magre's book À la Poursuite de la Sagesse published by Fasquelle Éditeurs, Paris, 1936. The translation first appeared, with the permission of the Publishers, in Sri Aurobindo Circle, Thirteenth Number, 1957, without the present subtitle. Our acknowledgments are due to Sri Aurobindo Circle. The Mother is reported to have remarked that Magre's impressions were shot with a psychic vision. Thus they have an inner value in addition to the purely historical.)

IN the Ashram of Pondicherry are gathered together the wisest men of the earth. They dwell in white houses that look as if they were painted with some liquid moon. There is no sign on the door that here the souls have found peace. No star of the Shepherds gleams on their terraces and the Magi-Kings do not know the way to them.

The men of the Ashram are clothed in white cotton in the manner of the Hindus and their hair is twined in a sheaf upon their backs. They carry themselves straight like the spurt of a fountain, like a flame where there is no wind and like a thought when it is true. They move between low walls, in the gardens tended with care, they converse of things of beauty and they aspire towards the Spirit. These are the Perfect Ones amongst men.

The gardens of the Ashram have not the grandeur of those of Seville or the Alhambra. But it has seemed to me that there was a supernatural element which coloured the stems and the leaves. Does a Deva of the night come perchance to paint them before each dawn? On looking up, one sees the mango and the coconut. Hibiscus-flowers, at the tips of high branches, delicate and tossing like vivid thoughts, bend down over the walls and seem to look into the street, with a touch of pride.

*

Here is a community perfect in the measure in which perfection can be of this world. Each is devoted to his favourite task, according to his knowledge and his ability. There is a workshop for the carpenter, and a room where flour is kneaded. The bindings of books shine out like swords from the shelves of the book-cases. Through the open bays one sees like great marble pieces the brows of the readers. But most do manual labour, for in the handling of matter and in the attention that one gives to it there is a method that helps the soul. No bell is there for rest, and no rigorous discipline. Each finds his liberty in the harmony of love.

* Reprinted from the April 1976 issue of *Mother India*.

All the disciples have a beauty that cannot be defined, that is not contained in a system of proportions, that sports with the science of form. From where do they receive this beauty? Was it already enclosed in the germ-cells of their parents and has it merely blossomed through the mystery of life? Or did they receive it when they brushed past the grassless ground of the seven times purified courtyards, is it only the inferior manifestation of the grace of the spirit which alighted on them when they stepped through the gate of the Ashram? Who shall ever say from what hidden spring flows the beauty of the man of goodness, detached from the world? The most crystalline waters never reveal the subterranean soil that has filtered them and none has been able to see in the midst of the rock-masses, where all is frozen and granite, the precise point where takes birth the stream chosen from the hierarchy of streams to become the Ganges.

*

Behind one of the Ashram houses there is a silent courtyard where the gardener is king. Here are the cuttings of all the plants that, in the season of their growth, have to take their place in the gardens of other houses. And there are even some choice cuttings, grace-touched, that will be on the window of the Master and give a perfect flower in which he will contemplate at sunrise the manifold beauty of the earth.

The gardener knows this and he watches with a greater love over his delicate little people. He has pots of all shapes that are the homes of his sensitive children. According to their age and their capacity of changing the wet soil into the substance of their being, he transfers them from one pot to another, offers them a ray of the sun or a jet of his watering can. Here is the supple convolvulus, the brilliant hollyhock and the gladiolus with its perpetual offering. This courtyard is like a kingdom of delicate births, tiny weanings, slow outbreaks.

By his science of the virtues that reside in the seeds, of the humid forces that flow in the stems, of the distribution of the sap and its affinity with sun and moon, the gardener is the undisputed sovereign of the little inhabitants of the earthen pots, the radiant flowers of the future, all the beauty of tomorrow.

But he does not know his royalty. His face is so pure that one sees his soul through it, and in his soul are shining all the cuttings he has brought to flower. Is it perhaps because the gardener is in contact, within his narrow courtyard, with a wisdom of plant life which manifests through the aura of each leaf? Is it perhaps because he has silently communed with the soul of infant cuttings?

*

He is the most modest of disciples and yet his modesty is combined with an aristocratic pride. He explains by turns and he keeps silent and his speech and his silence have an equal timeliness. He makes one think of a very wise mandarin of North China born of a family as ancient as that of Confucius. I see him as governor

of an immense province where the people bless him because under his administration finance has prospered, the harvests have been abundant and happiness has dwelt in every home. In a palace of porcelain, he handles justice as if it were a fan and he metes out with a grand severity punishments that are absolutely trifling.

When he welcomed me on his threshold, I recognised him all at once. I would have recognised him out of all the inhabitants of India. I would have wished to tell him: "You are my brother." I believe I merely said: "Good morning, sir!" There was a touch of raillery in the depths of his eyes, the raillery one has towards those for whom one has to show some indulgence.

He dresses at times like a Hindu and at other times like a European. His true country is the world of wisdom. But it is not there that I came to know him. I came to know him in some other age and I was then younger than he. He pulled me out of trouble again and again. Out of what trouble? I cannot say. He had often to forgive me and he did it with a smile. For what fault? Who will ever tell me? But is it all a memory or a trick of the imagination?

What force enables you to know a large-hearted man? I had no idea that such a man existed. Surely I shall not find his like. But it is enough that there should be one of his kind in all this space stretched between the North Pole and the South.

*

The town stands on the sea-board within a circle of lakes and palms. A fiery sun scorches it perpetually and makes the tiles of its terraces glow. One who would contemplate it from an aeroplane would see only the flat and scalded stones around the statue of Duplex and the flag of the governor. The crows are heard calling to one another and sometimes there are silences that we find in no town. The bazaar lies stretched out in the dust. At the doors of the shops corpulent Mussalmans with thick lips offer their multicoloured stuffs. A canal divides the town in two, attesting by the filth which it drags with difficulty on its dead waters the eternal division of races. All along this canal, children play during the hours of the day, and at night the phantom of cholera glides silently over the slime.

Afar, the great steamers sail at times on the roadsteads, deliver their merchandise, whistle lugubriously and depart. In the little cafés, Hindu women dance to the sound of zithers, their hands behind their heads and the body held almost motionless. And always on the roofs the crows keep talking some incomprehensible language. It is in this town that, from all the quarters of India, wise men have come to live within the shadow of the Master, a shadow that projects a spot of light.

*

If the Master's shadow illumines the very moment it spreads out, of what matter then is moulded his body of flesh? A body resembling that of all other men. A body

that is born of woman, has drunk its mother's milk, taken food, known the intervals of sleep and on whose head has grown hair and whose fingers have nails, in remembrance of far ancestors who have scraped the soil and torn from it their life's nourishment. The Master has lived among men of the earth, he has been to the West, he has studied the languages and the philosophies, crossed oceans, seen various peoples, taken measure of ignorance and injustice. He has suffered the oppression of his brothers and fought for their freedom. The human wisdom that he possesses he has wrested from day-to-day life just as one wrests one's daily bread. It is by touching the roots of sorrow, the hidden and hurting sorrow behind the figure of all manifestation, like the soul behind the body, that his eyes have grown so deep and his face hollow, like a field when it is turned by a plough. But the divine wisdom, that is above all pain and cannot take part in it, he has come face to face with in the solitude of a prison. The four walls of his cell, like shining mirrors, have allowed him to see what is given to no man to contemplate, the mystery of causes, the path that leads to the perfect union. Still as a cypress on a day without wind, as a stone fixed to the mountain by bonds of clay, he has pursued his infinite way which knows neither a milestone nor an inn, and he has reached the goal which makes man divine: It is since then that he has lived in two different worlds, perhaps uncertain of the one in which he finds himself, perhaps surprised to be always inhabiting a physical body. It is since then that those who had a presentiment of this realisation have come to live around him like bees around a wonderful queen who bestows a honey diviner than lies within the calyxes of the most beautiful flowers.

*

I have come from the barbarous West where the machine of the metal face is king and where men sell their souls in exchange for a little pleasure. I had embarked on a great liner with bridge over bridge and with smoke-trailing funnels and with sirens that tear the heart.

I had counted the days, I had counted the hours. At Port-Saïd I saw the pirogues of the Thousand and One Nights and at a little distance I passed the battleships where the guns glittered on their platforms and the flags sent signals. On the Red Sea I crossed above the carcass of dead ships and at night I saw their ghosts floating with their extinguished fires and the faces of their dead ones, eyes open, within the portholes. I saw the beacons turning and the birds in flight. I have come like a pilgrim a trifle ridiculous with his colonial helmet for a too burning sun and with provision of quinine against fever. There were in my bags a coverlet and a fan and books for the heavy hours.

O pilgrim with greying hair, what you lack is not faith. When I was walking up and down the bridge, I found the Indian Ocean limited in comparison to my hopes. The reefs of Minicoë were mere grains of dust in a desert of darkness before the mountains of diamond which appear to my gaze in the inner sea of my soul.

O pilgrim who have fixed your moment of departure in life's twilight, did you not know that all beauty that manifests, from the top to the bottom of this earth's scale, in a plant or in a man, needs the leaven called youth?

*

What would Edgar Allan Poe say in the nights of Pondicherry, streaming with sweat, under the square transparent shroud of the mosquito-net?

Ten thousand crows are perched on the trees and on the roofs surrounding my house and ten thousand times they repeat, "Never more!" with that pitiless regularity which only the hands of the clocks and the stars of the sky have. Never more, never more, why? What is the sense so mortally desparate of these syllables? What is it that never more will come? Is it the gaiety of youth, the possibilities of manly force? But it has been long since I gave up this morning-heat of the blood which awakening brings you and which is sweeter than any intoxication. I have accustomed myself to hear my heart beat, measure my strength, consider my organs like the pieces of a clock-work ill-adjusted by an artisan miserly of nerves and tissues, one who has scamped his job of human construction. Is it lost pleasure, the pleasure of the body needing to exalt itself in order to escape from the void? Is it the waiting at the door which opens with a crumpling of robes, with the melancholy odour of hair? But, like the man in charge of the accessories in a theatre, I have scraped together, once the show was over, the paper bouquet, the rouge-stick and the false letter and I have consigned them to a cardboard box for the next show which will not take place.

Why do the crows repeat "Never more" in the endless night? Never more the peace of the room with books lined up, books where beauty lies hidden and can leap forth, where wisdom is at rest and does not display itself. Never more the hills bathed in sunshine, the vines which bend over on themselves, the parasol pines like offertories, the paths which slope down like old happinesses? Never more the welcoming little hotels, the friends whom one meets, the tables on the terraces when night falls? Never more the things I have loved? But no, it is not that.

What is engraved in memory comes alive the most forcefully when thought recreates it and I can, like a magician, resuscitate at my wish the miserable enchantments that have adorned my ordinary-man's life. It is over something else that the night-crows are moaning. It is perhaps not concerned with happiness. There is a Never More which keeps resounding in the abyss of the soul where the consciousness has never descended. It is a lament over forgotten secrets, over beings one has known in dreams, over the beauty of landscapes in other worlds.

Oh the Never More of burning nights, how it tears, how it goes far into the possibilities of anguish, when the day is first breaking, when there are at a distance the indifferent breakers of the sea and the siren of a steamer that calls one knows not what, one knows not whom, undoubtedly death.

*

Between the Master and the disciples there is the Mother. The Mother is at the same time a woman, made of flesh and bone, with face and hair, and the metaphysical symbol of the world-soul. One invokes her as the essence of life, the animating power of things and one takes refuge in her feminine arms if a wound of the body needs tending. One sees the Mother glide over the terraces of the Ashram as fleeting as an ideal thought in a daily dream. She has established an unformulated language based on the correspondence that exists between flowers and human wishes. The giving of a flower by a disciple is enough for her to know that some disquiet has to be soothed, some prayer to be granted. The Mother is close to the Master as the shadow is behind a man and as a ray is before the mirror when it is turned towards the sun.

*

When I stood before her, it was as if an inner storm were let loose all of a sudden. It came from the depth of the soul's horizon, with clouds of sombre thoughts and with breaths of revolt.

The Mother wears a sari of grey silk with an embroidered border and round her head a band with the same embroidery as that of the voile. Her white buskins make her feet snowy. She seems to me so small in her form and so great as a symbol! Her hands are so delicate and well-tended that one would say they were made of jewels from another planet. When she pushed the door a breath of adoration penetrated after her like a fume of sacred gold. I felt gliding up to me a dancing light which passed through my heart. But one never gets what one expects. Just as at the age of ten I started weeping after having received the wafer of holy communion, so also, hoping for serenity, I saw disorder arrive. The Spirit touched me and I knew not that it had touched.

*

Between the Master's house and the street where men pass, there are trees. And on these each evening, with a great rustling of wings and cries of all kinds, thousands of birds alight. Never in any garden of the earth have there been so many gathered together. On all places where rise the prayers of man, there are birds that descend. For there is a secret rapport between birds and the spirit. As if the trees of the garden were blossoming in the spiritual world, all the birds of the region come to perch on their branches. But it is not for going to sleep, according to the law of creatures, when night falls. They exchange a thousand words in a language that has no contact with human speech. What they say remains ever incomprehensible to us, for they do not feel emotion either in time or space, and the quality of the things they communicate is of another nature than our thoughts. When everything has been said, everything that the birds have to say after a day of flight over the grain-bearing earth, they lower their wings little by little, they slowly grow still. The garden of the Ashram, when the

moon makes its appearance, is covered with thousands of tiny statues—beaks bent, feathers marbled.

*

What difference is there between a cricket of Toulouse and an Indian cricket?

The voice of the Indian cricket is perhaps more ringing but the spirit of their song is the same. The one that is singing in the little garden under my window is as much at ease in the shadow of a banana tree as its brother of the banks of the Garonne between the vine and the cypress. Both of them have learnt the same things while touching with their antennae different earths in which they dig similar tunnels.

To the man who hears them they speak of the happy chances of life, they promise good fortune and the evening-contentment which a calm conscience brings. All the crickets of our planet sing the same little benevolent hymn and if a cricket of genius adds somewhere a new note it is soon transmitted mysteriously to all the crickets of the earth.

I come to bear witness to one of these innovations. The cricket I am hearing this evening has struck upon an unpublished theme. It is almost a trifle, just two or three notes. I am indeed at a loss to translate them. A cricket's song is so mysterious!

I thank the cricket of Pondicherry for the way it played on its tiny instrument. When I shall walk along the Garonne at the hour when the small farms light their lamps and the poplars rustle, all the crickets of Languedoc will add for my sake to their song what the Indian innovator of genius has found, something indefinably deep, a mere nothing, the shadow of a palm, the vanished traits of an unknown brother.

*

I have crossed a part of the earth in order to draw nearer to the Divine. A child of five could have told me that this was unnecessary and that God is for ever by the side of each one. But all the children of five are wrong. Thanks to the faculty that is natural to him and thanks to the impetus of his soul, a man in his life-time can communicate with the worlds of the spirit. He makes his miraculous power radiate on those whom he loves. But he gives only infinitesimal drops, imperceptible luminous atoms. It is not because he is miserly. But the spirit, in order to be received, needs a prepared soul. Mine has gone through no preparation. Wrapped in my proud grossness I remain in the garden of the birds, I who have neither their wings nor their gift of song, I who would pose questions instead of staying on a branch and sleeping till the dawn.

*

O Master, we do not see your shadow at the window nor do we hear the noise of your steps making the ceiling resound. You sit in perfect solitude: the divine serenity, the realised ecstasy. My admiration lifts towards you in the silence of the night,

towards you who have crossed the gate of perfection.

But there is a contradiction that makes me suffer and whose obsession I cannot chase away, for each of us carries his thought like a sharp sword turned towards himself and every movement of the soul causes a rending. You teach the beauty of living forms, the task of perfecting man and nature and making the world flower according to the divine law. But the divine law is not observed, men even misconstrue it, injustice reigns and evil is lord. And then, O Master, I tell myself that if you pass over the dust of the roads, if you go into the cities, placing the palm of your hand on the heart of the untouchables, surely the deaf will hear and the lepers get healed and the world realise salvation.

Ah! the evening when I have walked through the empty street by the side of the house where you live, I have passionately heard—even if I did not listen from the other side of the wall—the sob that the misery of mankind drew from you.

It was childish, I know it well. And that evening it seemed to me that I saw your tears pass through the stone like diamonds of fire and that the breath of your pity came up to me and burned my heart.

*

The ship that brought me, with its tiers of bridges and its underground machinery, is like a reduction, a microcosm of this planet.

Guided by the compass and the sextant, it goes over the sea like the earth in space, held in equilibrium by the law of attraction. And it transports many different worlds. There is the paradise of the first class where live the chosen, enjoying the presence of God, their God who is the appeaser of the hungers of their bodies.

With the smoke of cigarettes and the whiff of whisky rise the mediocre dreams of these fortunate ones. Like grotesque angels the barmen and the cabin boys run to satisfy their least desire and the orchestra sets women in evening-gowns dancing, while Mount Sinai and the dunes of Arabia are outlined on the horizon. Just as God the Father admits into a particular seventh heaven certain saints or certain meritorious lucky ones, so also the captain of the ship makes certain choice passengers climb a little iron staircase to offer them a superior whisky on the bridge that is nearer the stars.

Immediately below is the intermediate world, with the angels less diligent, an orchestra more ordinary, cabins narrower. It is the purgatory of the proud. Hardly one light chain divides them from the creatures who are the elect and who live in paradise. They could make it give way by their little finger. But this chain is strong like the prejudices of money whose symbol it is, like the power of society. Its mediocrity must be paid for in pain. The tormented ones of this purgatory do not know that their lungs suck the same air, their eyes look at the same light, they are condemned to the rack of envy.

And lower, much lower there is hell. Hell is hidden in the depths of the ship. It

is invisible but everyone knows of its existence and refuses to think of it. Here there is another humanity whose face one does not imagine, whose torture one does not wish to know. They are Arabs, it is said, or perhaps the Chinese. As in the descriptions of the catechisms, hell is a-fire. The sinner is tormented by the flames. The ladder by which one descends is so hot that the hand of flesh can scarcely be put on it. Here there is the mystery of electricity with its levers, its wires and its tubes. There is an alley of metal where the air crackles and which is lined with the cylindrical masses of the boilers where the blue and red oil-fuel dances. And there live, in the darkness and the fire, anonymous beings whose eyes are hollow, whose chests are desiccated. But what fault could they have committed to be condemned to icy jets from plug-holes of air and steam from orifices of red-hot steel, condemned to hear, like the knife of a guillotine, the panel of automatic doors fall behind them?

And the ship goes on, driven by the inner power which it draws from the force of mute suffering; it transports within the circle of its armature the iron of the worlds in which no Virgil will explain to any Dante the secret causes of injustice and sorrow.

*

If I, the most egoistic of men, am touched by another's suffering down to the roots of my being, I ask myself what it must be in your being and how the fires of sorrow have not completely burnt you up in the room where you sit. If I look at your face I see as far as one can go into the depth of pity. To have those eyes of sorrow and that tearing sadness on the features, you could not but have absorbed the misery of illness and the still greater misery of the spirit. Your body must have oozed with the ulcers of the wretched, swollen with the bloat of the leprous. Your soul has felt the dissoluteness of the unbeliever, the despair of those who know not how to love, the abyss of the suicides.

And yet you sit in your white house at Pondicherry, hear the come-and-go of the disciples, see through the window the flowers burgeoning. Are you protected by a formula that the sages have handed down since the Vedic age? Do you conceal your self in a veil of virgin gold that the Seven Aryan Rishis wove with their hands ten thousand years ago?

Does there exist for man a protection against the sorrow of his brother? Or does one escape this sorrow by following the path of silver that leads direct to God?

*

But perhaps pity is not a high virtue. It touches on our physical senses, it moves us to our entrails, it comes almost always with an egoistic emotion. The misfortunes that strike home to us the most are those that we dread for ourselves or that we have known in the past. Our wounds, our revolts, from which we secretly draw pride as from an inner nobility, are only the passionate signs of our frenzy for life. One pities

those who lack in happiness. But happiness is not life's goal.

Fortunate is he who has been able to put himself in the region where good and evil appear like the two sides of one and the same medal, he who sees the divine presence moving in the sorrow as in the joy. Pity is for him only the memory of a time when his vision was limited and his comprehension less wide.

O divine joy of the perfection in which one touches the prime substance of creatures, is pierced by vibrations of the radiant intelligence, is merged in the ineffable love which sustains the world!

*

She¹ looked so intensely at the horizon, the horizon of the Eastern sea on which the windows of the Ashram open! When she kept herself seated in the prow of the ship, I believe I saw her prayer materialised above her like an aura of sapphire mist.

All that she told me about the life of the soul had a profound resonance. Like a magician who with a wand makes flowers break open in the barren earth, she gave birth in me to beautifully coloured thoughts.

It is always doubt that one utters with the greatest of ardours, for doubt is more living than faith and more avid of utterance. But her faith was so intense that as soon as I expressed a doubt before her, she dispelled it, without vain words, with nothing save that inexpressible warmth which comes from the hearth of the soul.

But a fire of such a nature, does it not get burnt up just because one warms oneself with the flame? According as my faith increased, it seemed to me that there was something in her which grew faint. And when my aspiration towards the spirit reached its highest point, a breath of dryness passed over her and brought her a mysterious despair.

Doubt is a sickness of the soul which periodically returns like certain fevers. O Master, cast a look on her who has generously poured the invisible riches. Penetrate her with your creative thought so that from now on she may carry certitude just as a warrior carries an enchanted sword by which he is saved from evil. Grant her the talisman which gives the unchangeable virtue of belief. It is she who deserves the gift of the Master, if it is true that faithful hearts should be the first and that sincere enthusiasm is superior to all knowledge.

(To be continued)

MAURICE MAGRE

(Translated by K. D. Sethna from the original French)

1. Editor's Note: Here the author seems to refer to one who accompanied him to Pondicherry as secretary and nurse.

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of April 2005)

SRI AUROBINDO starts the second part of *The Ideal of Human Unity* with the chapter called "Nature's Law in Our Progress". Man, of all creatures, has to know the laws of Nature, and especially, of his own nature. This Nature is a thing that is ever changing and evolving. Yet, in all this change there are certain unchanging truths within which our progress has to take place. Otherwise there would be a chaos instead of an ordered cosmos. The subhuman animals and plants are not called upon to know themselves and to direct their actions. Vital and physical struggles they have, but no mental conflict. Rational man is ever at war with himself and with others. He is capable of a constant, but gradual, rise to higher and higher types. Of man's evolution, Sri Aurobindo has written at length elsewhere. What he says here can be summed up in a short extract—"This evolution takes place at present by a conflict and progress of ideas applied to life.... But from this elementary process there emerges a second and more advanced character of man's ideas about life; he passes beyond the mere mental translation and ready dynamic handling to a regulated valuation of the forces and tendencies that have emerged or are emerging in him and his environment. He studies ... their law and norm. He tries to determine the laws of his mind and life and body, the law and rule of the facts and forces about him that constitute his environment and determine the field and the mould of his action."

There are two kinds of law that affect us—the law of our actualities and the law of our potentialities. For man's intelligence the latter has taken the form of a fixed standard and a fixed set of principles. The evolution of Nature provides a deeper meaning to human evolution. All life is Nature fulfilling itself. Our actualities are the form to which our nature and life have attained. Our potentialities, on the other hand, point us to a new form with its new law and norm. Our intelligent mind, placed between the two, tends to mistake present law and form for the eternal. Only the utmost limit of our rise and fullness can be taken as the eternal ideal. The ideals of the stages in between are of transient value. Our mentality constitutes the consciousness of the movements of Nature in her progressive self-fulfilment. The Gita teaches us that, while Nature acts by her three modes, man deluded by his egoism thinks he is the doer. Our mind being half-lit, we can see only a part of Nature's intentions and processes. This is true as much of our collective mind as of our individual mentality. In this world, the individual, the community and the human race are mutually related. Each seeks its own satisfaction; the growth of social life is determined by the relationship *inter se* of the three terms. The human race has no consciously organised life and yet we are conscious of the demands of the whole race. None of the three terms of human existence can be ignored or eliminated, for

Nature acts through them all. In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo makes a passing reference to man's social growth. "Therefore it would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of Nature must be to develop the individual and all individuals to their full capacity, to develop the community and all communities... and to evolve the united life of mankind to its full common capacity and satisfaction.... This would seem the soundest way to increase the total riches of mankind and throw them into a fund of common possession and enjoyment."

The progress of mankind would thus occur by interchange between individual and individual, between community and community and between community and the whole race. This interchange is accompanied by a clash of ideas and strife. Now there is assertion of freedom by the individual, and anon there is suppression of the individual by the community. But, like diversity and unity, freedom and order are both necessary. Uniformity is a different thing. Unity we must attain, but not necessarily uniformity. In fact, perfect spiritual unity is consistent with richest diversity. It is only because of the limitation of the mind that uniformity is sought after, but the real aim of Nature is a true unity supporting a rich diversity. Till we arrive at spiritual perfection, the method of uniformity has to be applied—but very carefully. The question between law and liberty, too, stands on a similar footing. Both can be pushed too far. But perfection lies in the harmony between the two. "Human society progresses really and vitally in proportion as law becomes the child of freedom...." These principles, based on Nature's constant tendencies, ought to guide us in our pursuit of human unity. It might be done in the manner of the ancient law-givers of the race, like Manu and Lycurgus. But, in reality, the pursuit will be made according to man's interests and desires led on by the half-light of the human reason. It may even be attempted by an autocratic world-conqueror pursuing his sordid ambitions. Still we must know the best, the ideal method even if we cannot employ it forthwith.

The ideal unification of man would, in principle, be a system in which mankind would form its groupings according to its natural divisions of race, culture, etc. The present grouping has been done by military, political and economic forces without regard to any moral principle. At the cost of much suffering and bloodshed it has fulfilled certain ends of Nature. It has satisfied itself biologically but not morally. But once the great task of unity has been undertaken, the present arrangement will no longer have a *raison d'être*. The artificial grouping can remain only as historical tradition. But many traditions and many accomplished facts will have to be scrapped before the great change can be effected. To provide a sound foundation for the world state to be, the component units must get rid of all internal discord and disharmony. World-unity cannot be based on any force or compulsion, any legalised injustice, any anomalies. We cannot erect an enduring edifice on transient foundations. To establish the supremacy of Europe over Asia and Africa, to establish an oligarchy of a few white races, cannot lead to any lasting settlement of the world. Yet, in 1916,

this was all that was being contemplated. Things have undoubtedly marched ahead since then, except for a few crusty determined old die-hards. It has got to be realised that Asia and Africa are determined to make good....

“...some general legislative authority and means of change would have to be established by which the judgment and sentiment of mankind would be able to prevail over imperialistic egoisms....” This is what Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1916. At the end of the first World War the League of Nations was established. Regarding this League a new footnote has been added on page 430—“The League of Nations started with some dim ideal of this kind; but even its first halting attempts at opposing imperial egoisms ended in secession and avoided a civil war among its members only by drawing back from its own commitments. In fact, it was never more than an instrument subservient to the policy of a few great Powers.” It is indeed not easy for the imperialist to shed his mentality. Yet,... Britain has definitely taken a new path. It may take some time for something definite to emerge everywhere in world-politics in this direction. But the realisation is slowly growing that no empire can last without being a truly psychological unit. Now, psychological unity can be assured only by the free assent of peoples who are considered to be subject to a dominant power. If no such free assent is possible, it will have to be free dissent and separation or use of force. The imperial heterogeneous unit has a value in evolution only as a step towards a greater unity. The major portion of humanity is not interested in power-proud empires. The ultimate end must be a free and natural grouping of peoples. Such free groups would be in a position to eliminate gradually all sordid self-seeking and to develop a sense of wide psychological unity. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “...the free and natural nation-unit and perhaps the nation-group would be the just and living support of a sound and harmonious world-system.” Racial and cultural bonds will remain, but they will gradually be delegated to a subordinate position.

Sri Aurobindo has given some instances of this kind of complexity. First and foremost is that of Helvetian nationalism. The strong national sentiment that inspires the Swiss people is well-known. Yet Switzerland is a country with well-marked divisions of race, religion and language. Another wonderful example is Alsace. In race, language and early history it is German, pure and simple. Germany has on the strength of this tried its best to detach this country from France, but never succeeded, so great are the sentiments and affinities that bind it to France. On the other hand, Austro-Hungary never could attract the allegiance of Latin and Slavonic subjects, who have moved steadily towards separation and largely achieved it in recent years. For this reason, a free grouping must be the basic principle of unification, and not any rule of historic tradition. At first sight it might seem that the unity of man could most conveniently be brought about on the foundation of national grouping along with certain sub-groups. But looking below the surface, we find that in spite of many common traits, Mongolian China and Mongolian Japan are sharply divided—that Arabia, Turkey and Persia, all Islamic countries, cannot form a happy family—that

the Scandinavian twins, Sweden and Norway, though there are many things that draw them together, cannot remain united for long; they have tried and given up. Of course, these Mongolian, Islamic or Scandinavian groups may act in unison under the stress of circumstances, but for how long? Still, the re-arrangement of the world on the basis of free natural groupings can no longer be considered an idle dream. There are, however, large obstacles on the way. Man will not easily give up his national sentiments, unless he sees a fairly easy way of getting something better. We quote a couple of lines from what Sri Aurobindo said in 1916 and his short footnote written recently: Under certain circumstances, "the settlement of the world on any such ideal principle must wait upon the evolution of new forces and the coming to a head both in Asia and Europe of yet unaccomplished spiritual, intellectual and material revolutions." [And the footnote: "These revolutions have now happened and these obstacles, though not yet entirely, have faded or are fading out of existence."]

In discussing the drive towards uniformity and centralisation Sri Aurobindo asks what precisely the status would be of the nation units in the larger unity of mankind. The answer depends on whether there is going to be a single vast nation and centralised world-state with many provinces, parts of a huge machine, or an aggregation of free nationalities into a world-union under a loose, flexible system. If the former kind of unification comes about, there will be a single government which will impose on the world its uniform law and uniform administration, one educational and economic system, one civilisation and one culture, one social principle, perhaps one language and one religion. Such an arrangement seems a distant dream indeed, and by no means a beautiful one. Still, considering the speed at which things are moving ahead, it might become possible in three centuries or so. It would follow logically from the overwhelming predominance of one powerful empire or group of nations. It might come about, if there is already a loose basis of unity, by the prevalence of a political theory or the upsurge of a political party, which is out to establish its cult of absolute human equality. Such a system, by whatever means arrived at, would be based on the dictum that perfect unity is attainable only by uniformity. Sri Aurobindo says that uniformity increases as civilisation progresses. This is seen clearly in the history of the Turkish movement. The movement started with a lofty ideal of toleration for the various elements that made up the Ottoman empire, but, bit by bit, the Young Turk was carried away by an ardent zeal for a uniform Ottoman culture and nationality, which is the key-note of the Turkish State of today. The example of Germany is quoted to show how in spite of many component states the whole was moulded into the image of a larger Prussia. Even in federations like Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, "the spirit of uniformity... prevails or tends to prevail". The craze for general uniformity starts from that of a highly centralised administration. At the beginning the lesser units claim and exercise certain sovereign rights, but the tendency is to concentrate more and more power in the Central Government. We see this trend even in the U.S.A. where the people are deeply attached to the original

constitution. But things are changing fast. Sri Aurobindo says, "Once militarised, once cast into the vortex of old-world politics, as it at times threatens to be, nothing could long protect the States from the necessity of large changes in the direction of centralisation...." Certain circumstances drive a State towards centralisation. These circumstances have, of late, acquired a compelling force. A new footnote appearing on p. 442 says, "Even as it is, the direction of the drive of forces tends to be evidently away from democracy towards a more and more rigid State control and regimentation." This trend towards a totalitarian system reached its acme in the Germany of Hitler. But the trend persists and the tendency is general. It is important for us to understand this, to study its why and wherefore, in connection with the evolution of a World-State.

But the executive, the administrative, is not the only aspect of organised life that we have to consider. There is also the legislative, the judicial side of it, which is of equal importance. Life does not develop according to the law laid down by the self-conscious mind. This applies quite as well to the development of human society. Man started with a largely mechanical mentality, and he progressed at first in accordance with a largely mechanical law. Society, too, followed this same course, in the wake of the individual. Consciously laying down the rules of life was a later step. Later still, came the perfectly conscious organisation of group existence by means of the State—a comprehensive organisation of all branches thereof. The completeness of this method depends on how far State and society are synonymous. Modern democracy and modern socialism are only a first crude attempt at that achievement. Nazism and Fascism have tried to arrive at the requisite consciousness by violent regimentation, not freely.

In early society, there was no enactment of laws as we know it. Law arose out of custom by natural development, and embraced all law—political, social and religious. There was no fixed legislative authority to determine them. Traditionally, all law was believed to have been framed by an original Moses or Manu or Lycurgus, but historic evidence points to the contrary. Manu, in fact, is a symbol only; the word means "the mental being". He is the mental demi-god in humanity who fixes the terms upon which the race or people has to govern its evolution. Manu or Moses or Mahomed is only a prophet or message-carrier of the Divinity. All this receiving and transmitting of God's message belongs to a stage prior to the rational, when laws are framed for a people by a fixed legislative authority. The central authority established by the rational mind is at first political, but gradually becomes synonymous with social. Originally the king was a great warrior outside and a great chief in society. But, as time passed, he became the executive ruler as well as a social administrator. It was easier for the King to be an absolute ruler in foreign affairs than in internal administration. The people willingly left everything to him in peace and war, but in domestic matters he had to defer to the popular will. Sri Aurobindo says that this was the state of things in European governments, even at a much later period. For their

own safety the people had to acquiesce in the monarch's actions in war and peace for a fairly long time. Parliamentary control of foreign affairs is a very recent thing. It is more difficult for the central authority to seize the internal functionings, because of existing rights and privileges. But, in the end, it is bound to assume control of all administrative power,—financial, executive proper and official.

Financial control includes control of the public purse and expenditure of the money contributed by the community. The king has in the past tried to keep hold of the public funds because it was an important aspect of central authority. The public, too, perceived that it was an important part of their rights to see that their money was expended properly. What was the use of having a House of representatives if the King levied ship-money over its head? As early as the thirteenth century, the people of England put forward the maxim, "No taxation without representation." With the defeat of the Stuarts the monarchy in England had to give in on this point, and organic control of the State passed easily to the hands of the people—first the aristocracy, then the bourgeoisie. In France, the monarchy kept a tight hold on the public purse for a longer period and went on administering it inequitably, till the Revolution came in to rectify things. Still, the power has to go down yet to a much lower stratum. It may come about peacefully or it may not. The will of the whole society has to be given effect to, not only in the matter of taxation but in the whole organisation of economic life. These questions, says Sri Aurobindo, are preparing the revolutions of the future.

The uniformity of judicial administration completes the concentration of all powers in the hands of the sovereign. Judicial authority is a very important thing, for by its instrumentality the monarch can crush all revolt against himself and can stifle all criticism of his acts. It has two sides: the civil and the criminal. The former, dealing with laws relating to property and marriage, has a great control over social life. But the latter, which seeks to prevent crime, has a more direct connection with the process of substituting the State for the natural organic community in a position of power. All these laws were originally customary and were enforced by loose customary devices like the Panchayat in India and by similar bodies elsewhere. As the State idea developed, these local institutions began to lose their authority. In India, the King, whose principal function in the older Hindu polity was to coordinate the work of the village and town "republics" and to look after the business of war and peace, encroached more and more on the prerogatives of the local bodies. Large empires like the Maurya were established and the process of unification proceeded apace. Against this, there was always a mass of codes and customs and precedents, but they had ultimately to give way before the onward march of the Leviathan. A fixed uniform constitution, side by side with a uniform civil and criminal law, marks the advent of the new State. In time the rational spirit of man prepared a resistance to it on the basis of equality and called it Socialism.

But it should be remembered that no individual thinker, however wise, can

determine the religious, social and cultural life of a people; no arbitrary ruler, however powerful, can fix the economic, administrative activities of his people for long. Although exceptional monarchs like Asoka, Augustus, Charlemagne and Akbar can indicate the way and inaugurate certain new institutions at a critical point of history, it is all a passing guidance. But divine personages—messengers and prophets of God—who are born once in a millennium can speak in the name of God and give a fresh turn to human evolution. Sometimes, however, a man urged entirely by mundane motives has claimed to speak for the Divine. Sri Aurobindo calls this kind of claim “one of the most amazing among the many follies of the human mind”. Yet, false as they are, such attempts have had their use in human growth. For, after all, group life has to be moulded by reason, and the masses being unenlightened, it is the reason of the individual that has to do the shaping of the collective life. This is the whole rationale of autocracy and theocracy. The idea of the individual is itself no more than a half truth, but it has to take its course in evolution. The Man who dominates can control the mechanical part of life, but not the soul. Things, however, must go on as they are, till adequate powers arise in the course of evolution from the larger mind of the race to take up its guidance.

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

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

ASPIRE

Chiselling the words,
 On a block of my silent inquisitions
 I discover many in me,
 Clinging to those quivering, falling chips.

They wander in space,
 Searching for the veil.
 I am but an incomplete hand,
 Hiding behind my chisel, smiling, at my shaping soul!

RAJAT KUMAR MISHRA

A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

(Continued from the issue of May 2005)

A COUPLE of months later is the postcard of 13.7.90 that shows Amal's deep personal concern over my problems lightened with a radiant touch of humour that is his very own and prescription of a homely remedy for kidney stones!

I am so sorry to hear of your tale of woe upon woe. Your mother-in-law's case is typically suited for homeopathy. I suppose the whole Hahnemann implicit in you is at it. But do you believe in the Master's doctrine of one single unmixed dose? By the way, I am sure some Indophile will say that Hahnemann was a fiction hiding the reality of Hanuman.

I pray everything sorts out and you find time for *Archaeology* and the *Mahabharata*. I have calculated the War to have taken place around 1450 B.C., as you will note from *Ancient India in a New Light*. I don't know when the epic was written.

I know very well what your brother has passed through. I have experienced the passage of the kidney stone through the ureter (not the urethra). A Hercules would fall on the floor and writhe with agony. But there is a simple remedy. Make bhindi soup, sip it as hot as possible, then walk for 15 minutes. Repeat this twice a day. Within a week or so the stone will pass out without his knowing it...

Amal reminded me about the *Mahabharata* and archaeology article on 15.8.90 while returning a book thus: "Your Chandra will soon cease to be Gupta in my cupboard." In this postcard he had high praise for Koenraad Elst's book on Babri Masjid as "absolutely the last word". He informed me that Sonia Dyne was sponsoring his *Collected Poems* which was ready for printing and that the 2nd edition of *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare* was on the way.

Amal's postcard of 26.8.90 carried interesting information regarding kidney-stone pains and praise regarding my book. His eagerness to get me to write up the findings of Dr. Gauri Lad regarding archaeology and the epic is noticeable:

When I was troubled by it years ago, Dr. Karanjwalla, the expert on kidney and bladder complaints, told me that the best pain-killer was an injection of Baralgan. It acts almost instantaneously, he said.

Your MBH book contains all sorts of startling information on social mores in antiquity. My friend, Dr. Dinkar Palande, of Kumbakonam Leprosy Centre, who is now settled here, has taken copious notes from the book. When shall I

get the review and your chronological notes? Are they about the date of the War or about the composition of the epic? By the epic I mean the original Vyasa-stuff, which, according to Sri Aurobindo, runs to about 25,000 lines.

The last postcard I have is dated 6.9.90 in which he is keen to find out if I could get *Ancient India* reviewed in *Puratattva* or elsewhere. I had sent him some details of Lad's findings and asked about the new edition of *Iliad*.

Dating the oldest stratum of the MBH by tallying its information on artefacts, etc. with dated archaeological finds seems a very original and illuminating method. Do let me have your series of notes woven together. They will provide also a *terminus ad quem* of the War itself.

The new *Iliad* is indeed splendid. I regret that the essay on Quantitative Metre was omitted. It is a most important contribution to poetic technique. Of course the numbering of lines would have been helpful.

Nearly a year passes before I find another letter. This is dated 7 July 1991 and shows quite a change. He begins with a piercing insight into my own psychology—pulling no punches but quite confident that our affectionate relationship was such that he could say this without causing offence. I had posed to him the problem of evil in the world and received an illuminating reply. The letter also sums up the central thesis of his revolutionary *Ancient India in a New Light* in a succinct sentence or two.

I was glad to hear from you. It's been a long time since I last received a letter. Within that time your handwriting has undergone a bit of a change. I find it more carefully and patiently employed. Perhaps you have added a cubit to your stature and grown more efficient as well as more considerate all round?

Both your enclosures are worth attending to. I don't think Velikovsky is demolished by the earth's encounter in space millions of years ago. Why should earth be blessed with only one or two such experiences? Personally I don't believe there is any such cosmic accident to be connected with the Exodus but what destroyed the dinosaurs need not be taken to destroy Velikovsky's "vision".

The questions raised by the fine article on Evil are age-old—only they have here been put in modern garbs. They are unanswerable on our own level. The materialist mind escapes giving any answer: it takes the world to be such and such and no moral or theological problems are involved by it. Beyond materialism the immediate temptation is to believe in dualism: God and Satan as equally existent and always fighting. Some sort of practical dualism is unavoidable even in the Aurobindonian spirituality, but some subtleties are felt and even made effective in the modalities of the Yoga. If God exists with the nature which would really make him Godlike, a problem analogous to that of

Evil is the one of waste. The sole answer Sri Aurobindo considers as conveyable to the mere mind is that in the series of varied possibilities of manifestation by the Divine the possibility must arise and be accepted of a manifestation of the Divine starting from the very opposite of all divinity—an utter involution in which all existence, consciousness-force and bliss seem lost but from which a slow difficult evolution takes place of all these and shall culminate in a total divinisation of all the elements, including matter itself. There is a push upward from the involved Divine and there is a pressure downward from the free divinity: the result will ultimately be a transformation of a complete kind such as only Sri Aurobindo has envisaged because only he has visioned the supreme Plenitude as acting from both high above and down below. In this manifestation where an evolutionary process goes on as if initially God did not exist, evil and waste as the consequence of the total involution are bound to be logical and natural accompaniments of evolution, with the free godhead from “above” fighting them to fulfil

The Eternal broken into transient lives
And godhead pent in the mire and the stone.

Behind the apparent fight, there is also a subtle strategy born of the fact that in spite of all the differences and contradictions “the One without a second” is everywhere, so that even evil and waste are bound somehow to subserve, for all their natural and logical actuality, the purpose of Sat-chit-tapas-ananda.

Your question about the *Mudra-rakshasa* passes my understanding. My scheme of ancient history does not deny the link between Chandragupta Maurya and the Nandas, with the former leading to the latter’s decline. Not that all the dramatic details of this play of the fifth century A.D. have to be accepted. But my perspective has room for the traditional Maurya-Nanda opposition: the revolution I propose shifts it from the late fourth century B.C., where the Sandrocottus of Megasthenes is currently identified with the Mauryan Chandragupta, to the early tenth century B.C. and identify Sandrocottus with Chandragupta I of the Imperial Guptas. My book is not interested in discussing how exactly the war between the Maurya and the Nanda took place; it is interested only in arguing that it did not take place in the epoch in which conventional history sees it. That is why I mention *Mudra-rakshasa* six times without raising the topic to which you refer.

My *The Problem of Aryan Origins* in its extensively enlarged second edition—more than 430 pages—will be ready in a month or two. Do you remember sending xeroxed extracts from *The Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, edited by B. B. Lal? I have made use of your matter, but I want to know who were the publishers and when was the book published. This information is lacking

and I shall be thankful if as soon as possible you drop me a postcard to fill this gap in my book's omniscience.

Amal had wanted publication details of Lal's book urgently and I tried to provide this over the phone and failed, but my letter reached. Amal brought me up to date regarding new publishing news in his letter of 30.7.91 besides the recurrence of strikes in the Press bedevilling *M.I.* The obsession with ancient India continues.

Thank you very much for your valiant efforts to run down the publishing details about *The Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*. I knew you would try to ring me and also the probability of the line being obstructed. You have been in time just to fill in the gap in the Bibliography. The new book should be out some time in August—almost four times its old length. It is Aditya Prakashan that will be the publishers—a concern of Sita Ram Goel's family. I am lucky indeed in having a discerning, generous and enterprising man like Goel as my friend.

I haven't seen *Ancient India* in any of the journals that come my way. But I learn from the accounts sent me by Aditya Prakashan that it is selling rather well. I don't know how they manage to market such a book successfully. If you review it somewhere, I shall be very glad.

The second batch of the June-July *Mother Indias* have been posted to you early this morning. The August issue which has been held up because of a Press strike will be posted tomorrow or on the 1st. It has some items of special interest.

My *Collected Poems* is still hanging fire. The final section of work still uncollected has been taking long to be set in order. I hope to attend to the task in the course of next month.

There is some talk of a second edition of *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo* with a few additional articles.¹ The second edition of *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare* has been brought out by the Ashram in a somewhat different format with a short additional appendix setting right two small omissions in the first edition.

Our country is in a sad mess. The Kashmir problem seems insoluble unless India takes over Azad Kashmir which belongs to her by right. But the mountainous terrain is somewhat against a straight attack unless a massive air-blow is carried out. Of course a concomitant war with Pakistan will be involved—unless a masterly blitzkrieg against Azad Kashmir is mounted and the job is finished before Pak wakes up. I have no solution for the Punjab imbroglio.

The next letter came three months later and was, most unusually, handwritten. Amal had shifted [in 1980] to 19, rue François Martin but his current address was the

1. The second revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1992.

Ashram Nursing Home following “a nasty toss at my own place” because of which he had fractured his right thigh-bone and badly hurt his right knee. The detached intellect in him calmly describes the state in which he found himself which makes one shudder, but he typically spices it up with humour:

My leg was completely twisted to a position behind my buttocks. I could not have brought it forward and the pain was rather sharp.... The lower half below the knee was in one line and the upper in another—a most inartistic sight. I pushed the latter outward and somehow the two halves fell into line.”

Virtually immobilised for several months, his spirit is unbowed:

A strange state at my age. I am sure there is something to be gained by me through this experience which creates quite a hiatus in my life. I am in the course of discovering what Grace Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have secretly bestowed on me.

Characteristically, he shifted from personal matters to “business”, namely publication of my parents’ accounts of how they came to Sri Aurobindo in abridged form in *M.I.* (Shyam Kumari brought out the full accounts in the third volume of her series). He also provided the news that the revised and enlarged second edition of *The Problem of Aryan Origins* was being printed by the end of December and that no proper reviews of his *Ancient India in a New Light* had come out. He asked me to pass on mine to Sita Ram Goel for use and said he was looking forward to my translation of Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s great work *Krishna Charitra* (M. P. Birla Foundation).

The next letter I find is also handwritten, dated 14.3.92, apologising for errors in my mother’s story as published. I had sent Amal my paper on the Indus Civilisation published in the *Dravidian Encyclopedia* and he liked my treatment of his outlook, but pointed out that some other hands had also tinkered with the rest depriving it of a focused picture. I had asked Amal why Sri Aurobindo has nothing to say about Old English poetry and treats Chaucer perfunctorily. He writes, “Perhaps he hadn’t read it or thought that it culminated in a worthwhile way in Chaucer and so Chaucer was taken up. Yes, the treatment of Chaucer sounds somewhat brusque but perhaps the treatment served the psychological purpose well enough.” I had also asked Amal why Sri Aurobindo has hardly anything on Vidyasagar, quoting to him Swami Vivekananda’s praise of his greatness. Amal advised I hunt through the index of *Foundations of Indian Culture* and wrote: “You have made me interested to know more about him. I didn’t know Vivekananda had referred to him in such high terms.” He adds that his second set of correspondence with Kathleen Raine is ready, but there is no money to fund the publication.

The next letter I have kept is typed and dated 13.5.92, again apologising for the

truncated version, with some mistakes, of my mother's account of coming to Pondicherry in 1948, promising to carry my corrections in the June issue and eagerly awaiting my book-length commentary on the *Mahabharata* TV serial. He reiterates here, "I wish some day somebody will be able to get hold of the nearly 25,000 lines which Sri Aurobindo isolated on stylistic grounds as genuinely Vyasa's. In a certain edition of the poem he had marked them and it is said that Nolini transferred the markings to his copy when Sri Aurobindo's copy which had belonged to some Madras library had to be sent away. Sraddhalu of the Archives here is after those lines but I am afraid he has not succeeded yet." I have recorded earlier on how I found this copy in the Ashram library and gave it to Nolini-da in 1969-70. Amal's *The Problem* is out, he informs me, thrice as large as the original, and adds that he is "again in circulation and not bedridden but in a wheelchair avatar. My daily visits to the Samadhi are also wheelchaired. The little 'walking' I do at home with the help of a 'Walker' is really a fraud. For the lower half of my right leg is somewhat angulated owing to the awkward way the fracture has set and until it is aligned to the upper half I cannot have a stable poise on the floor." His irrepressible humour flashes through even now. Everyone, he says, is advising against another operation whereby he hopes to have "at least a 50% chance to regain my old subnormal normality" because it "will be too much for the old guy and he may limp off the world-stage. I have no such apprehension and am prepared to take the risk" he announces with his typical unflinching courage, to "better my ambulatory prospects".

This is the last letter I had from Amal. In the meantime Sankalia was no more. I was in the throes of what had become routine: getting transferred annually! In subsequent years—up to 1995 at least—I wrote to Amal in detail of my travails, feeling much relieved every time I shared my anguish. For some reason he did not reply, though I am sure he had me in his heart always. When I met him later, he simply said that he no longer found any interest in writing. A major change had occurred within. He still took weekly sessions with Huta, but wrote nothing—quite astonishing for such an indefatigable and even inveterate writer.

And so that brings me to the end of a wonderful excursion into the past, traversing 23 long years from 1969 to 1992 in the company of a mind that astonishes with its encyclopaedic reach, suffused with humour, and a heart whose warmth reaches out to envelop one making a mockery of distance.

(Concluded)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of May 2005)

I HAD been observing for the last few days that father on returning from the Playground remained in the Meditation Hall, at the same spot where the bronze bust of Sri Aurobindo stands today. He would sit there for a long time. After father left his body I missed him terribly and I felt an emptiness in that spot. One evening I was sitting in the Meditation Hall when Nolini-da came down from “upstairs”. He did not see me. While entering his room, this empty spot struck him and he at once exclaimed: “What a terrible void he has left there!” Nolini-da had a very deep affection for father.

After sitting in the Meditation Hall father would go to bow at the Samadhi where he would stay for a long time. Sometimes I felt very worried about him. At times we had to call him back from the Samadhi.

“It is very late in the night. Don’t you want to go home?”

Slowly, quietly, he would get up from the Samadhi and come away. On his way home he recounted to us all kinds of experiences.

Father would often say at home:

“This body has become old. It is time to discard it.”

That absent-minded, empty look was always there. He never told us that he often had chest pain.

It was the 21st of May. In the evening I was rather busy with some work. Suddenly Tapati came running:

“Didi! Father is feeling very unwell.”

I rushed to father’s room and saw him sitting on the floor. He had placed a photograph of the Mother on a chair and was holding it with both his hands, his head touching the Mother in obeisance. His body had turned blue and he was sweating profusely. I touched him and found his body completely cold. I rushed to the Ashram and informed the Mother that father was in a very critical state. The Mother sent word to Dr. Sanyal to go at once and examine him. I stood on the second-floor staircase and waited. When I reached the house with Sanyal-da I noticed father was sitting cheerfully on the cot outside in the verandah! Unbelievable! He even joked with Sanyal-da about various things. Sanyal-da went back quite relieved.

One day I found father in deep thought. Very pensive. We were sitting near him. After a while he remarked:

“Tomorrow is Manu’s (Arati’s) birthday. I will not go on her birthday. I will stay on till her birthday.”

Then he looked at Manoj and said:

“You will stay in this room with Nebu (Tapati).”

He said these things in such a way that we were taken aback.

“Why are you saying these things? Where will you go leaving us behind?” I asked.

Father did not answer. I felt that he was plunged in some thought. As night deepened, his chest pain increased. Sanyal-da returned a few times in order to give him an injection. The next day was the 22nd of May. The pain did not subside. Even with that tremendous pain he had not forgotten Arati’s birthday. He asked repeatedly:

“Manu has not yet returned from the Mother?”

It seemed that he was restless. That evening the Mother’s work ended very late. So Arati returned home only around six. On seeing her, father felt better at once. He came and sat in a chair.

“Come to me, Manu.”

And he hugged her tightly and asked her all kinds of questions about her birthday. He enquired about the Mother again and again.

Then he went and lay down on his bed. He was a different man now. The pain went on increasing and his suffering became unbearable. It was difficult to watch him in that state. He seemed to have been waiting for Arati to come back from the Mother. And all that time he was continuously battling with death. Meanwhile the pain went on increasing.... Father signalled to us to bring him some paper. There was a little bleeding from his mouth. Not wanting us to know, he kept spitting into the paper and throwing it in a bin. He avoided looking at us. Amazing! The night was well advanced and he signalled to us to go to sleep. I switched off the lights and began rubbing father’s back with my hand. And I kept calling the Mother.... Silent tears welled up uncontrollably. Suddenly father exclaimed in a loud voice:

“You should be quiet in a sick man’s room. Don’t spoil the atmosphere.”

And I had not even cried audibly! How did father get to know! From the night of 22nd May father’s condition began to deteriorate very fast. Early in the morning when Manoj rushed to the Ashram to inform the Mother about his condition, She told him:

“Tell your father that if he wishes to continue in this body he will have to bear this pain.”

And the Mother gave Manoj her “Blessing” for father. Manoj came back home and told father what the Mother had said. He touched the Mother’s “Blessing” on his forehead first and then kept it on his chest. A mysterious smile dawned on his lips. Then suddenly the pain increased even more. Manoj was holding father in his arms when he breathed his last. Father was clutching the Mother’s picture and Her “Blessing”, holding it close to his heart.

We kept staring at father’s face and remained still. It was difficult to understand what had happened. News of father’s departure spread in the Ashram. Ranju-da came home and said:

“Baba (Nolini-da) has asked all of you to go to the Ashram at once. The Mother is waiting for you. Baba is waiting for you near the door next to his room. Go quickly.”

We just looked at him quite nonplussed.

“How can we leave father at this moment and go?” I said to myself.

Ranju-da understood at once.

“Don’t worry. We’re here.”

I noticed a lot of Ashramites had gathered quietly in the verandah and the courtyard outside. We left for the Ashram. Nolini-da was indeed waiting for us. He looked at us with great tenderness and said very gently:

“Go upstairs. The Mother is waiting for you in the Meditation Hall.”

We saw that the Mother was sitting upstairs in the same chair where She sat for the Darshans and on the 5th of December. This chair is still kept in the same spot and we still bow down to the chair on Darshan days and on 5th December. It is in front of this chair that on 5th December we all gather and meditate between 10 and 10.30 in the morning.

We entered the room and sat down in front of the Mother. The Mother looked at us and said:

“You will go back to your father’s body and sit around it. Meditate for an hour.”

Then She turned to me and said:

“Don’t cry. Meditate for one full hour. Don’t worry about the flowers. I will give the flowers to Nolini, Amrita and Pavitra. They will also sit and meditate with you.”

We returned from the Mother and came back home and sat before father’s body. We began meditating. But what was this! I kept seeing father, with that happy carefree radiant face! A silk *kurta* adorned his body, the same that father used to wear for special occasions. A silk *chaddar* around his neck. His beautiful face was aglow. Father was sitting a little above his body. And he called us all by our names. Slowly he went on rising upward. How wonderful his face looked! I just could not meditate any more. I went on looking at father and could not take my eyes off him.

After the meditation Minu told me:

“I was bowing down at the Samadhi when suddenly I noticed that the Service tree above was covered with flowers. The flowers were arranged in the form of uncle’s (my father’s) body and they were slowly going up. After this celestial vision was over I quickly ran to your house. And there I saw that uncle had indeed left his body!”

On 24th May, the day after father’s passing, we went back once again to the Mother. The Mother was waiting for us in the Meditation Hall, in Her chair. Hardly had we sat down around Her that She began talking to us about death.

“This body is nothing,” She repeated again and again touching Her own hand. “As you change an old *sari* with a new one, in the same way when the body becomes old and sick, we give up the old body and take up a new one. It is like leaving one room and entering another.”

And even as She was telling us this, suddenly She exclaimed:

“There! There in that corner near the Darshan room, your father is standing full of joy. He is telling you ‘I am extremely happy. Coming over to this side is not difficult at all. Very easy indeed! I am very happy.’”

We turned around to look at that corner but we could not see father.

After father’s departure, why had the Mother asked us to meditate for an hour? This question was troubling me. Was it because something unforeseen had happened to father after his death? I therefore asked the Mother:

“Mother, why did you call us as soon as father had left his body? Why did you ask us to meditate for an hour?”

The Mother answered:

“I asked you to meditate near your father’s bed for an hour because I performed the last rites for him during that time.”

The Mother understood that I was not able to derive much consolation from Her words. I still harboured negative fears for my father. The Mother suddenly asked me:

“Didn’t you see anything during the meditation?”

I replied:

“I saw that father was seated a little above his body. His face was aglow with joy. He called us all by our names and then slowly he started moving upward.”

“You’ve seen rightly,” the Mother answered. “After his death, his whole being rose upward but his paternal affection kept him tied down as with a slender thread. What will become of my children? How will they stay without me? These worries were holding him down. I decided to perform the *śrāddha* for him and free him totally from this bond of paternal love. Your father will not return any more as a human being. He will come down straight as a supramental being upon the earth.”

As soon as the Mother uttered that father would come down as a supramental being upon the earth we cried out joyfully. Hearing our cries of joy Champaklal-ji came running to the door. He too had a smile on his face.

Then I told the Mother about Minu’s vision after father’s death.

The Mother listened to everything and then remarked:

“Minu has seen well. Your father spent all his life in the service of Sri Aurobindo, in order to surrender himself. He organised every part of his being around his psychic being. He was an extremely conscious human being. I saw him rise straight upward, gathering every part of his being, straight to that plane where Sri Aurobindo is at work. That’s where he has gone.”

The Mother told Satprem many things about death. While talking about this, She described father’s journey after his death in great detail to him. I include that description below. If man lives his life consciously then his soul progresses. Father’s life is proof of that. The Mother observed:

“Take N.D. for example, a man who lived his whole life with the idea of serving Sri Aurobindo; he died clasping my photo to his breast. This was a consecrated man,

very conscious, with an unfailing dedication, and all the parts of his being well organised around the psychic. The day he was going to leave his body, little M was meditating next to the Samadhi when suddenly she had a vision. She saw all the flowers of the tree next to the Samadhi gathering themselves together to form a big bouquet, and rising, rising straight up. And in her vision these flowers were linked with the image of N.D. She ran quickly to their house and he was dead.

“I only knew about this vision later but on my side, when he left, I saw his whole being gathered together, well united, thoroughly homogenous, in a great aspiration and rising, rising without dispersing, without deviating, straight up to the frontier of what Sri Aurobindo has called ‘the higher hemisphere’, there where Sri Aurobindo in his supramental action presides over earth. And he melted into that light.

“Some time before his heart attack he said to his children: ‘The gown is old, it must be thrown away.’”

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

EPIPHANY

The candles blaze...

They blossom out of dark
aeons. Is it not the divine
teleos?

Fire of life ascending into
day? *They* have

descended with gold
blessing, gifts of supramental

light unfolding in our world,
our life,
our moment—to fulfil

the brightest wish
of earth.

JOSEPH KENT

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of May 2005)

19. Krishna is Born

WHEN was Krishna born? When did the Supreme decide to contain its splendour in a tender, tiny babe? The *Vishnu Purana* gives an indication: “To make the lotus of *samsāra* bloom forth, the Lord, the sun-like Achuta was born to Devaki who appeared as the morning twilight.” The Lord is born with four shoulders and Vasudeva hails him. On Devaki’s request the babe withdraws its four shoulders and now appears like an ordinary baby. Vasudeva takes the baby to Gokula and leaves it near Yashoda, bringing back the girl child who had been born to her just then.

What appears as a grand design of superhuman happenings in the *Vishnu Purana* was transformed into an utterly human scenario by the 7th century Vaishnava Tamil poet, Perialwar. The day has dawned in Gokula and the cowherd settlement knows that a heir is born to Nandagopa. In fact Nandagopa and Yashoda have no inkling about the child-transfer. Ananda consciousness streams everywhere as Perialwar sees the Supreme in the child at home. He sings for him cradle songs and feeds him and plays with him, shows him the moon, calls out to Krishna for a hug and addresses the dark-feathered crow to comb the little one’s tresses:

My Lord would gulp down butter kept in a heavy vessel up in the woven hanger and then speedily go to sleep. O crow! Come and comb the curls of this Lord of the Immortals, this Kannan of the cowherd settlement. O crow! Comb the curls of the one whose complexion resembles the rain-bearing cloud!¹

These songs of Perialwar (7th century) gave birth to the genre of *Pillai-t Tamil*, unique to Tamil literature. From now on, Indian culture gets literally drenched in the childhood, boyhood and youth of Krishna. While all the bhakti poets of later days have sung of Krishna in some way or the other, the Hindi poet Surdas shines as the foremost singer of Krishna’s childhood days, next only to Perialwar. In fact, the stay of Krishna in Gokula has now embraced the whole of the earth with the ubiquitous International Society of Krishna Consciousness popularising the legend through its soul-enthraling portraits of Krishna stealing butter and feeding monkeys, raising the Govardhana Hill and playing the flute in the groves of Brindavan. Celebrating the birth of Krishna is a major festivity everywhere. In Vrajabhumi around Mathura it is a return to Dwapara yuga!

The Radharaman Mandir at Vrindavan, for instance, celebrates Janmashtami

1. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

with abhisheka for the presiding deity with milk, curd, ghee, honey, sugar syrup and ninety-two other items (including herbs), following the rules laid down by Rupa Goswami in his Krishna Janma Tithi Vidhi. Decked in silks and ornaments, Krishna is now seated on a mirrored throne. Rituals are performed by priests and there is plenty of music. This is the season when traditional Rasalila troupes set up their stages and the Vraja days come to life again using vrajabhasha and attains its emotionally keen point in the enactment of the circular dance called Rasalila. Probing the inner significance of this religious drama unique to Uttar Pradesh, Selina Thielemann says:

Mythology tells us that Krishna when he manifested himself in human form, performed his deeds in various places in both his sweet and heroic aspects, but the rasalila dramas are concerned only with those events that happened in Vraja and that show mādhyura rasa, the sentiment of sweet love. According to Krishnaite theology, Krishna never departed from Vraja in his sweet aspect, and his unmanifest lila continues eternally in the heavenly realm, the cosmic Vraja which is beyond human perception. The manifest lila performed in this world is constantly re-enacted in the rasalila.²

E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, a classic, has an unforgettable portrait of Krishnashtami celebrations in the kingdom of Dewas. It is actually a fictionalised record, for Forster gave us the original in his book of reminiscences, *The Hill of Devi* (1953). He had been working in Dewas as the Maharajah's Private Secretary in 1921 and watched the palace festivities from the ringside seat. In the book he gives a detailed account of the preparations, the rules of fasting and abstention, the new dresses for the idol of Krishna, the special illumination done by contractors from Indore and so on. The climax was the birth of Krishna on the eighth day and "the Maharajah announced it from his end of the carpet and then went to the altar and buried his face in the rose leaves, much moved."

Forster compares the ceremonial games associated with the birth festivities of Krishna to the ones played in the Cathedral of Seville at Easter, a relic of the Christian Middle Ages. He has also compared it to the Adonis festival "where the God is born, dies and is carried to the water, all in a short time". With all this in mind, Forster yet felt a gap in Christianity: "the canonical gospels do not record that Christ laughed or played. Can a man be perfect if he never laughs and plays?"

The *Bhagavata* is the first sustained record of Krishna's laughter and play, and it is quite possible the poet drew freely from the hymns of Perialwar. Devotees who had been listening to Krishna as the companion and ambassador of the Pandavas and the mastermind behind the Kurukshetra War as found in the *Mahabharata* were

2. *Rasalila: A Musical Study of Religious Drama in Vraja*, 1998, p. 2.

transported to the Vrajabhumi in the *Bhagavata*. Shuka describes the all-pervading peace that pervades all the quarters while Krishna was born to Devaki in Kamsa's prison:

At such a time, in the pitch darkness of midnight, Mahavishnu, the resident in the hearts of all, was born of the divinely beautiful Devaki, like the full moon rising on the eastern horizon. Lotus-eyed, four-armed, sporting the conch, mace and other weapons; with the luminous Srivatsa mark on the chest and the shining Kaustubha round the neck; wearing a yellow cloth; possessed of the majesty and grace of a heavy rain cloud...³

The description of the *divya mangala vigraha* might surprise us but not Vasudeva and Devaki. They take it as a matter of course for they realise that this is a manifestation of the Lord, and each praises Krishna with a sweet hymn. Vasudeva mentally gifts ten thousand cows to Brahmins to mark the happy occasion and hails the avatar as one who is sure to destroy the asuric kings who are keeping the world in the grip of terror. But the paternal heart also shudders with human fear. Kamsa had killed all the children born earlier and now he is sure to come with a weapon to destroy the babe. Devaki is also afraid but she manages to sing the Lord's glory and makes a request: Withdraw this transcendental form!

*Upasamhara viśvātmannado rūpamalaaukikam,
Śaṅkhaçakraçadāpadmaśriyā juṣṭam caturbhujam.*

Expounders of the *Bhagavata* point out that if as the young Rama the Lord acceded to Dasharatha's command, in Krishnavatara the Lord dutifully did what he was told at the very moment of his birth. No questions asked! We had noted at the very beginning of the *Bhagavata*, the author asking us to drink the *rasa* of the Purana which was full of it. The *rasānubhava* is simply uncontainable when we come to the Tenth Book. Here every word has charmed the devotees and each action of the Lord has been accepted adoringly. Again, no questions asked on the part of the listener! If Shuka tells us that the Lord was born in his transcendental form, we simply accept it; and we nod with joy at the obedient manner in which Krishna withdraws his four-shouldered form. In fact, like Krishna's parents, this brings us great relief.

Wonderment is the emotion that chiefly holds us in thrall when dealing with other incarnations. So the Lord grew from a mini fish into a cosmic leviathan! Oh, the Lord did hold the Mandara Mountain on his tortoise shell! He did storm forth as the Boar and dug out the earth from the depths of the sea! What a roar he gave when he emerged as Half-lion from the pillar! And the greatest instant transformation of it

3. All translations from the *Bhagavata* used for the present series of articles are by Swami Tapasyananda.

all, Vamana to Trivikrama! The stern self-discipline of Rama is yet another cause for our wonderment, his skill as an archer, his vow to save whoever surrenders to him.

But with Krishna it is all so different. We may wonder at his miraculous achievements, but the emotion that fills our heart is *vātsalya*, maternal love. This is *our* boy. Indeed *my* child. Hence the feeling of relief that Krishna withdrew his transcendental form. In terms of rational thinking, it is obvious that a baby which is born as a divine effulgence and is able to speak at once, should be able to protect itself from any enemy. But he is *our* Krishna, and so we worry even today! There is a charming story about Perialwar singing that Krishna's birth asterix was Sravana: *tiruvonaththān ulakālum*, one who is born in Sravana asterix will be an emperor. Where was the need for Perialwar to change the asterix of Rohini to Sravana? Commentators say that Perialwar's maternal love for Krishna made him forget that he was singing of Krishna several millennia later. He was afraid if it were known that Rohini-born Krishna was in Gokula, Kamsa would immediately target the babe. To misguide Kamsa's spies, Perialwar changed the birth star!

The *Bhagavata* has the baby Krishna lecturing to his parents in the prison about the past births of Vasudeva and Devaki. They were Prajapati Sutapa and Prisni in the aeon of Swayambhuva Manu and led a life of purity and engaged themselves in austerities. The Lord appeared to them and asked Devaki to choose a boon. She wanted the Lord himself to be born to her. The newborn babe tells her:

It is to help you recognise My identity that I have revealed to you now this divine form of mine; otherwise if I appeared as a mere human infant, you would not have recognised Me. Thinking of Me again and again as both Brahman and your son, you will rise to higher and higher stages of divine love and attain to My state.

The familiar and much-loved drama now takes place. Vasudeva carries the baby in a basket in that dark night out of the prison. Shuka says this was possible because the huge prison doors opened automatically and the guards were all sleeping soundly. It was raining heavily. Oh, my newborn babe, our hearts call out and Shuka calms us immediately saying Adishesha himself followed Vasudeva, holding up his hood as a protective umbrella over the basket, *śeṣonvagādha vāri nivārayan phaṇaiḥ*. Every movement of Krishna's life from his birth onwards has been etched indelibly in our hearts thanks to commentators, poets, painters and sculptors. Vasudeva walks with the basket on his head crowned by the cobra's hood, and lo! Yamuna which is in spate makes a corridor for him to cross over to Vrajabhumi. Shuka says this was like the ocean that parted for Rama, *mārgam dadau sindhuriva śriyaḥ pateḥ*.

As in the Mathura prison, here too Yogamaya is in action and the whole cowherd settlement is sleeping soundly. Vasudeva exchanges Krishna for Yashoda's newborn girl child and returns to the prison. The bolts get back in place and all is well. But

Kamsa comes soon enough, having been told of the birth of a girl for Devaki. He dashes the girl-child pitilessly on a rock. But the baby wings to the sky as an eight-handed goddess, the sister of Vishnu. The celestials pray to the goddess. She informs Kamsa that his enemy is alive elsewhere and disappears from the sky.

Henceforth the scene shifts to Vraja. Krishna is born! A baby son for Nandagopa, the cowherd-chief! Nanda is transported with joy, bathes and dresses himself nicely, *snātaḥ śuciralankṛtaḥ*. He does not stint in any manner in giving gifts to mark this joyous moment: two lakhs of decorated cows, seven maunds of sesame seeds well packed in zari cloth that has been embroidered with gems. It is not Nanda's house alone which is full of happiness. The entire settlement is happy and declares a holiday, according to Surdas:

“Why are you doing something else?”, someone says,
 “Rush to the house of Nanda and fulfil the desire of your heart
 By seeing the boy with your own eyes.”
 One is moving around, dipping curd
 With a bunch of holy grass, and sprinkling it about;
 Another is touching the feet of the elders;
 One is giving cattle and clothes as gifts;
 Another is laughing and singing.
 Young and old, men and women, their pleasure is fourfold:
 They are so happy in the love of Surdas' Lord,
 They pay no special heed to any king or noble.⁴

The *Bhagavata* gives a graphic description of the settlement where people swept and cleaned their homes, decorated every available space with flags and banners, garlands and festoons. The cattle which formed the wealth of the settlement were attended to with joy. Rural India during Sankranti festival leaps to life in the Sanskrit verses of Shuka:

The bulls, cows and calves were anointed with turmeric-mixed oil, and they were decorated with mineral paints, peacock feathers, flower-wreaths, silken scarves, and golden chains. O King! The cowherds (Gopas) dressed in costly silk clothes, coats and turbans and wearing various ornaments, came with rich presents to see the newborn infant.

What a contrast to the dire scene in Mathura's prison where the newborn babe was being flung on a rock to destroy it, while the weeping parents stood by, totally helpless! But in Vraja the Gopis decked in their finery come in large numbers and

4. Translated by Srivatsa Goswami.

bless the baby in the cradle: *prayuñjānām ciraṁ pāhi*, may you rule long over your subjects!

There is music; there is nothing but Ananda in Gokula. This description in the *Bhagavata* carried into all the regional variations has seen to it that devotees re-enact the scene every year. I have myself been part of the revelry when the late Sri Lakshmana Yatheendra of Mumukshu Peetham (Andhra Pradesh) used to conduct the *Tiruppavai* festival. Come Bhogi day, huge vats of curds were set up and we churned with long ropes and threw buttermilk and butter at one another as if it were the Holi. This was to get back to the Gokula ambience spoken of in the *Bhagavata*:

In honour of the advent of the supreme and infinite Lord to Nanda's Vraja as Krishna the Incarnate, many kinds of musical instruments were sounded. The rejoicing Gopas sprayed at one another milk, curds, ghee, water, etc., and pelted balls of butter.

This recreation of Gokula shows how the Puranas have not lost their relevance at all. In this world of human affairs where the material existence too often nails us down into the self-made coffin of loneliness, the Gokula ambience brings us out of the shell, and we breathe again the freedom that comes by getting in tune with the rest of the world. For, our existence is not made up of building blocks, each a separate unit. Everyone of us belongs to a bootstrap existence and one is attached to another by a million ties of unseen, human bondage. These Gopas and Gopis could well be projections of our psychic existence. Turn the human bondage into a divine one, and the transformatory touch brings the Lord to us: Krishna, the Delight of Existence is born!

These hues were the very prism of the Supreme,
His beauty, power, delight creation's cause.
A vast Truth-Consciousness took up these signs
To pass them on to some divine child Heart
That looked on them with laughter and delight
And joyed in these transcendent images
Living and real as the truths they house.⁵

The constant companion of Yashoda's Krishna is Rohini's Balarama. These two stepbrothers with their veritable army of cowherd boys grow up enjoying their outdoor life as much as their existence within their homes. Krishna the leader gets blamed all the time, of course. There is the very charming complaint of the cowherdesses to Yashoda:

5. *Savitri*, Book III, Canto iii.

He comes and releases the calves before milking time. If anyone scolds him for this, he laughs at them. Then he makes arrangements for stealing milk products and consumes all the milk and curds he gets that way, and distributes good quantities of it among the monkeys that follow him. When he does not consume their contents, he breaks the containers. If he gets nothing in any place, he goes away in anger, pinching the little children there and making them cry.

How come we are never angry when we read all this and more (the Bhakti poets have woven huge canvases during the last millennium) about this boy who was disobedient, a trickster, a thief and a liar? Ah, that is the secret of Sanatana Dharma. The account of Krishna's boyhood days proves that India has always nurtured a world-accepting religion and not a world-negating religion. The foundations of Indian spirituality are in its material existence. When you accept life on earth, you must necessarily make all the emotions part of this life. Clinical morality alone is not going to get us anywhere. Certainly not when dealing with children. Even today, this is the reason when young mothers complain, elders say, "He is a Krishna", and all at once is said. The Krishna legends constantly take us into realms beyond the human when we realise that this is the Supreme who has incarnated on earth for a particular purpose. But our Ignorance veils us immediately and we see only the little human child teasing little girls by stealing their clothes and breaking their sand houses.

The episode of Yashoda's watching the worlds in the mouth of Krishna explains this very well. On hearing complaints that he had eaten mud, Yashoda had scolded Krishna. He opened his mouth to prove that he had not and Yashoda saw the whole universe moving there and wondered. She realised that this was the Lord and saluted him, and realised that her own life as the wealthy wife of Nanda was but a dream. But then, how can life go on and evolution take its normal course, if we reject existence? Shuka says:

The Lord thereupon cast the spell of Vishnu's Maya of parental affection on his mother who had come to glimpse the truth. At once Yashoda lost even the memory of the experience she had, and she gathered up her son in her lap, overcome by intense affection for him as before. He whom the followers of the Vedic Karmakanda speak of as Indra and other Deities, whom the Vedantins call Brahman, whom the Sankhyas speak of as Purusha, whom Yogins call the Atman, and whom the devotees call the Bhagavan—that Hari was considered as her own son by Yashoda!

In reverse gear, these Krishna legends have helped us revere childhood in India. Our children are *amṛtasya putrāḥ*, children of immortality, devas come to our homes as children! Each one of the samskaras (rituals associated with birth like *jātakarma* and *nāmakaraṇa*) constantly link the human and the divine. This is a precious gift of

the Puranas which we would do well not to reject in the present century. Fortunately for us, Sri Aurobindo has reiterated this constant miracle in *Savitri*:

A silence in the noise of earthly things
 Immutably revealed the secret Word,
 A mightier influx filled the oblivious clay:
 A lamp was lit, a sacred image made.
 A mediating ray had touched the earth
 Bridging the gulf between man's mind and God's;
 Its brightness linked our transience to the Unknown.⁶

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *Savitri*, Book IV, Canto i.

A NICE DAY

Softly steals the sun over
 A valley's brow,
 Over the haughty peak
 Takes a shy peep
 At the river running below:
 They smile and twinkle
 At each other.
 The sun stretches, scratches
 Itself under a rocky overhang,
 Rests lightly on a butte's head
 And kisses lightly the brow
 Of the canyon's rim.
 It smells the drying dew
 On the grasses verge
 And decides:
 "It will be a nice day."

AMIT GANGULI
 (A Student)

AMAL KIRAN AT ONE HUNDRED

AN INTELLECTUAL TRANSFORMED INTO A YOGI

(A Talk at the Beach Office on 26.11.04)*

I FEEL rather overwhelmed by the task which the organisers of this function have entrusted to me by inviting me to speak on this occasion, and I am also aware that in doing so they have bestowed on me an honour and a privilege I do not deserve. I have adored and hero-worshipped Amal Kiran from a distance for many years, but I cannot lay claim to any close association with him. I have always considered it somewhat sacrilegious to try to be on familiar terms with my heroes. Of course, I have met him quite a few times, and whenever I met him, I derived immense benefit and encouragement from these meetings. In any case, most of you, members of this audience, know him very well, since he has lived amongst you here at the Ashram in Pondicherry continuously for fifty years now. I am sure your grandchildren and their descendants will envy you for having had this many-splendoured legend as your contemporary.

To participate in the celebration of the birth centenary of Amal Kiran is an occasion for us to contemplate not only the life of this great man but also to reflect on his burning faith in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the twin lodestars of his life. In this respect he is indeed a radiant example to all disciples and devotees of the twin Avatars.

As we all know, Amal Kiran completed one hundred years of his life yesterday. What is most glorious about these one hundred years is that seventy-seven of them were lived in the orbit of the grace, glory and love of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The most obvious fact about Amal Kiran is that he was born with a phenomenal intellect, which he developed further by a vast amount of reading. The combination of an extraordinary intelligence and a vast erudition, though not very common, is not very rare either. But wherever such a combination is found, it normally ends up either in intellectual dilettantism or in nihilistic cynicism. The mental ego detests the spiritual verities it cannot comprehend. What is remarkable about Amal Kiran, in my view, is that without losing any of his intellectual sharpness and dynamism, he has succeeded in transforming his mind into a vibrant instrument of the higher afflatus and consciousness under the influence of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's world-transforming yoga. It is evident from what we know about Amal that he was born with a strong vital and an even stronger mental, and these are normally considered to be obstacles to the touch of the spirit and the higher consciousness. But Amal gave himself totally into the hands of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and out of the fire-ordeal of Sri Aurobindo's transformative yoga, he has emerged pure gold. I shall

* This talk was part of a book release function on Amal's Centenary.

come back to this point a little later in my paper.

Some ten years ago, Jugal-da wrote an essay entitled “The Wonder That is K. D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran”. The title of that monograph just about sums up in my view what would be the considered opinion of most people who are educated enough to understand at least some of the fifty-odd books and pamphlets that Amal has authored. At one time, not too long ago, there was a possibility that he might go down in history as an author who had left behind him the largest number of unpublished manuscripts. Fortunately, some of his admirers have since taken action to deny him that distinction.

Amal has given us more than fifty works. That figure in itself doesn't sound very striking. There are writers whose tally exceeds this. But by and large, these writers are writers of fiction, or of exegetical books or editors of compilations of various kinds. But almost all of Amal's writings are works dealing with serious subjects: philosophy, literature and culture, mysticism, spiritual and scientific thought, literary criticism, ancient Indian history and the history of the Jews, Christology, Blake and Shakespeare, Overhead Poetry and, of course, Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision, and *Savitri*. This work needed not only erudition, sharp powers of critical analysis and synthetic thinking of a difficult kind, but in some cases a great deal of meticulous research, particularly his works on Indian and Jewish history, and his work on Shakespeare's sonnets and on Blake.

The range of topics which Amal Kiran has tackled in his books is amazingly vast but in many of these fields he has done outstanding pioneering work. About the brilliance of his writings, I will cite only a couple of testimonies here. One of them to me is greater than the winning of a Nobel Prize. From the late twenties to 1950, most of Amal's writings were approved by Sri Aurobindo himself. About one of his essays, the one entitled “‘*Freewill*’ in Sri Aurobindo's *Vision*”, Sri Aurobindo remarked, “The article is excellent. In fact it could not be bettered.” Then I may cite another accolade which Amal got very early in his life. When he was barely nineteen, he wrote an estimate of one of the celebrated writers of that time, H. G. Wells. This was sent to Wells himself by one of Amal's senior friends. Wells wrote back: “Your young man will go far.”

But in the physical and material sense Amal didn't go very far. After a brilliant B.A. from Bombay University, he was preparing to go to Oxford or Cambridge, a distance of several thousand miles, for higher studies. Instead, he came to Pondicherry [in 1927], a mere thousand miles or so from Mumbai. Again if he had joined the teaching profession, he probably would have won the highest honours and as an academic become an internationally renowned celebrity. Instead [in 1949] he became the editor of a journal called *Mother India* and edited it for more than fifty years with single-minded devotion. This is a journal not known outside the circle of the devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In choosing a life of isolation and self-effacement while remaining actively en-

gaged with the world, Amal Kiran became an exemplar of an intellectual becoming a yogi. Of all the people of his intellectual stature that I have seen, Amal is probably unmatched in the manner in which he relinquished all personal ambition at the altar of yoga. For an intellectual, and in our age, this is almost an impossible feat. Never did Amal Kiran regret his choice. This note he inscribed in his copy of "*Overhead Poetry*": *Poems with Sri Aurobindo's Comments* sums his own attitude to worldly success: "Who cares for what the world says when those great wide eyes, deeper than oceans, fell on these poems and accepted them as fit offerings to His divinity? The Lord's look, the Lord's smile—that is what I have lived for."

I shall now briefly mention some of the major areas in which Amal has made valuable contributions.

First and foremost, he has been one of the authentic interpreters of Sri Aurobindo's vision and yoga. This he did at a level at which it is most difficult to do it. When a new teaching emerges, it needs to be dealt with at least at two levels, one at the popular level, and the other at the level at which it breaks new ground and brings about a paradigm change. Most of Amal's writings deal with this higher level. In his critique of Zaehner's study in *Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin*, and *The Spirituality of the Future: A Search Apropos of R. C. Zaehner's Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin* on the same theme and his correspondence with Bede Griffiths, he discusses how Sri Aurobindo's notion of the supermind is different from somewhat analogous notions in Christianity, such as the resurrection of Christ. In presenting Sri Aurobindo to his contemporaries in India he had to fight many an intellectual battle. Amal never hesitated to take up arms in defence of Sri Aurobindo at a time when almost all the major groups of the intelligentsia in the country were unsympathetic to Sri Aurobindo. The late Sri Kapali Sastriar rendered similar service in explaining Sri Aurobindo to traditional Indian scholars who refused to believe there could be anything new in the Indian spiritual tradition after the Acharyas.

Amal spent much of the creative phase of his life explaining the new spirituality for which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stood. And that was and still is a most difficult undertaking. We live in an age dominated by intellectuals who do not understand spirituality at all and, in most cases, are even hostile to it. Although Truth ultimately triumphs and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will triumph in the long run, the short-term prospects are not particularly bright. The West does not yet take Sri Aurobindo seriously because the mainstream academic thinking there is still squeamish about spirituality. Here in India, we are still too wrapped up in the old spirituality of world negation to appreciate Sri Aurobindo.

Up till now, more than fifty years after his passing, Sri Aurobindo has not received even a small part of the recognition that is his due from his own countrymen. For one reason or another, almost all the leading groups of the intelligentsia in the country fell foul of him. The Hindu establishment found his concept of the supermind and his ideal of making the earth perfect like heaven too radical for them. The Gandhian

establishment found his views on non-violence and the need for the Indian society to cultivate the Kshatriya dharma unacceptable. A third group, namely, Macaulay's brown sahibs, the university intellectuals, found his emphasis on spirituality as the bedrock of Indian civilisation and the key to its resurrection incomprehensible and dismissed it as obscurantist. The communists and the leftists in general didn't know and even today don't know what to make of Sri Aurobindo, who valued highly the communist ideals but was critical of the ways the communists went about destroying these very values in trying to realise them. As a result, in public discourse and in newspaper articles Sri Aurobindo has often been calumnised and misrepresented.

Whenever this happened, the person who boldly came out in print to clear the misrepresentation of Sri Aurobindo was Amal. As a one-man demolition squad, he was deadly effective, and most of his adversaries came to the conclusion that taking evasive action through the good offices of the editors of newspapers was a better tactic than meeting Amal head on.

The list of people against whom Amal had to contend and defend Sri Aurobindo's position is quite long and has in it members of each of the groups of the intelligentsia I have mentioned earlier. Some of you may recall his response to Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's "Open Letter to Sri Aurobindo" in the then reputed "Last Page" of the Bombay weekly, *Blitz*. Sri Aurobindo had permitted Amal to publish a statement supporting the U.S. intervention in the Korean War, Abbas criticised this statement vehemently in the "Open Letter". Those were the days when India's foreign policy tilted all the way to the Red Square in Moscow and India's intelligentsia had a great deal of sympathy for North Korea and Soviet Russia. In his rejoinder to Abbas, Amal presented a stout defence of Sri Aurobindo's stand on the Korean War and on the real threat of Communism closing in on India through China, and then clarified many issues on which there was popular misunderstanding about Sri Aurobindo, especially his retirement to Pondicherry. In subsequent years whenever anybody misrepresented Sri Aurobindo, his vision and philosophy, Amal always came out with a stout defence. Most people criticised Sri Aurobindo because he was too vast and too radical for them. Amal took pains to explain Sri Aurobindo's position, bringing out its sense and value and originality.

Then there came a time when the Departments of English Literature in Indian universities fell foul of Sri Aurobindo and decided that he was anything but a poet and *Savitri*, surely an aberration. Although scholars like Professor Iyengar, Professor Gokak and Professor S. K. Ghosh tried valiantly to fight off this aggression, the public defence was left to Amal and he did this job brilliantly. "Future poetry" and "Overhead poetry" are concepts very little understood by students of literature in the country and abroad. Amal wrote brilliantly on this subject and took on critics like Nissim Ezekiel, K. Raghavendra Rao and P. Lal and a host of others. His correspondence with Kathleen Raine, which has come out in two volumes, is about whether Indians can write genuine poetry in English and other issues.

What made Amal swing into action was not that Sri Aurobindo was unappreciated, but that he was misrepresented. Amal could not stand any misrepresentation of Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes when people such as K. M. Munshi and Professor Gokak, who had such profound admiration for Sri Aurobindo, wrote things about him which were likely to be misconstrued, Amal came out with a clarification. As a defender of Sri Aurobindo and his radically new philosophy and vision of life, Amal had no equals, and the service he has rendered in playing this role should be acknowledged in full measure on this occasion of his centenary.

Unfortunately, the attacks on Sri Aurobindo still continue and each time the ground chosen is different. Sri Aurobindo stands for a great truth and every shade of falsehood tries to sow doubts about him through various agencies. It is now often hinted that Sri Aurobindo was a communalist, the leader of a Hindu sect, and also that because of the Mother's French connection, he was soft on French imperialism. All of us seated in this hall know that such charges are inane but people outside do not know this. They believe what they read in the Sunday tabloids. We have to do our bit to give the correct picture, to formulate the truth and broadcast it; for various reasons, it may not always be well received immediately. But as a spiritual group we cannot take the attitude of the three monkeys, which see, hear and speak no evil. Some of us, at least, must do what we can to counter these sly attacks. But alas, Amal is not in his prime any more. We miss the sledge-hammer strokes he delivered so deftly to demolish the façade of untruth and to establish the truth in all such matters.

As a spokesman for the new kind of spiritual poetry that Sri Aurobindo and the Pondicherry poets have produced, Amal has been the loudest and clearest voice against the din of uncomprehending criticism from several quarters. He became the spokesman and leader of a group of poets which included such illustrious names as Chadwick (Arjava), Nirodbaran, Thémis and others. I am not qualified to speak about Amal's own poetic achievements. He was probably a born poet but it was Sri Aurobindo who made him a great poet. Very competent readers have judged Amal's poetry second only to Sri Aurobindo's. What yoga can do for creativity can be seen in this miracle,—the brilliance of his collected poems in *The Secret Splendour*. It is indeed sad that the award-giving bodies in our country such as the Sahitya Akademi and the Jnanpith have ignored such a major poet as Amal. But, as I have already said, this did not bother Amal in the least. Let there be no mistake about it—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have lavished the highest praise on him on several occasions, and after this, Amal had no desire left for any prize or honour.

Whoever would have ever thought that Amal would make pioneering contributions in the fields of Indian history and archaeology, in Christology and in the history of the Jews? When he took up these studies, there was not the faintest hope that his work would even get noticed because he had no academic credentials in these fields. Nevertheless, his work got the most attention from scholars in these fields. And when you try to find out what drove Amal to these academic pursuits,

you will be surprised to know that he undertook these stupendous and thankless labours as a part of his adoration of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Amal has written a book called *The Beginning of History for Israel*. One could wonder why Amal wrote this book, which has no interest for most Indians and falls in an area of scholarship in which he was unlikely to be taken seriously because of his unorthodox views. The writing of the book must have entailed long and laborious research. Do you know why he took up this stupendous work? Amal explains: “The Mother is known to have once remarked that it was Queen Hatshepsut (one of the Mother’s own past incarnations) who was the princess said in the Old Testament to have asked her maids to pick up the basket in which baby Moses had been left on a river’s bank. From it I could work out all the other necessary dates according to the numbers given by the Bible.” (Letter dated 26.7.1990) This is an incredible intellectual feat. All this reminds me of a Sanskrit verse about Lord Krishna which ends by declaring that everything about him is exceedingly sweet:

madhurādhīpaterakhilam madhuram.

For Amal, anything said and done by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was exceedingly sweet—valuable and significant, and to justify what they said and did he willingly gave many years of his life.

Last but not the least, I mention here his great achievement as the editor of *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture*, about which Sri Aurobindo is reported to have once said that it was his paper. During the first two years, *Mother India* was a fortnightly, and although not avowedly political, it did not hesitate to comment on many a political issue of the time from a spiritual standpoint. Its political writings became a byword for courage. Amal’s articles on the political designs of communist China, on the Kashmir problem, his defence of General MacArthur were acts of journalistic courage which Amal derived from Sri Aurobindo himself since almost all the editorials he wrote were read out to and approved by Sri Aurobindo. The first issue of *Mother India* came out on February 19, 1949. Since then it has been in publication without missing a single number during all these fifty-five years.

Finally, I would like to say a few words on Amal as an intellectual transformed into a yogi. By the time he came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in 1927, at the age of 23, he was acknowledged as a brilliant intellect. He had read widely and deeply, mostly English literature and philosophy. Popular among young and old as a renaissance man, he had a wide range of intellectual interests and a great artistic sensitivity. Here then was an ideal specimen for the transformative yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Could the human mind as richly endowed as Amal’s be made a surrendered instrument of the spirit, while not losing its sharpness and incandescence? As we know, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gathered people representing various capacities and propensities to see whether the yogic force they had acquired could transform these people into powerful and plastic instruments of the spirit. Some had fine artistic

talent, some had fine organisational talent, some had a titanic vital capacity! The sadhaks in the Ashram were representatives of various sattwic, rajasic and tamasic qualities. Most of them had some opening to yoga and had turned to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, thus coming under their transformative power. The transformation attempted in this yoga is very difficult compared to the effort of old yogas to prod spiritually-inclined people on the path of Nirvana. This transformation is a part of the long evolutionary labour. In some cases, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother seem to have succeeded partially in their efforts and in other cases the process seems still to be going on.

But I feel that one of their successes was Amal Kiran. Without ceasing to be a keen and daring intellect, he succeeded in becoming a yogi whose hallmark is his surrendered mind. He has undergone a difficult sadhana in order to receive poetic inspiration again and again from the planes above that of the creative intelligence—Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, and Overmind.

Among the many occult battles that were fought during the twentieth century, in preparation for the descent and gradual emergence of the supramental consciousness on earth, one of the toughest was fought to make the human intellect realise its limitations and seek its fulfilment in becoming the glorious weapon of the spirit. Until now the human intellect has either rejected the touch of the spirit or wilted under its power and abdicated its legitimate functions and its capacities. This has been the case, generally speaking, wherever the older spiritual ideal has held its sway.

The human intellect is still refusing to acknowledge the presence and the importance of the spirit. This is the state of the academic world in the West. But it is now being badgered from all sides by the insistent claims of the spirit. Although the spirit seems to have made many significant inroads into the academic bastion, the main plank still seems to be holding firm. It is in this context that we must appreciate the sadhana and the siddhi of Amal Kiran.

A long time ago Sri Aurobindo wrote in his *Thoughts and Glimpses*: “When we have passed beyond knowings, then we shall have Knowledge. Reason was the helper; Reason is the bar.”¹ Sri Aurobindo meant by “knowings” all that can be learnt through the study of outer phenomena, all that the human mind has produced through the external study of life and things, all that can be found by reasoning, deduction, analysis and the speculative activities of the human mind. Man has put reason at the summit of his mental activity, has made it the arbiter of his mental activity. But if you want to attain true knowledge, spiritual knowledge, you must go beyond reason and enter a domain of consciousness higher than the mind, where one is in direct contact with the Light of the divine consciousness. This is something the mind refuses to do.

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo diagnosed this inadequacy of the mind:

But Mind is not a faculty of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain of

it in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities of action. Even when it finds, it does not possess; it only keeps a certain fund of current coin of Truth—not Truth itself—in the bank of Memory to draw upon according to its needs. For Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly. It is the power which interprets truth of universal existence for the practical uses of a certain order of things; it is not the power which knows and guides that existence and therefore it cannot be the power which created or manifested it.²

The mind is refusing to acknowledge its limitations in spite of the often demonstrated weaknesses of the intellect—its leaning toward sterile doubt, its arrogance to judge things that are beyond it, unknown to it, too deep for it, its attempts to explain the supra-physical by the physical or its demand for the proof of higher and occult things by the criteria proper to Matter and mind in Matter. The intellect substitutes its own representations, constructions and opinions for the true knowledge. “But”, Sri Aurobindo says, “if the intellect is surrendered, open, quiet, receptive, there is no reason why it should not be a means of reception of the Light or an aid to the experience of spiritual states and to the fullness of an inner change.”³

Spiritual traditions the world over, and pointedly in India, assert that there are many levels of being or consciousness within a person as well as in the cosmos. The levels of consciousness higher than the mind can be attained only by transcending the mind, and this can only be achieved by those whose consciousness has been radically transformed by yoga. In science, the quality of a person’s scientific work does not depend on his human qualities, his capacity to love and to give. But this is not the case with what we call higher knowledge. It is recognised that the Buddha was wise and had the higher knowledge because he was compassionate; his entire behaviour illustrated that he had realised Nirvana. The higher knowledge requires the sacrifice of desire and individualistic clinging.

Now this is the crux of the problem. It is difficult for the modern mind to accept that there are levels of being beyond the mind, and that to be able to rise to those higher levels of knowledge we have to change our very mode of being. It cannot accept that the mind is not the true knower. The mind can measure, calculate, compare, make hypotheses and speculate about the nature of reality, but it cannot perceive reality directly, it cannot know from inside things as they really are in themselves.

In one of his talks with disciples, Sri Aurobindo once indicated the nature of the transformation the mind has to undergo in order to be a perfect instrument of the spirit. He said:

Mental transformation is a gradual process. First, the reasoning and constructions are silenced. Then the mind becomes intuitionised. Then one feels that there is something above which is much more than intuition. Intuition goes downwards and the higher Truth takes the place of intuition. At present, you find it difficult

to understand how all reasoning and constructions of the mind can cease. That can be understood when you know what is intuition.⁴

The mind can go on reasoning, examining and evaluating eternally and not arrive at the Truth. These active operations of the mind can themselves be obstacles to the coming of Truth. But how is the mind to realise this? And how is the mind to be brought to recognise its own inadequacies? Mind cannot correct the tendencies of the mind. It is only the Truth which can change the nature and activities of the mind.

There are many other complex problems here. I shall mention only a few. If you only silence the mind and do nothing else you will have a silent mind and nothing else. An underdeveloped mind is a poor receptacle for the higher Truth. Therefore, we need a developed mind. “But the too much developed mind is also an obstacle. It has its fixed habits, its fixed grooves to which it sticks tenaciously.”⁵ It is then an ideal vehicle for the mental ego and may simply refuse to abdicate its dominant role.

Amal Kiran seems to have willingly offered his mind for this transformative spiritual change. He had immense faith in Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s action on him. He placed himself into their hands. I am too small a man to try to assess his yogic achievements but I see in him a kindness, brightness and humility which suggest that he has overcome many of the obstacles of the mind and ego and basks in the sunlight of Truth.

We are celebrating the one hundredth birthday of Amal Kiran. And for every birthday there has to be a birthday wish. What shall we wish him on this most auspicious day? He has come a long, long way since as a callow youth of 23 he heard the call of the entrancing flute of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Quite some time ago, Amal wrote about himself as follows: “Of late I have been feeling as if the Mother’s presence were not only above me and in front of me and within me but also behind me enfolding my body and carrying me onward according to her will.”⁶ This in itself is a tremendous Upanishadic spiritual experience! We know that there is still something more which he has aspired for intensely for many years now. It is something that comes by degrees—a total receptivity to the Beyond, of the kind which Aswapati is described as having in *Savitri*. Let me conclude by making this birthday wish for Amal on behalf of all of us. May the benevolent and compassionate Sri Aurobindo and the sweet and merciful Mother grant to Amal this spiritual prize which he has been seeking and for which he has prepared himself all his life with such intense tapasya—the loftiest imaginable blessing an intellectual can aspire for:

Indifferent to the little outpost Mind,
He dwelt in the wideness of the Eternal’s reign.
His being now exceeded thinkable Space,
His boundless thought was neighbour to cosmic sight:
A universal light was in his eyes,

A golden influx flowed through heart and brain;
 A Force came down into his mortal limbs,
 A current from eternal seas of Bliss;
 He felt the invasion and the nameless joy.⁷

MANGESH NADKARNI

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 343-44.
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Prayer for Perfection

*Out of our darkness lead us into light—
 Out of false love to Thy truth-piercing height—
 Out of the clutch of death to immortal space—
 O Perfect One with the all-forgiving face!*

*From Thy pure lustre build the mind anew—
 From Thy unshadowed bliss draw the heart's hue—
 From Thy immense bring forth a godlike clay—
 O Timeless One self-sought through night and day!*

Dearest Mother,

*May I hope that one day you will answer this prayer of mine, which begins
 with a reminiscence of the soul's cry in the past and goes on to our own aspiration?*
 30.12.1963 *Love, Amal*

The Mother's reply: One day is sure to come...
 blessings

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT

DR. NRIPENDRA

(Born: 1.9.1904—2004 was his centenary year.)

*An apple a day
Keeps the doctor away
(Old proverb)*

AN old adage, but I speak of this doctor who provided the “apple” also! He is Dr. Nripendra—to us, simply Doctorbabu or Nripen-da. There was no confusion—he was the one and only doctorbabu. A thought may arise: “You had no choice”—but we did not need a choice!

In the early 40’s the Dispensary was a very homely and popular place—not because of the “need” of the patients or the aged—but from the children’s point of view. Nripen-da loved children.

The building was unimposing, single storeyed, but clean and inviting. There were just 2 ½ rooms. A small open front-yard (the same as now) let you into a biggish room on the left, with white tiled walls up to 5 feet or so and a smooth black floor. I think a neatly laid brick floor pre-dated this. But it was not so cluttered up as it is today. One corner had a mobile tray of medicinal paraphernalia, a high bench in the far corner for patients, and in the centre, a little to the rear, a largish table behind which sat the smiling doctor, Dr. Nripendra. The next room, behind this one, was the domain of the “compounder”. (This word “compounder” was very much in vogue then. The word means an individual, in a dispensary or hospital, who mixes or combines different elements or liquid chemicals to make up the doctor’s prescription.) That was the time when the doctor’s prescriptions had to be concocted on the spot. The compounder then poured the medicine into a bottle and stuck on the outside a strip of paper with notches cut at equal intervals. Each notch indicated the “dose” the patient had to gulp down once, twice, or thrice a day. Nowadays the practice is to just hand out ready-made pills. What the “handing out” person is called, I wouldn’t know. The job is made easy and uninteresting. For every disease there is a pill packed in tinfoil (could we call the man a “piller” and the times a “pillage”? The beneficiary is of course a pill-popper). The pill, I admit, is very convenient for both, the doctor and the patient.

The compounder of those days was a young man named Salil (late). Salil later shifted to watch repairing. Another young man named Manilal also helped the doctor. (Manilal was the younger brother of Moolshankar. Moolshankar was a beautiful person. He attended on Sri Aurobindo. He was stabbed and died on the night of the 14th of August 1947, the eve of India’s Independence, during a dastardly attack on

the Ashram.) Manilal left the Ashram soon after. Next, a young man named Akhil was the compounder. He too left after shifting to our Electric department. Then came Vasant-bhai, sometime in April, 1957. The late Madhav Pandit introduced him. He is IN and never got OUT. He has become now a part of the Dispensary. I suspect he is stuck at the centre of a whole network—like a spider caught in its own web! These days anyone can get himself caught in any one of the millions of “Websites” festooning the globe.

The ½ room mentioned earlier was a country-tile-roofed verandah set to the East of the two above-mentioned rooms—where now the pills are stocked and dispensed. This is where Manilal worked. Here it was that Manilal distributed soup and sometimes a piece or two of papaya. We ran hither for these in the recess period (papaya was very rare, so a much sought after delicacy).

The Doctorbabu & the Apple—This apple was not just a fruit one munched and forgot the doctor. It is the fruit of all his labour and the man himself. There have been 2-3 doctors before him, a few during his time and quite a few after him. But he is the “Flag bearer”. He, Nripen-da is the one etched into our minds (of the early-timers, 1940’s to 1970’s).

The Doctor—Dr. Nripendra or Nripen-da (that’s how we addressed him) sat behind that big table in the first room—a big man, with a big smile and a bigger heart. He stood tall and straight. A good face with a straight nose, spectacled kind eyes ready to smile along with the lips. (It was pointed out to me that the upper lip hardly had the vertical depression at the middle, like what we normally have. Why do some have it? Why some not?) He carried a headful of wavy dark hair the colour and quantity of which did not change much through the years. He was a solid, handsome man. He was very approachable! The reassuring smile made it easy for children and the old alike. His voice was strong and it carried far. In fact it could be intimidating but seldom was it so. His dress was ever the same—*dhoti* “Bengali way” and *kurta*—all white, Ashram-given.

Nripen-da came to the Ashram in 1941. He was Chitra-di’s (Chitra Sen—captain in the Department of Physical Education and also of the Trésor Nursing Home) maternal uncle (i.e. *mama*). Chitra-di’s father, Nolini Sen, happened to lend Nripen-da a typed copy of Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga*. (Printed books were then hard to come by. The devotees had enough urge to get whole books typed to take home and read—a coveted possession.) Nripen-da read and was impelled to come to Them (The Mother and Sri Aurobindo). He was given charge of the Dispensary. The Ashram was small, both in extent and numbers. Most of it was limited by the Canal, the sea, Rangapillai St. and North Boulevard (Sardar Vallabhbbhai Salai). So Nripen-da could and would walk to the patient when called or needed. Later he took to a cycle (pedalling—no motor). Much later, a car was given him. That (car) was the end of one era and the beginning of another. Nripen-da had also a younger community, so a healthier community to care for. I suspect too that we were more hardy and

less concerned about ourselves.

The Apple (“CART”)—I add the “cart”, for Nripen-da did so much (so many projects) that it could not be just *one* apple. Any way one looked (especially if unwell)—the hand of Nripen-da was evident (obviously in the realm of health care). His the idea, and his the hand that gave the push and kept pushing—often against heavy weights.

Nripen-da’s first and foremost thoughts were probably for the children. One can understand the Dispensary’s popularity with the children for there was first the soup, then came, occasionally, a piece of papaya. Often one could get “Lithini” (I think that is the right word). This came in two small paper packets, one of ordinary paper, the other of cellophane paper, each containing a few grammes of powders. You mixed them in a glass of water and it started to fizz! One could add a little glucose and it was a great drink—our home-made soda. This was to be had on demand—not too often, though. One or two remedies which we don’t see now were common in those days. We derived some pleasure from them. They were “Throat paint” and “Eye-wash”. The first was sweet (glycerol +...?) which was applied to the back of our throats with a long swab. The second was literally an eye-wash. A saline solution (distilled water) which he or a “sister” poured in a steady trickle onto your unblinking eyeball while you held a kidney tray against your cheek to catch the overflow. There was also *pora*, *Neem-pata* or *bhaja*—Neem leaves were deep-fried (I wouldn’t know in what oil) and it was not only the children who took them home—to mix with a handful of rice—considered very healthy. I think some refinement or improvement was achieved by adding a few pieces of brinjal. Many took the *neem-bhaja* to the Dining Room at lunch time. These three items are no more part of the Dispensary’s repertoire—a pity and a nostalgia.

Nripen-da it seems urged Jalad-da to start a poultry. The eggs were for the children. The first egg was sent by him, through the Mother, to Sri Aurobindo! He was happy that the Department of Physical Education later took it upon itself to open a tiffin-room for children where eggs were served. (This tiffin-room was in a way the precursor of our present day Corner House.)

We, at least the young ones, had no serious physical problems. (Usually a common cold or a common fever. The word “virus” was not yet in common use.) So if Doctorbabu came home on a visit he would sit down with a loud “*Ki holo?*” (What’s happened?) Then the usual stethoscope, percussion, smile and “*Gorom Roshom khao, theek hoye jabe*” (Eat-drink hot mulligatawny—you will be all right). Sometimes it would be *Khichuri* instead of *Roshom*.

Nripen-da thought (rightly so—at that time) that the Dining Room (DR) was not adding sufficient greens (= spinach) to their cooking so he started a small kitchen and started cooking spinach. Children used to drop in (during the 9.30-9.45 recess in school) and have it along with soup. It was for long popularly known as “Vitamin”. Some older persons also took this as an extra item to the DR at lunch. This kitchen

now has grown tenfold in size and variety, and caters to many, not only children. The children have shifted to Corner House.

One child contracted the much-feared smallpox. The child had to be quarantined and even other members of the family could not approach her. But Nripen-da would visit the child every day, get into her mosquito net, and play with her. He would later go home and discard all his clothes and have a thorough cleansing bath. He had no fear or hesitation.

I wonder if a gadget, then very much appreciated, is lying somewhere forgotten if not neglected or has it been got rid of? It was a bandage rolling, hand-driven machine, made of aluminium. All I can describe is that, the bandage's end was engaged and given an initial winding or two, then the cloth was spread out and held with one hand, the other hand was used to turn a handle. The spreading out was achieved through two or three other rods. The machine was fixed onto a table end. It was a work fit for an old lady. It may interest us to learn that a notice would appear every so often "Please give your old *sarees* and *dhotis* for bandages. The Dispensary needs them badly." Bandages were not bought, the Dispensary and many other departments hung on a shoestring budget.

If anything beyond Nripen-da's capacity—technically or equipmentally—cropped up, there was the Govt. General Hospital to fall back upon!? But that hospital's general wards were more like cattle sheds—a tiled roof on pillars linked up by a three-foot wall, an opening or two for entrance. The beds were placed with no space wasted. Maybe an attendant could fit in a stool. A line of bedbugs could be seen making for the patient and attendant alike. (It reminded me of cars on a highway making for a filling station.)

I never entered the special wards or rooms until many years later. But I did attend on a patient in the above-mentioned general wards. But things have changed. And much later came JIPMER, then Apollo [at Chennai] and PIMS to fall back on!

Nripen-da moved on. He wanted to establish a well-equipped Nursing Home. For a beginning he ordered an X-ray machine from Germany. The customs held it up—he got round their regulations. When it arrived, it wouldn't work. He got Arun and Mahi (Projector Room) to look at it. They managed to get it going. And all the time he had to struggle to get some funds. His till was always empty. He was full of ideas and his hands were full of work. So it was often start and stop, start and stop—but it went on. He started a "Lab" with an old German lady who had some lab experience. Her name was Krista. When a sample of blood had to be taken, she would say, with big eyes and mock ferocity: "Come, I will suck your blood." And she really did! I gather the German way of collecting blood was to puncture the ear lobe and with a thin tube suck out the blood! The English puncture the inner side (i.e. palm side) of the forefinger. The French of course had to oppose the English—they puncture the nail-side of the forefinger. (These three got us two WWs and more with their bickerings.)

All these activities and our increasing numbers needed more place. That old single-storeyed building was not enough. By now Nripen-da had to rent one or two houses. He also had to remodel the old Dispensary. He got permission to build another floor. There was some opposition (neighbours saying that there was too much noise and even that the view was being obstructed, etc.). But I think finally he got round all obstacles. (Even now some improvements are carried out but with less opposition.) Once Madhav Pandit came to tell Nripen-da that a neighbour was complaining about the breaking of a boundary wall. Nripen-da requested Pandit-ji to take a seat and went out, came back after 20-30 minutes and assured Pandit-ji that he had stopped the work—to everyone's satisfaction. Actually he had got the work completed (only the last bit was remaining).

We come now to Dr. Nripendra's *chef-d'œuvre* or *pièce de résistance*. It must have been an ever-present dream or even a mirage for a long time. For, to fulfil this dream, he had to run himself giddy. We often heard him in his moments of leisure—start off with a *Boujhle* (=listen to me, understand and dream with me....), then his eyes would shine and as he built the Nursing Home in front of us, a satisfied smile would break on his lips. It must be remembered that that period was quite different from the present, as far as the financial condition was concerned. There was not much money. He had to ask for donations from anyone showing a little sympathy and who had a little money to spare. In fact all his projects were undertaken in like manner. The ground was bought, plans were made, one floor was done. The coffers were empty. So just wait out the drought! Dr. Karan Singh also took interest and gave a great helping hand. Nripen-da had the satisfaction of seeing it function, though not completed. The two marble statues of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that we see near the entrance, were got done by one Shobha-di.

The Nursing Home was probably the last of his achievements. He fell ill and had to keep to his bed. He was looked after by his new assistant, Dr. Dutta, who was already very much the incumbent doctorbabu. Nripen-da's condition got worse. He was shifted to the Nursing Home. Once I went to see him; he was not talking. He wouldn't or couldn't, I can't say. I heard he had stopped eating too. I asked him why he was not eating. He just smiled. I then tried his recipe. I asked him: "*Gorom, gorom Roshom khaben?*" He did not speak, but nodded assent. I went home and got him some *Roshom*. That was but a short reprieve. He passed away on the 21st of July 1981—not too old at 77. He never seemed to age at all in many years. His old faithful friends and assistants were on close attendance those last few days. They were Vasantbhai, the present "compounder", Nripen-da's protecting hand (*Abhaya mudra*), and Manashi, his "giver of food" and cook, the giving hand (*Varada mudra*).

The last moments were interesting. Though he was lying inert for a long time, he suddenly made a great effort and swept his arms as if gathering something, at the same time he sat up, opened his eyes, looked and then just lay back with his hands on his heart, breathed his last of this earthly air and left for the greater Realms

of Love and Labour.

For 40 years Nripen-da served the Mother by looking after Her children. He did so much with so little that one is left wondering as to how he did it. But on second and deeper thought, looking just a little behind the good doctor—or is it inside?—we no longer wonder, we are wonderstruck.

Tomar karmo, tumi karo ma.

Yours is the work and you are the doer, O Mother.

That was probably an unspoken, unwritten but deeply felt motto by which Nripen-da (and many of his contemporaries) laboured on and on. It was a labour of love. It cast a spell on them—they ploughed and sowed. It casts a spell on us—we are reaping.

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

(Message for the inauguration of the School for Perfect Eyesight)

The more the mind is quiet, the more the sight is good.

5 May 1968

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(Message for the Nature Cure Section)

Nature is the all-round Healer.

2 July 1968

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(Message for the Main Dispensary)

Finally it is Faith that cures.

Blessings.

9 August 1969

*

(Message for the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), near Pondicherry)

Veritas curat. [Truth cures]

1957

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 172)

THE DIVINE RESCUE WORKER

When misfortune comes tripping at least in pairs
And we are knotted up in pain,
No door has been opened,
We have forgotten to call you,
But suddenly you are there again.

When we most need you and least expect you
(Thinking you must be dealing with the Universe up there)
In secrecy you have come.
Like in that picture
Where swathed in veils,
On white tabi'd feet,
You leave the seclusion of your room
And step towards us down the stairs.

We've read about earthquakes
Where people are buried for seven days,
No longer expecting to come out,
No longer having strength to shout

But are then pulled up without a scratch
Wondering what all the fuss is about.
Well sometimes we've lain in darkness-pain
Not expecting our soul to survive
When of a sudden you arrive
And striking a single match of compassion
You light up the Universe again.
And yes...
We are whole. We are one. We are without stain.

MAGGI

“THE SANNYASI”

THE strict Hindu is expected to go through the four phases of life, namely Brahmacharya, Garhastha, Vanaprastha, and Sannyasa and attain liberation or Moksha by the grace of the Divine. Real Sannyasa is in the mind. It is an inward, not an outward renunciation. The real Sannyasin is the Yogin who has renounced the desire-will in the mind. “The essence of renunciation, the true Tyaga, the true Sannyasa is not any rule of thumb of inaction but a disinterested soul, a selfless mind, the transition from ego to the free impersonal and spiritual nature.”¹

*

“India had three fortresses of a communal life, the village community, the larger joint family and the order of the Sannyasins; all these are broken or breaking with the stride of egoistic conceptions of social life; but is not this after all only the breaking of these imperfect moulds on the way to a larger and diviner communism?”²

*

“Vivekananda, exalting Sannyasa, has said that in all Indian history, there is only one Janaka. Not so, for Janaka is not the name of a single individual, but a dynasty of self-ruling kings and the triumph-cry of an ideal.”³

*

“There have been hundreds of perfect Sannyasins, because Sannyasa has been widely preached and numerously practised; let it be the same with the ideal freedom and we shall have hundreds of Janakas.”⁴

*

All these remarks by Sri Aurobindo show that it is not reducing one’s needs, activities, words, food that makes the Sannyasin’s life but the sublimation of the physical, vital and mental urges that makes him free and his path a noble one. “In all the lakhs of ochre-clad Sannyasins, how many are perfect? It is the few attainments and the many approximations that justify an ideal.”⁵

One such perfect Sannyasin is presented to us by Amal in his poem *The Sannyasi* (*The Secret Splendour*: page 94). The immediate cause and source of inspiration for the poem comes from a story given as an epigraph by the poet. The choice of words and phrases used by him, e.g., “pilgrim passion”, “azure height beaconing above the mind”, “a spirit washed in whitenesses”, “flickering clay”, “ice-pure loneliness of

hush” are appropriate to the life and the mental and moral states of the Sannyasin; and the last six lines of the poem tell us of the widening heart attaining salvation and sublimity which help him to see the golden smile of the one Self everywhere!

*

“Hard is it to be in the world, free, yet living the life of ordinary men; but because it is hard, therefore it must be attempted and accomplished.”⁶

*

Amal’s poem is given here for the immediate reference of the reader, along with Sri Aurobindo’s comments on the poem.

C. SUBBIAN

References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 480.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 118.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

THE SANNYASI

(An old story relates how a princess over-proud of her beauty would not accept any lover unless he could first live like a Sannyasi in the Himalayas, practising austerities to purify himself in order to win her favour as of a divinity. One youth, famous for his handsomeness as well as heroic deeds, took up the difficult wager and at the end of the stipulated three years returned to the eagerly waiting princess, but he came now no longer in the mood of a suitor...)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If every look I turn tramples your flesh • Forgive the pilgrim passion of a dream • That presses over the narrow path of limbs • To an azure height beaconing above the mind. • No love could dare to reach your mouth’s red heaven • Without a spirit washed in whitenesses— • But who shall hear the call of flickering clay • When titan thunders of the avalanche leap, | |
|--|--|

	A pinnacle-voice plunging to deeps below	9
	As if the agelong barrier broke between	10
	Our dubious day and some eternal light?	11
•	Nor can a small face fill the widening heart	
	Where in the ice-pure loneliness of hush	13
	A vast virginity devours all time!	14
	O masquerader of the Measureless,	
	O beauty claiming the Invisible's crown,	
	The empire of the undying Mystery	17
	Has burned across you like an infinite sun	18
	Withering for me your body's puny veil!	
•	Yet all this fire is but the dwarf soul's death:	
	O strain no more those pale and quivering arms:	
	Rise from the crumbling cry of littleness	22
	Beyond each blinded boundary to feel	23
	The immortal Lover flaming through your heart,	
	The golden smile of the one Self everywhere!	

Sri Aurobindo's Comment:

“The blank verse is quite successful. It is all fine poetry throughout, rising from time to time to overhead sublimity and profound force. Not being able to expatiate at length, I summarise my impression by the marks—double line means overhead inspiration, single line means poetry fine enough and strong but not from overhead, single line with dot means lines which have the overhead touch or might even reveal themselves as overhead if in proper immediate company—the last is the case with line 2. The overhead lines belong to the type that is now usual with you, Higher Mind lifted by Illumination to reach the Intuition level or else Illumined Mind rising to Intuition level; the latter in 9-11, 13-14, 17-18, 22-23. Both are very fine combinations.”

(*The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems* by K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], pp. 94-95)

THE HUMAN CYCLE AND THE MODERN AGE

HUMAN progress through history is not a linear march but a cyclic spiral. There are ups and downs but also a resultant progress with each cycle or epoch developing what remained unmanifest or underdeveloped in the previous era. In this article we will study the inner psychological evolution of humanity as it passes through the historic cycle which culminates in our modern age. Our emphasis here will be not on the outer event but on the inner significance of the event, with a greater stress on the modern age rather than on the past eras.

1. EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN AGE

There is at present a growing body of evidence which indicates that ancient, legendary conceptions regarding many civilisational cycles may probably be true. Our human race had perhaps passed through many cycles of civilisation in the past and the present cycle is only one among them. Let us look at this cycle in the light of Indian thought.

The Past Eras:

When we look at the earliest communities and civilisations, we can see they are predominantly sattwo-tamasic,* a small minority of elite sattwic ego dominating a largely tamasic population submerged in the subconscious tribal mass. These early civilisations are governed mainly by the spiritual, religious, aesthetic and intuitive mind and their values. Nature seems to establish the sattwic and the spiritual very early in the evolution of human civilisation probably because they are essential for the fulfilment of the human destiny. Some of these early civilisations gave birth to great cultures like for example the Vedic or Egyptian cultures, reaching tremendous heights and depths of aspiration, profundity, nobility and refinement in thought, art and religion. But the sattwic element of these civilisations was confined to a small creative and ruling minority, while the majority of the masses lived in the subconscious instincts and sensations of their physical being and the group-mind.

In the second phase rajas and the rajasic ego begin to develop and gradually acquire more and more political and social control. But the sattwic elements retain an equal power over the society. The rajasic ego and its powers, motives and needs emerge from the subconscious matrix of the group and are released into conscious activity in the inner being and the outer life of man. In the inner being, increase of rajas leads to greater energy and awakening in the emotions, life-force and will and when this expresses itself in the outer life it leads to greater economic, social and political activity. In the cultural life, sattwa and the sattwic ego retain the leadership

* For a more detailed discussion on the concept of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas and its application to history, readers may refer to my earlier article. "History as Human Development: A Psychological Approach", *Mother India*, May, 2004.

and also exert a considerable influence on the political and social life as the highly respected mentors whose advice is eagerly sought by the king and the people. So this second phase is sattwo-rajasic.

In this phase of evolution, the consciousness of the masses rises slowly from their subconscious tamasic inertia towards a greater rajasic awakening in the economic, social and political life. In the mental and cultural life rajas brings a certain militant and analytical vigour to the intellect leading to the birth of various schools of philosophy and their debates and discussion. The rajasic energy also induces a greater and a more vigorous flowering of the ethical and aesthetic intuition. While the sattwo-tamasic culture was predominantly religious and intuitive, the sattwo-rajasic culture was ethical, intellectual, aesthetic.

We may indentify two sub-phases in the sattwo-rajasic age. In the first phase the sattwic and spiritual ideals of the earlier age were still a living force in the consciousness and life of the people. Rajas, though it was the political and military ruler of the society, willingly subordinates itself to sattwa and lends its force, protection and authority to implement the sattwic values in society. In the second phase, the rajas or the rajasic ego, even while accepting and respecting sattwa as its guide and mentor, was no longer willing to subordinate itself to sattwa. It becomes independent of the sattwic influence and gives more and more importance to the realisation of its own motives and values like power, wealth, expansion and enjoyment. The sattwa and its ideals and values still remained as an inspiring light in the community respected by all sections of the society. But it was now only a light and not a living force governing the society. The ruling force now is rajas using sattwa as a sort of noble and sublimating sanction for the fulfilment of its own motives and aim.

The sattwo-rajasic phase brings out the faculties of organisation and the intellectual and ethical mind, giving birth to great empires, vigorous civilisations, ethical systems and ideals and numerous philosophies. The human life as a whole gains in the richness, variety and energy though there may be a certain loss of depth, wholeness and vastness of vision of the earlier spiritual-intuitive cultures. In ancient India, the epical age, the age of Ramayana and Mahabharata, belongs to the first phase of the sattwo-rajasic age. Most of the "golden ages" in history, like for example, the Gupta age in India and the Augustan age of the Roman empire belong to the second phase of this era.

The Modern Age:

In the third phase, rajas and the rajasic ego gain total ascendancy and begin to dominate sattwa. As the rajasic ego grows in power and strength, it sidelines or eclipses sattwa. In this stage sattwa is no longer the revered or respected mentor nor the sublimating comrade of rajas; it is either dismissed as an ineffective lotus-eater or else used as a servant by the rajasic ego for the fulfilment or justification of its own desires, motives and ambitions. But when sattwa is suppressed, tamas with its natural

inclination for the material life rushes in. But in this phase, it is a tamas and its material needs animated, energised and vitalised by the rajasic desires of the vital ego in man, which means vigorous materialism. This is the condition of our modern age.

The central psychological phenomenon of the modern age is the ascendancy of the rajasic vital ego dominating and using the tamasic physical and the sattwic mental ego, first as its servant and the second as its subordinate adviser to supply the mental power, for the fulfilment of its material and vital desires for enjoyment and dominion over the material life. With this event, the advent and domination of the rajasic vital ego, the centre of gravity of history shifts from the East, which preserved and nurtured its inborn sattwa, to the West, the fortress of rajas.

This evolution of human civilisation from tamas to rajas involves a vigorous churning of the human consciousness with negative as well as positive consequences. There were two calamitous world wars and all the brutalities of Nazism, which is a manifestation of the lowest and crudest form of the rajaso-tamasic ego. We had industrialism, commercialism and utilitarianism, with their rather one sided and exclusive pursuit of wealth, productivity and efficiency. They have cramped the mentality of the race into a narrowly materialistic and pragmatic vision of life and blunted the higher ethical, aesthetic, ecological, spiritual sensitivity of the human mind. And the result is, inwardly, a drying up of the heart and a sense of inner hollowness; outwardly rampant greed and violence, ecological degradation, mechanisation of life, and a titillating sensationalism to fill up the inner emptiness.

To a cultured mind of the past, this movement from the lofty and refined sattwic civilisations of the past to the present gross materialism may appear not as progress but as a fall and a relapse into another form of barbarism. There is some truth in this view because there is a certain amount of regression in culture and values in this historical progress from the ancient to the modern period. But as we have said, Nature's cycles of progress are not a straight line but spirals. There is an evolutionary necessity behind this apparent regression. Without the intervention of the rajasic vital ego, human beings would have never moved from the sattwo-tamasic poise to the dynamic throb and progress of life.

The Inner Development through History:

So there is a net inner progress behind the apparent retrogressions. Each stage of evolution develops some faculties of human consciousness and establishes certain values which are essential for the integral development of humanity. The first, sattwo-tamasic phase develops the religious, spiritual and intuitive faculties and establishes the corresponding values which are related to the highest spiritual aims of human development. The second sattwo-rajasic phase develops more fully the philosophical, aesthetic and ethical faculties which were either absent or under-developed in the first stage and their corresponding values which are essential for the higher psychological development of humanity. This second phase also brings out the faculties of

the pragmatic and organising mind, but only partially. In our present, modern rajaso-tamasic age we have seen the further flowering of the scientific, technological and organising mind or, in other words, the full development of the faculties of the pragmatic intelligence which are essential for the outer, material development of humanity or, in other words, for the material realisation of the Idea in the outer economic, social, political and material life.

This modern cycle may appear to some as a regression from the more sattvic cultures and civilisations of the past. But in order to concentrate on developing a new faculty, Nature may sometimes withhold or suppress certain other faculties which were developed in the past. She may again bring forth what was developed in the past and present and weave them into a greater harmony in the future. For nothing which was developed or established in the past is lost. When something new is developed, that which was developed in the past may retreat into the subconscious mind of the race. But it can be easily recovered when the human mind again turns its conscious attention to it.

Thus when we look at the psychological evolution of humanity in this holistic perspective we can see that the drift of change is towards the integral development of human consciousness. Let us next examine what is the contribution of the modern age to this total development of humanity.

(To be continued)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

It is necessary... that advancing Knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect. It is necessary, too, that she should correct her errors sometimes by a return to the restraint of sensible fact, the concrete realities of the physical world.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 11)

FIVE PIECES FROM RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S 'KANJIKA' RENDERED INTO ENGLISH

1. TAKING UP OF DUTY (*Kartabya Grahan*)

“Who will take up my work hence?”
Asks the evening sun. The world remains mum!
There is the earthen lamp who replies,
“O Master, I shall do whatever best I can.”

2. BEYOND QUERY (*Prashner Atit*)

O Sea, what does your voice convey all the time?
“Mine is the question Eternal,” responds the sea.
“What does your silence signify, O Lord of mountains?”
“Mine is the Everlasting ‘No Reply’,” says the Himalaya.

3. THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION (*Bhakti Bhajan*)

Car-festival: huge crowd, great pomp and grandeur—
The devotees prostrate on the path to offer obeisance.
The path presumes, “I am God,” the car thinks “I am God,”
The Idol assumes, “I am God.”
The Omniscient simply smiles!

4. THE APPREHENSION OF ILLUSION (*Moher Ashanka*)

The baby bloom opens its eyes and sees the world—
Green, beautiful, soothing, full of melody and fragrance!
It calls out to the wide world, “O dear,
Please live on as long as myself do live.”

5. THE KINSHIP (*Kutumbita*)

The kerosene flame warns the earthen lamp,
“If you dare call me brother, I shall teach you a bitter lesson.”
Just then the moon rises on the horizon;
The kerosene flame calls aloud, “Welcome, my brother!”

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

COLLECTED WORKS, Volume One, Vasishtha Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. *The Book of Adoration Part One.* Edited by K. Natesan, 2003. Sri Ramanashramam, Thiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu - 606603. Rs. 300.00.

CHALLENGING triumphantly the doubting *littérateurs* of contemporary India comes this volume in Sanskrit, the first of the Collected Works of Vasishtha Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. The volume proves that Sanskrit has not only been the *deva-bhāṣā* of our ancient land, but it has remained so for several millennia and is today pulsatingly alive. Whether editing scholarly publications or naming a new missile, the Indian automatically turns to the noble accents of this rich language. For the language is as ancient as it is contemporaneous.

If the twentieth century was full of technological advance in India, it was also reaching out to the pinnacles of yogic endeavour during these hundred years. One of the experiments was to use yoga for helping the creative lotus in man to bloom, wafting a divine scent in the environment. Sri Aurobindo did it with tremendous success in *Savitri* and today this epic in English has a global presence.

Another great yogi of the times was Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. His chosen field was Tantra yoga. This yoga sadhana is based on intense meditation. We find Ganapati Muni adventuring in the serried realms of consciousness that have been mapped in Sri Vidya Upasana. His adoration of the Divine Mother led to the epic recordation of one thousand stanzas. Such mind-boggling variety in approach, prosody and Pauranic legends! Indeed, the same variety and superior scholarship as well as soulful poetry is found in all the works of Ganapati Muni.

The first volume has an informative biographical homage to the savant in English by K. Natesan. Born in 1878, Ganapati Muni was educated at home, became an adept in reciting and explaining the Vedas and achieved excellence in mantra japa. At an early age he was decorated with the title of Kavyakantha (Voice of Poesy) by a committee of scholars at Nabadwip. A teacher, Ganapati Muni led an intensely spiritual life. He met Sri Aurobindo in 1928, stayed in the Ashram for a fortnight and meditated with the Mother. A dear disciple of Ramana Maharishi, Ganapati Muni received the guru's grace in full which led to the outpouring of *umāsahasram*. An adept in yoga, he became a Lighthouse of Atmavidya to innumerable aspirants. Ganapati Muni merged with the Absolute in 1936.

Lovers of literature and practitioners of yoga are greatly indebted to Sri Natesan for collecting the works of the savant and preparing this treasure house of the spirit. This too is yoga; and yoga being skill in works, Sri Natesan's assistant, Dr. Sampadananda Mishra has also engaged himself in this yajna with a breathtaking attention to detail.

The volume opens with prayers to the *guru-paramparā*:

*dakṣiṇāmurtisārambhām śaṅkarācāryamadhyamām
ramaṅācāryaparyantām vande guruparamparām.*

After praying to Vinayaka, the Brilliance who rests in the *Mūlādhāra*, we come to four magnificent prayers to Uma. Why this partiality to the name Uma? Sri Natesan explains:

umātrīsatī—three hundred names of goddess *umā*—is a most beautiful composition of the seer-poet Kavyakantha. This is one of his powerful, potent mantric utterances. The sound OM consists of three letters—A...U...M. The word UMA too has three letters in a transposed manner. This is the name of the Primordial Shakti, the Mother Goddess of the universe. In *tantrasāstra*, *umā* is considered to be the *śāktapraṇava*. Therefore, the *trīsatī* befittingly starts with the names *umā* and *haimavatī*.

The Kavyakantha was taking a cue from the *Rig Veda* (*umaso* or Uma-born) and the *Kena Upanishad* where Indra comes upon “*bahuśobhamānām umām haimavatīm*” who teaches Indra, Vayu and Agni about the Eternal, the Brahman. As we quietly recite to ourselves the *umātrīsatī*, it becomes clear that Uma’s name is *aparyāptāmṛta*, the nectar that never satiates. Apart from the *trīsatī*, the Kavyakantha has given us *umāsatakam*, *umākṣaramālā* and of course, *umāsahasram*.

Again, it is in a condition of *aparyāptāmṛta* that we study *umāsahasram* with its commentary, *prabhā* by T. V. Kapali Sastry. We walk in the regions of the divine with the very opening exclamation: *Akhilajaganmātā*. Here are forty cantos (*stabakās*), each containing twenty-five verses. Sastry refers to the work as a *pārāyaṇa granthā*, created in the immediate presence of Ramana Maharishi who was the very image of meditation. As we move from one canto to another, we find the Mother as the transcendent Supreme and as Vedic and Tantric deities. She is Purusha-Prakriti, the Trimurti and the Pancharmurti. She is the Kundalini who moves in the human body (*Stabaka* 4).

*nṛtanuṣu viharantīm tvām upādhivīṅākṛterjaganmātāḥ
sādrśyāt kuṇḍalinīm paroḁṣavādapriyāḥ prabhāṣante.*

Our progress with the poem’s stately verses takes us to familiar places in India where the Divine Mother is worshipped—Kanyakumari, Ramesvaram, Madurai, Jambukeswaram. In fact we almost complete an all-India tour going to Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bengal, Magadha, Benaras and Avanti as well. The whole of the 26th canto is devoted to Goddess Apeetakuchambal of Tiruvannamalai.

We are given an idea of the experiences one gains by meditating upon these images, and the significance of the *Daśa mahā vidyā* worship. When we come to the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth cantos we find ourselves in the awesome *terribilita* of Prachanda Chandika and Renuka Devi. The poem concludes with an ecstatic paean to the Mother of Radiances. The place of *umāsahasram* in an aspirant's life can be gauged from Sastriar's statement that for him writing the commentary on the poem was itself *upāsanā*.

The volume has a shloka index and an English transliteration of all the Sanskrit poems published in it. These are of much help, but an English translation would be most welcome as well. Of course, the first step is the gathering of the original works in twelve volumes, for the Kavyakantha also handled prose with felicity and has written commentaries, a treatise on the *Mahabharata*, aphorisms and a Sanskrit novel, *Pūrṇā*. For undertaking this stupendous task, our grateful salutations to the editor Sri Natesan; also, our gratitude to Sri V. S. Ramanan for making the publication a delight for the *sahridaya* who loves to handle books. It is like receiving nectar in a golden chalice.

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

For there is, concealed behind individual love, obscured by its ignorant human figure, a mystery which the mind cannot seize, the mystery of the body of the Divine, the secret of a mystic form of the Infinite which we can approach only through the ecstasy of the heart and the passion of the pure and sublimated sense, and its attraction which is the call of the divine Flute-player, the mastering compulsion of the All-Beautiful, can only be seized and seize us through an occult love and yearning which in the end makes one the Form and the Formless, and identifies Spirit and Matter. It is that which the spirit in Love is seeking here in the darkness of the Ignorance and it is that which it finds when individual human love is changed into the love of the Immanent Divine incarnate in the material universe.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 160)

TO A POET WHO FEARS HIS INSPIRATION HAS DRIED UP

The shadows lengthening; the setting sun's
Purple brilliance is but a goodbye sign;
And then the shadows cover these paths;
Flutter in the evening wind till the stars come.
Or maybe the clouded skies will fill the horizon,
And I look up and see a dark naked sky above
A dark naked earth gone to sleep.
Which way would you come then, crossing
The dark streets where even the shadows die?

When age weakens your bones, and eyesight dims;
When walking some dark street alone, companionless,
Would you cleave the darkness with a moon glow,
Or kindle a lone sunlight from your heart's throbs?

How to cleave the darkness? Would you remember
Those who left us impoverished, save the grace
Of words; would you hum a song
Of childhood hopes and dreams that recur?

Though lengthening shadows may fall on our path
And even the shadows die, covered in pit-darkness;
Sing, revive some hope; surely a smile remembered,
A jasmine fragrance filling the air, somewhere,
An infant stumbling and crying his fallen failure's pain,—

Leave the maddening play scripted by others;
Words; revive your words, glare and gleam
Give to the sapless stuporing world.

K. N. VIJU

NAVANIT STORIES

WHICH WAY IS THE WIND BLOWING?

A SAILING boat was anchored at the Kutch-Mandvi harbour. I was going to travel on it with thirty-one students. Coming in groups of twos or threes, they and their luggage had all been properly checked and accounted for. Everything was in order.

“Ishaaq-bhai, we are all here. Please raise the anchor and let us be on our way,” I informed the captain. But Ishaaq did not seem to have heard; he stood motionless, gazing at the horizon.

I kept quiet for a while, then repeated, “Ishaaq-bhai, we are ready, all our boys and their luggage have come aboard. Won’t you set sail now?”

Ishaaq turned round and looked gravely towards me. His eyes betrayed the ire of the experienced. In a severe voice he replied: “Can’t you see the wind is blowing inland? I have no intention of wrecking my ship, she is my life. Besides, I would prefer to ferry you safely across this bay, not drown you in it.”

It was true. A strong wind was blowing against us—it would have been suicidal for us to defy it.

After a long hour, the adverse gusts subsided. Immediately, Ishaaq issued the necessary commands and asked us to go to our places. The anchor was raised, the sails went up, the officer manning the steering wheel went into action. Majestically, like a swan in a pond, with the wind now in its favour, the ship glided over the waters, confidently skirting the shoals and rocks along the way. Smoothly and safely we reached our destination.

O Ishaaq, you have taught me a precious lesson today. What a disaster awaits one who jumps in at the wrong time! And if you miss the right moment because you are sleeping or are unprepared, well, you remain where you are! Only he who recognises the right moment and acts immediately will succeed in his work. That is why the great Bhartrihari has said, “What is failure but missing the right moment?”

PUJALAL

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

There are unique moments in life that pass like a dream. One must catch them on the wing, for they never return.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 79)

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
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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.