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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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ADWAITA

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.

Around me was a formless solitude:
All had become one strange Unnamable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.

A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 153)

Before he met Lele, Sri Aurobindo had some spiritual experiences, but that [was] before he knew anything about Yoga or even what Yoga was,— e.g. a vast calm which descended upon him at the moment when he stepped first on Indian soil after his long absence, in fact with his first step on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay; (this calm surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards,) the realisation of the vacant Infinite while walking on the ridge of the Takht-i-[Sulaiman] in Kashmir, the living presence of Kali in a shrine in Chandod on the banks of the Narmada, the vision of the Godhead surging up from within when in danger of a carriage accident in Baroda in the first year of his stay etc. But these were inner experiences coming of themselves and with a sudden unexpectedness, not part of a sadhana.

Sri Aurobindo

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, p. 110)

EXPERIENCE OF THE ADWAITIC SELF

Q: I have read what you wrote to X the other day about the way in which you had the experience of the Self; that such a thing could have happened seems to me almost unthinkable!

A: I can't help that. It happened. The mind's canons of the rational and the possible do not give spiritual life and experience.

Q: But can you not tell us what the experience was like? Was it by any chance like the one you speak of in your Uttarpara Speech—the Vasudeva experience?

A: Great jumble-Mumble! What has Vasudeva to do with it? Vasudeva is the name of Krishna, and in the Uttarpara I was speaking of Krishna, if you please.

Q: By the Self, I suppose, you mean the individual Self!

A: Good Lord, no. I mean the Self, sir, the Self, the Adwaita, Vedantic, Shankar Self. Atman, Atman! A thing I knew nothing about, never bargained for, didn't understand either.

Q: But didn't you begin Yoga later on in Gujerat?

A: Yes. But this began in London, sprouted the moment I set foot on Apollo Bunder, touching Indian soil, flowered one day in the first year of my stay in Baroda, at the moment when there threatened to be an accident to my carriage. Precise enough?

31.10.1935

SRI AUROBINDO

(On Himself, SABCL, Vol. 26, pp. 80-81)

THE REALISTIC AND THE ILLUSIONIST ADWAITA

THERE is possible a realistic as well as an illusionist Adwaita. The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is such a realistic Adwaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. This is what we nowadays call the Inconscient which seems to have created the material universe by its inconscient Energy, but this is only an appearance, for we find in the end that all the dispositions of the world can only have been arranged by the working of a supreme secret Intelligence. The Being which is hidden in what seems to be an inconscient void emerges in the world first in Matter, then in Life, then in Mind and finally as the Spirit. The apparently inconscient Energy which creates is in fact the Consciousness-Force of the Divine and its aspect of consciousness, secret in Matter, begins to emerge in Life, finds something more of itself in Mind and finds its true self in a spiritual consciousness and finally a supramental Consciousness through which we become aware of the Reality, enter into it and unite ourselves with it. This is what we call evolution which is an evolution of Consciousness and an evolution of the Spirit in things and only outwardly an evolution of species. Thus also, the delight of existence emerges from the original insentience, first in the contrary forms of pleasure and pain, and then has to find itself in the bliss of the Spirit or, as it is called in the Upanishads, the bliss of the Brahman. That is the central idea in the explanation of the universe put forward in *The Life Divine*.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 105)

CHARM OF KASHMIR

QUITE agree with your estimate of Kashmir. The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat—that was a kind of earthly Paradise—also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushes down Kashmir towards the plains. Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekwar to cut short the Paradise! His idea of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit. But after all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden.

7.11.1938

SRI AUROBINDO

(*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 352)

A DAY IN SRINAGAR

[*Note on the text:*

1903, probably 30 May.

Sri Aurobindo was in Kashmir from late May to mid September 1903. During this time he served as the private secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda. Letters that he wrote for the Maharaja while in Kashmir show that the royal party was in Srinagar at least three times: from 28 May (or slightly before) to 6 or 7 June, for a few days around 23 June, and again for ten days or more after 5 September. References in these diary notations make it seem likely that they were written during the first of the visits to the Kashmiri capital, that is, between 28 May and 6 June. The only Saturday during this period (omitting 6 June itself, which must have been spent making preparations to go to Icchabal, or “Archibal”, as Sri Aurobindo spelled it) was 30 May 1903. This then is the likely date of these notes. The longer and shorter pieces separated here by an asterisk were written by Sri Aurobindo on separate pages of his notebook. The Sardesai mentioned in the first piece is no doubt Govind Sakharam Sardesai, the Marathi historian, who was an officer in the Maharaja’s service. The Maharaja was often referred to as His Highness (H.H.). His chief Baroda residence was Lakshmi Vilas Palace, an imposing building that unsuccessfully tries to combine Italian, Indian and other architectural elements.]

Saturday. [30 May 1903]

Cashmere. Srinagar.

In the morning Sardesai dropped in and we went together to Dhond, where I arranged with Rajaram to mess with him; the dinner consisted of the usual Brahminic course, dal & rice, two chupatties with potatoes & greens and amthi,—the whole to be seasoned liberally by a great square of clarified butter at one side of the tray. Fortunately the dishes were not very pungent and, with this allowance, I have made myself sufficiently adaptable to be a Brahmin with the Brahmins

*

Dinner in the morning from Rajaram, who put me au courant with zenana politics. Not having his son to quarrel with, H.H has filled up the gap with his wife; they have been at it hammer & tongs since the Maharani joined him at Murree, chiefly, it seems, about dhobies & other such highly unroyal topics. To spite his wife H.H has raised the subject of Tarabai Ghadge’s carriage allowance, which she has been taking very

placidly without keeping any carriage; for neglect in suffering this “payment without consideration”, Mohite, Raoji Sirgavkar & the Chitnis are each to be fined 105 Rs. Note that Mohite alone is to blame, having signed the usual declaration that he had assured himself the recipient had her own conveyance; but this sort of thing is becoming too common to be wondered at. Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur officials. The order adds that if any of the stricken has objections to make, he may make them and, if found satisfactory, the fine will be withdrawn. This is perilously like hanging a man first and trying him afterwards—or to put it accurately, I throw my shoe in your face and then permit you to prove that the salutation was causeless, in which case I shall be graciously pleased to put my shoe on my foot again. Another characteristic order is that degrading Savant back from Naib Khangi Karbhariship to Chitnishood & ordering Mohite to make a tippan as to whether his allowance should be continued or not. “His Highness thinks it should not, but still the K. K. should make a tippan about it.” Again if translated this might run, “I sentence the criminal in the dock to six months’ hard labour and the jury may now consider whether he should have been sentenced or not.” The latest trouble is about “unnecessary tongas” from Murree to Srinagar; yet the Maharaja was assured that if he insisted upon starting at once, there was no other course open, and at the time he promised to sanction any expense entailed. Now that he has had his own convenience satisfied, he chooses not to remember that he ever promised anything of the sort, so that he may have the pitiful satisfaction of venting his illtemper on innocent people. He has also ordered that no one shall receive special bhutta at a hill-station, unless the matter is brought to his notice and he is personally satisfied that prices are higher than in Baroda. Where will all this shop-keeping unprinceliness & petty-fogging injustice end?

Ashudada sent Visvas’ son Hemchandra with a note to me; the lad is a young Hercules five foot ten in height & monstrous in muscle with a roaring voice and continual outbursts of boisterous laughter over anything in the shape of a joke good or bad—a fine specimen of the outlander Bengali. His companion, a Kaviraj, rejoices in the name of Satyendranath Banerji Kobirunjun and is something of an ass & much of a coward, but not a bad fellow withal. We adjourned in a body, Sardesai, Ambe-gavkar, Dr. Balabhai, myself & the two Bengalis to the Maharaja’s green-cushioned boat & set out on the broad bosom of Lake Dal and through the lock & a canal into the Jhelum. The boatman swore that we should get drowned if we shot the lock, but Hem Babu though he admitted there might be a little danger, insisted on having it done. In the result we only shipped a little water which sought the left leg of my trousers as naturally as a bird seeks its nest, but the Kaviraj was in a terrible fright & clamoured protestation till we were right in the swirl of the waters. The water was lined with houseboats of the ogre-monkeys in some of which there were marvellous specimens of Cashmeri beauty. After a visit to Ashu & then to the hospital,—where I found I turned the scale at 113, my old weight, and reached the height of 5 ft 5 in my shoes—we adjourned through the rain to Hem Babu’s house. There we [met] his father, the

genial & hearty Reception Officer, tall & robust in build, with a fine largely cut jovial face and a venerable beard, and several other Bengalis—let me see if I can remember their names, Chunilal Ray of the Foreign Office, with a face of pure Indo-Afghan type looking more the Punjabi or Cashmeri than a Babu, Gurucharan Dhar, a pleader, Bhabani Babu of the Commissariat, another of the Commissariat, and a certain Lolit Babu, of I know not where. No, I shall never be any good at remembering names. The tea was execrable but the cigarettes & the company were good.

Afterwards the carriage took us through the streets of the town & then, the coachman being unable or unwilling to find his way out, back the same way. The streets are very narrow and the houses poor & rickety, though occasionally picturesque, being built impartially of bricks, stones or other material imposed & intersticed irregularly & without cement, cobbled in fact rather than built. The windows are usually plastered with paper—for the sake of privacy, I suppose,—but it must make the rooms very dingy & gloomy. The roofs are often grown over with a garden of grasses & wildflowers, making a very pretty effect. The Maharaja's palace by the river in the true quaint Hindu way of building was the one building which struck me in Srinagar,—how much superior to the pretentious monstrosities of architecture at Luxmivilas Palace! This drive has finally completed and confirmed my observations of Cashmeri beauty. The men in the country parts are more commonly handsome than the town people & the Hindus than the Mohamedans.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 16-18;
p. 560 for note on the text.)*

‘SOLE REALITY OF OUR BEING’

January 10, 1914

My aspiration rises towards Thee ever the same in its almost childlike form, so ordinary in its simplicity, but my call is ever more ardent, and behind the faltering words there is all the fervour of my concentrated will. And I implore Thee, O Lord, in spite of the naïveté of this expression that is hardly intellectual, I implore Thee for more true light, true purity, sincerity and love, and all this for all, for the multitude constituting what I call my being, and for the multitude constituting the universal being; I implore Thee, though I know that it is perfectly useless to implore Thee, for we alone, in our ignorance and ill-will, can stand in the way of Thy glorious and total manifestation, but something childlike within me finds a support in this mental attitude; I implore Thee that the peace of Thy reign may spread throughout the earth.

O inaccessible summit which we unceasingly scale without ever reaching Thee, sole Reality of our being whom we believe we have found only to see Thee immediately escape us, marvellous state which we think we have seized but which leads us farther and farther into ever unexplored depths and immensities; no one can say, “I have known Thee,” and yet all carry Thee in themselves, and in the silence of their soul can hear the echo of Thy voice; but this silence is itself progressive, and whatever be the perfection of the union we have realised, as long as we belong by our body to the world of relativity, this Union with Thee can always grow more perfect.

But all these words we use to speak about Thee are only idle talk. Grant that I may become Thy faithful servitor.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 52-53)

ON THOUGHT—INTRODUCTION

MILLE. MOLITOR has very kindly asked me to say a few words on thought.

Since you have been good enough to come and listen to me today, I conclude that you are among those who, knowing the primary importance of thought, its master-role in life, strive to build up for themselves an ever stronger and more conscious thought.

So I hope you will excuse me if, while showing you what this primary importance of thought is, I venture to give you—to give *us*—some advice on learning how to think well.

In this, I shall act only as an interpreter for you on behalf of the great instructors, the great initiates who have come from age to age to bring to men their words of wisdom and peace.

But before translating for you as best I can their beautiful teachings on the rational, effective and just use of the marvellous faculty in us which is thought, it seems to me indispensable that we should first of all enquire a little into what thought is.

5 February 1912

*

ON THOUGHT—II

You probably remember that, last month, we made two observations.

The first is that thought is a living, active, autonomous entity.

The second is that in order to contend victoriously with the injurious effects of the polluted mental atmosphere in which we live, we must build up within ourselves a pure, luminous and powerful intellectual synthesis.

For this purpose we must bring down into ourselves the highest thoughts within our reach, that is, within the field of our mental activity, and make them our own.

But since thoughts are living beings, they have, as we do, their likes and dislikes, their attractions and repulsions.

We must therefore adopt a special attitude towards them, treat them as people, make advances and concessions to them and show them the same attentions as we would to someone we would wish to be our friend.

On this matter, a modern philosopher writes:

“Sometimes thinkers in their meditations, explorers and prospectors of the intellectual world in their discoveries, and poets—the diviners of thought—in their dreams, feel and vaguely sense that the idea is not something abstract and bodiless. It appears to them to be winged, something which soars, comes close and flees, denies and gives itself, something which must be called, pursued and won.

“To the most clairvoyant, the idea seems to be an aloof person with her whims and desires, her preferences, her queenly disdain, her virgin modesty. They know that it takes much care to win her and but a little thing to lose her, that there is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.

“But these are pretty symbols, and few indeed can perceive the very precise reality which lies beneath them.

“It needed a Plato to identify this thing which lives and vibrates, which moves and shines, travels and is propagated through time and space, which acts and wills and freely chooses its own time and place—in short, to know the Idea as a being.”

Let us take especially one phrase from this beautiful page: “There is a love of the mind for the idea, a love made of consecration and sacrifice, and without this the idea cannot belong to it.”

This is not an image. To enter into an intimate and conscious relation with the idea, we must consecrate ourselves to it, love it with a disinterested love, in itself, for itself.

Today we shall try to find out what this love consists of and, at the same time, what we must do for it to blossom within us.

The first attitude to be taken, the most indispensable, is the most perfect mental sincerity it is within our power to acquire.

Of all sincerities, this is perhaps the most difficult. Not to deceive oneself mentally is not an easy thing to achieve.

First of all we have, as I explained to you last December, a certain habit of thought which comes from the education we have received, from the influence of the environment, and which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. This habit naturally makes us give a far better reception to all the thoughts which are similar, if not conformable, to those which already fill our minds, than to those which could, to however small an extent, unsettle this mental structure.

For the same reason, as you probably remember, it is sometimes so difficult for us to learn to think for ourselves: we hesitate to change anything whatsoever in our customary way of thinking, which is most often made up of social conventions and collective suggestions. For our whole existence is based upon this habit. It takes a great courage and a great love of progress to consent to examine one’s existence in the light of thoughts that are deeper, and consequently more independent of the customs and usages of the environment.

You can judge from this the great, the very great love of the idea that is needed to achieve such a revolution in one’s habits, for the sole purpose of gaining the power to enter into a more intimate, more conscious relationship with it!

And even when our mental synthesis is made up of thoughts that we have received and made our own in the course of a constant and persevering effort of meditation, we must love the idea with a very powerful love, perhaps even more powerful still, so

that we may always be in quest of a new idea, ready to give it the most eager reception if it is willing to come to us. For we are well aware that each new idea will constrain us to modify our synthesis, relegate to the background ideas which had seemed to us master-ideas, bring to the light other ideas too long disregarded, rearrange them all so that they do not clash, to the great detriment of our brain, in brief, a long and sometimes painful task. Indeed we are very seldom disinterested with regard to ideas; there are some which we prefer to others and which, consequently, occupy a place in our mental activity which they do not always deserve.

And if we must replace them with others that are more precise, more true, we often hesitate long before doing so, we cling to them as indispensable friends, and we love their defects as well as their qualities,—which is the worst way to love people, as well as the laziest and most selfish,—for we are always more highly esteemed by those we flatter than by those from whom we demand a constant effort of progress. But our difficulties do not stop there.

As a consequence of the intellectual education we have received or of some personal preference, we are also prejudiced about the way, or ways, in which ideas should be introduced to us.

These preconceptions are so many veritable superstitions that we must overcome. They are different for each person.

Some people have the superstition of the book. For an idea to merit consideration in their eyes, it must have been expressed in some famous book, in one of the bibles of humanity, and any thought coming in any other way will appear suspect to them.

There are some who accept an idea only from the official sciences, and those who recognise one only in the established religions, old or new. For others, the idea must come from the mouth of a man of renown with enough honorary titles so that none can question his value.

Still others, more sentimental, in order to come into contact with thought, need a master who should be the perfect incarnation of the ideal human standard constructed by their imagination. But they are bound to be sorely disappointed, for they forget that they alone are capable of realising their own ideal, that the one in whom they have placed their confidence has a duty to realise his own ideal which, consequently, however great it may be, may very well differ considerably from their own. So, most often, when they become aware of these divergences, since they had attached themselves to the ideas only for the sake of the man, they will reject both man and ideas together.

This is absurd, for ideas are worth what they are worth regardless of the individuals who have expressed them.

Finally, there is a whole category of people enamoured of the miraculous, who will recognise a truth only if it has come to them clothed in the mystery of a supra-mundane revelation, in dream or trance.

For them the master must be their God, an angel or a Mahatma, and give them

his precious teachings during their contemplation or their sleep.

Needless to say, this method is still more unreliable than the others. That a thought should reach us by extraordinary means is no guarantee of its correctness or its truth.¹

You see, the true lover of the idea knows that by seeking it ardently he will find it everywhere, and even more so in the subterranean and secret fountainheads than in those which have lost their pristine purity by turning into rivers that are majestic and renowned but also polluted by the waste of all kinds which they carry with them.

The lover of the idea knows that it can come to him from the mouth of a child as from the mouth of a learned man.

And it is even in this unexpected way that it can reach him most often.

That is why it is said: "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes forth truth."

For if the thought of a child cannot have the precision of the thought of a man, neither does it have the fixity which results from laziness of habit and which in the adult prevents the thought from expressing itself whenever it does not belong to the categories which are familiar to him.

Moreover, it was to escape the distortion of an environment made up of habit and fixity that the schools of ancient times where the young prophets were educated were established far from the cities.

That is also why the great instructors of men began their apprenticeship in solitude. For if too many things are absent for the thought to be able to express itself in the minds of unrefined men, too many things are also absent from the mind of the cultivated man shaped by the artificial life of human societies.

How much silence is needed—not the outer, illusory and momentary silence, but on the contrary the true, profound, integral, permanent silence—to be able to hear the far-off voices of thought!

That is why the sincere lover of knowledge also knows that the greatest sages are always the most modest and the most unknown. For one who has the knowledge and the capacity prefers silence and retirement where he is free to accomplish his work without being disturbed by anything, to the fanfares of glory which would throw him as fodder to men.

The lover of thought knows that he will find thought everywhere around him, in the little flower as in the radiant sun; nothing and no one appears to him too humble or too obscure to be for him an intermediary of the idea he is ever seeking.

But above all he knows that the best, the most reliable contact with the idea is certainly a direct contact.

Since we are made out of the universal substance, we are this universe in miniature.

1. *Paragraph added when this talk was presented to a different group:*

I do not mean that it is impossible to come into contact with an idea by these means, but they are far from being the only ones or even perhaps the best.

Since no phenomenon can exist without a corresponding medium, the existence of ideas implies the existence of a corresponding domain, the realm of free intelligence always in form but not subject to form, and this realm is within us as within the great universe.

If then we concentrate sufficiently, if we become conscious of our inmost being, we shall come into contact, within it and through it, with the free universal intelligence, the world of ideas.

Then, if we have taken care to polish our mirror well and to clear it of all the dust of preconception and habit, all ideas will be able to reflect themselves there with a minimum of distortion, and we shall have acquired bodhi (knowledge), we shall have acquired the power of reflecting the rays of the Sun of Truth²—such was the hope which Siddhartha Gautama held out to us. When he was asked, “How shall we obtain bodhi?”, he would reply:

“Bodhi has no distinctive signs or marks: what can be known in respect of it is of no use whatsoever; but the care we take in practising its spirit is of great importance. It is like a cleansed and polished mirror that has become clear and bright, so that images are reflected in it sharply and vividly.”

And again:

“One who is without darkness, free from blemish, of blameless conduct, perfectly pure, that one, even though he does not know and has never heard and in short has no knowledge, however little, of any of the things that are in the world of the ten regions since time without beginning until today, none the less, he possesses the highest knowledge of the one who knows all. He is the one of whom it is said: Clarity.” You see here a panegyric of the direct relationship with the idea as opposed to the wholly external and superficial method of erudition.

The advantages of this direct relationship are incalculable.

It enables us to recover and love the idea behind all appearances, all veils, all forms, even the most barbarous, the most crude, the most superstitious.

Thus we can put into living practice the state of mind of the sage, of which I spoke to you in my first talk and which a master defines in this way:

“One who advances in Truth is not troubled by any error, for he knows that error is the first effort of life towards truth.”

Consequently, not a single fragment of an idea can ever be lost for us; wherever it is concealed, we know how to discover and cherish it.

Moreover, when we have become familiar with an idea, when we know it in

2. In a version presented to another group the paragraph ends here and is followed by these two paragraphs:

Then will our mental actions take on their full power and effectivity. Our thought-formations will become useful and luminous messengers going forth to do their work of goodness and harmony wherever material circumstances prevent us from doing it physically.

And by a little effort of concentration we shall rapidly succeed in becoming conscious of these actions while at the same time remaining in touch with the emanated thought.

itself, for itself, we recognise it behind the most diverse appearances, the most varied forms.

This faculty can even serve as a criterion to discover whether someone is in contact with the idea itself, that is to say, whether he has understood it well and made it his own or whether he is part of the mass of those who have assimilated as best they could a doctrine, a special language, and who can think only in the words of that language—outside this formula, they no longer understand anything.

This attachment to form, which consists entirely of intellectual impotence, is one of the most powerful causes of dissension among men.

But one who penetrates deeply enough to see the thought, the naked truth, soon realises that it is the same behind its varied and more or less opaque veils.

This is the surest way to achieve true tolerance.

Indeed, how can we have an exclusive passion for one particular doctrine or school or religion when we have had the experience that each one of them contains treasures of light and truth, however varied the caskets which enclose them?

16 February 1912

THE MOTHER

(Words of Long Ago, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 78-86)

“THE TEMPLE-GIRL OF MO-HEN-JO-DARO” CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

[In July 1932 Amal sent Sri Aurobindo an untitled “stray little poem”. Further versions—titled “The Temple-Girl of Mo-hen-jo-daro”—followed later in 1932 and 1933, some of which are lost. In the following correspondence dated 8 and 9 July 1933, marking the end of the discussion on “The Temple-Girl of Mo-hen-jo-daro”, Sri Aurobindo also refers to Amal’s poem “Sakuntala’s Farewell”(see May, June and July 2007 issues of Mother India).]

Sri Aurobindo—

I am sending you another copy of the “Temple-Girl” because I have made one small but important change in the second line of the second stanza. Of course I need not have typed the whole poem again, but I have done so for beauty of general impression.

THE TEMPLE-GIRL OF MO-HEN-JO-DARO

(As imaged in dance-posture on a relic)

Behold her face: unto that glorious smile
All sorrow was an ecstasy of gloom
+ Fragrant with an invisible flame of flowers.
And never but with startling loveliness
+ Like the white shiver of breeze on moonlit water
Flew the chill thought of death across her dream...

A far cry fades along her kindled curves*
+ To beauty ineffable: shameless and pure,
The rhythm of adoration her sole vesture,
+ Upon the wayward heart of time she dawns— [1]
A passion wedded to some glowing hush
Beyond the world, in tense eternity!

* Is it better to say “Along her kindled curves a far cry fades”?
Won’t “Along her” be too near “Across her” of the line preceding? [2]

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

[1] Why not “She dawns upon the wayward heart of Time”.
[2] Yes.

The lines marked + have a specially ineffective rhythm-movement. If these were mended, the whole might stand better.

Your poem has colour and grace and vision in it, but its rhythm is a colourless monotone. Each line is a blank verse line by itself—except

“Like the white shiver of breeze on moonlit water”

which has no rhythm at all,—but together they are flat and ineffective. In blank verse of this type, with few enjambements and even these hardly seem to enjamber at all, it is essential to see to two things.

(1) each line must be a thing of force by itself—it is the Marlowesque type and, although you cannot always command a mighty line,—either an armoured strength or a clear-cut beauty must be the form of each decasyllable;

(2) each line must be different from the other in its metrical build so as to give the utmost variety possible—otherwise monotony is inevitable.

It is possible to use either of these methods by itself, but the two together are more effective.

I suppose I ought to give an illustration of what I mean and I can do it best by altering slightly your lines to make them conform to the first rule. I am not suggesting substitutes for them, for these would not be in your style; I only want to make my meaning clear.

Behold her face; unto that glorious smile All sorrow was an ecstasy of gloom, A rapturous devastating flame of flowers. Seldom with a rare startling loveliness, A white shiver of breeze in moonlit waters, Death flew chill winds of thought across her dream.	[1]
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A far cry fades along those kindled curves
Into ineffable beauty; shameless-pure,
A rhythm of adoration her sole vesture,
She dances on the wayward heart of time,
And is passion-wedded to some glowing hush,
And is the world caught by eternity.

[1] These two lines satisfy the rule, so I don't change them.

You will see that the movement of each line is differentiated from that of almost every other and yet there is a sufficient kinship in the whole.

I have done it of course in my own way; yours tends to a more harmonious and coloured beauty and you achieved what was necessary in your Shakuntala’s Farewell, where each line was a cut gem by itself and there was sufficient variation of movement or at least of rhythmic tone; but here the materials of a good poem are there but the effect fails, the chief fault lying in the defect of rhythm which denies the poetry the value to which it has a right.

8 July 1933

*

Sri Aurobindo—

Your version of my poem I find splendid, except for one line which seems to me unnecessarily obscure or rather misleading:

“Seldom with a rare startling loveliness.” [1]

I suppose what you want to say is that the thought of death very rarely entered the temple-girl’s mind, but when it did it was with a startling loveliness. What, however, strikes one more naturally is quite the opposite meaning, owing to the negative force of “seldom”—namely, that it was not often that the thought of death came to her in a beautiful form, that she was denied the frequent experience of seeing even death as a wonderful thing, as she did see all sorrow to be a wonderful thing. Is it not more effective to write—

“Never but with a startling loveliness”?

I don’t know if I should at all try to improve my poem in my own style, now that you have made it so astonishingly impressive; but if I did, it would be something like the following (I have also adopted some of your modifications):

Behold her face: unto that glorious smile
All sorrow was an ecstasy of gloom,
A rapturous invisible flame of flowers.
And never but with startling loveliness,
A white shiver of breeze on moonlit waters,
Flew the chill winds of death across her dream...

A far cry fades along those kindled curves
Into ineffable beauty: shameless-pure,
The rhythm of adoration her sole vesture,
She burns into the wayward heart of time—
A passion wedded to some glowing hush
Beyond the world, in dance-eternity!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] A comma after "seldom" obviates the objection. [*"Seldom, with a rare startling loveliness."*] However your line is a good one.

It [*the poem*] is good—except the "dance-eternity" which sounds like a mere ingenuity.

[*Amal's further questions written on the lower part of the sheet*]

(1) Which line do you prefer to keep in your version: "Seldom, etc..." or "Never etc..."?

(2) I want to substitute

"Beyond the world, in dance-eternity"
(or –"in tense eternity" as in the original version)

by

"That clasps each moment with eternity!"

Will this ending improve the poem considerably? Will it be necessary for "time" to be changed to "sense", or something else, in the second line preceding the last, if you approve of this variant?

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

(1) It is better to keep "Never etc."—it is more in the style of the poem.

(2) Yes, I think it is the best.

9 July 1933

*

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

A VISIT TO SRI AUROBINDO

(Extract from a journal kept during a stay in the Ashram in 1959-60)

At supper tonight an old man with a laughing face, Major Ramachandra, told, with some sense of occasion, an incident from his youth—in 1919, to be exact. At that time he had been teaching in Madras, and was also running a Boy Scout group. He had taken a party of forty boys to Pondicherry for a fortnight's change of scene, and they had spent much time on the beach.

One evening, on their way back to their camp, he had said to one of the boys — a bright, keen lad who later became India's Ambassador to Norway—"Go to that house and you will find Sri Aurobindo sitting on his terrace. Ask him if we may come and see him."

"Well, the boy ran off, and we waited, and then he returned and we said, 'What does he say?' and the boy replied, 'He says, "Come."'"

"So we all went in, and there was Sri Aurobindo sitting on his roof-top, with a chaddar over his shoulders, enjoying the cool evening air.

"Well, I asked him all sorts of questions, chiefly on the liberation of India—when it would come—but also about the relations of labour with capital, about the international situation after the war, and many such things, and Sri Aurobindo answered everything for perhaps half an hour, and then we went away.

"But after we had all gone down and left him, I ran back up the stairs and said, 'I have one more question.' Sri Aurobindo smiled and asked me what it was. 'How may I become a better teacher?'

"By helping the souls of your pupils to develop.'

"But then I had another question: I said, 'I can help the minds of my pupils to develop, and I know how to help their emotions and their bodies to grow—but how can I know about their souls?'

"He answered very seriously, because my question was a very serious one, 'You must first study your own soul.'"

4th November 1959

DICK BATSTONE

THE SILENT SEEKER: SITARAM

Underneath all speech that is good for anything there lies a silence that is better. Silence is deep as Eternity, speech is shallow as Time.

Thomas Carlyle

SITARAM—Not many of today know him. He is a man lost in the backwaters (or ‘washing waters’) of our Dining Room. I, since long, have wondered at the man but could hardly fathom him. I am trying again, now, with the help of others closer to him. Here is what little I could salvage, from the lesser depths, to share with others.

Sitaram was a Tamilian, born in the village Gobichettypalayam in Coimbatore district on the 12th of December 1920. His father was Sri Venkatakrishnan Iyyer (so a pukka Brahmin). Sitaram was a year old when his mother passed away. His father remarried. There were eight children in the family and Sitaram was the eldest. Sitaram later went to his uncle’s (or grandfather’s) at Bangalore for studies. He passed his B. Sc. at the Central College. He had a dear friend, Natesan Iyyer by name. The two friends came to hear of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo from a relative of Sitaram. They first went to Chennai (Madras) and then visited the Ashram. This event, a turning point in Sitaram’s life, happened in 1940.

The Mother called Yogananda (our old friend: see *Among The Not So Great*, chapter 8) and told him that two good souls had arrived and he should take care of them every time they came for Darshan. (It may be recalled that Yogananda’s work for a period was to receive the visitors to the Ashram.) I would wonder, in later years when Yogananda was my colleague at the Sports Ground and we had tea together daily, why he (Yogananda) would often call Sitaram (or Sitaram’s brother) for tea and seemed inordinately fond of him—hovering over him like a parent would on a son’s visit after a long absence. Some time later, Sitaram got a job in Chennai in Post & Telegraph Department—a step closer to “Home” and to his chosen deities.

Two years went by. Natesan was transferred from Chennai. Sitaram came alone to the Ashram. Sitaram one day decided to join the Ashram, leaving the family to the Mother’s care. He wrote to the Mother. She gave him the permission. Sitaram thus came under the Mother’s wing in 1948.

His Work

His first work was to learn by teaching (in our School). I was never in his class, so cannot say first-hand anything about his “teacher-ship”. He didn’t teach for too long. Soon the Mother, maybe on Ravindra-ji’s suggestion, had other ideas for him.

The Dining Room washing section was in a disarray. Sitaram was eased out of the School and put in charge of the washing section. Mother used to call him “Big Head”. (Why? I am not aware.) He stepped in there (the washing section) and left the

organising of it only on the day of his passing. That would work out to five decades or so in one place! Many of us have worked five decades in one place—but the similarity in most cases ends there. We will soon *try* to gauge the man by his works and more importantly by the *ways* of the works.

Sitaram was a true gentleman, as gentle as they come. To look at, he was just ordinary. He had a good compact figure with good enough features. Gentle eyes, an aquiline nose and a faint smile made up the face. As far as I can go back in my recollections, he was bespectacled. The eyes grew worse with time and the spectacles grew thicker. Perhaps he was an intellectual by temperament. But here, in the Ashram, he joined the Physical Education in khaki group with Biren-da as captain. He joined us in the Bodybuilding Gymnasium. We were his co-builders—Sailesh (late), Parna Kumar, myself and others. He built up a good, well-muscled upper body. He couldn't do much for his legs which was a pity, for, when lifting weights, he could haul up the weight to his shoulders, but could not hold it there long enough. The legs started to shake (akin to a good building with weak foundation). He tottered around and had to put the weight down sooner than the rules required.

He also took to a bit of running. He joined the 3000m and the 5000m runs—maybe for 2-4 years.

These, the classes, weight-lifting, running were but episodes on the Way. His path was fixed through the washing section and then came another Divine Dictum. It came about like this: Amrita-da was publishing a Tamil magazine—*Vaikarai* (meaning 'Advent'). Amrita-da had too much work and could not cope up with its publishing. The Mother (or Amrita-da) suggested Sitaram's name. He was called by the Mother to take up *Vaikarai*. He now found himself with three handfuls of work. That was when he was released from the School work.

These were his works—now for his ways.

His Ways

What amazed me or could have or should have amazed many others too, is that though I was acquainted with him for many years (not as student, but as a colleague and friend) I have not heard his voice *ever* raised above the normal conversational levels—that voice needed sharp or attentive ears. Even the little conversation—if heard—was never unnecessary or loosely indulged in. One would think that managing the washing section would require, sometime or the other, that he raise his voice! And it was not that the workers were docile lambs or saints who needed no second telling. Yet the section functioned smoothly enough. I have heard that if a worker was absent, Sitaram would himself quietly replace him, do the work, in addition to his own. We did not know it then, but we often saw him going back late, perhaps the last one to leave, from his work—doubling up for some absentee?! He never took the bunker to task. But this sort of schedule often delayed him elsewhere, often even in reaching

the general Blessings of the Mother. In those (g)olden days the Mother came down to the Meditation Hall and the ashramites and devotees passed in a queue to receive a flower from Her. She waited along with two or three others who attended on Her, and people like Sitaram (or even unlike Sitaram) were able to reach Her. Some thought this was not right. They reproached Sitaram for keeping the Mother waiting. She heard of their reproach and was not sympathetic to Her ‘well-wishers’. She asked *them* to keep quiet and said, “He is doing my work.” It also happened that in his hurry to get to Her, he would rush straight from his work, clad as he was—a bit untidy, a little sweaty. This too displeased some, who tried to advise him to be more presentable (if not chic). Nolini-da heard of this and advised the advisors to “leave him alone—no one need say anything to him!” What with his ‘softness’ for others and none for himself—(a total unconcern, we could say)—he often failed to find time to eat. Baba-ji (Ramkrishna Das) who had a soft corner for this young newcomer saved his dish of food for him, but often found the food untouched!

His work for *Vaikarai* too had its ups and downs. When he took it up, it had more of ‘downs’. He wrote to the Mother. She simply sent some ‘Prosperity’ flowers and Blessings. By and by, the paucity of funds disappeared but work had to be done. There was no letting up on that score (even miracles are the end-products of hard work done somewhere, some time). Later, a friend, Mahalingam, came in to help. He also was a bodybuilder. He too had a good upper body—also lacked a matching lower body. His source of protein was, if I remember well—groundnuts; meat, the more popular source was not required.

The Dining Room expanded, changed in quality too. More young workers joined, some old ones left, but Sitaram was always around. But *Kāla* (Time) is a friend (or foe) of everyone, living or non-living. Sitaram was getting older and he would never say ‘No’ to work. Fortunately help did come. Vijayalakshmi (our teacher—physicist) rendered yeoman service at a crucial period; then came Mahalingam, then an energetic looking young man Ananda Bharati. They were great supports in Sitaram’s publishing work. For the washing too, many came and went, some true ones stuck on, the chaff flew, the grain stayed. (Rani, Prashant and many more that I cannot name or recollect.) What *Kāla* could not change was the real Sitaram. He remained steadfastly “Sitaram”—never a word of complaint or very probably never an unnecessary word. Yet the body moved towards ‘Old Age’ without fuss or fretting. His eyes troubled him. One developed a problem—the retina dried. His friend (late) Dr. Venkataswamy Naidu did take him to Madurai, did whatever was possible—yet the eye lost its vision. Sitaram continued with one eye, which too was not in great shape—glaucoma was the culprit. He was again taken to Madurai; but nothing much could be done. Then the hearing too was impaired.

Sitaram continued but now seemed to feel the burden of the years. His achievements were many but not sung about, and most of us are not attuned enough

to “hear” Silence! The adage “out of sight, out of mind” may be expanded by adding “out of earshot, out of mind”. So let us hearken to at least some faithfuls who watched him with awe, and then watched over him in his last days of failing health. I only recount as faithfully as I can what they said, with unshed tears in their eyes and love in their hearts: no names, no comments.

When Sitaram was working for *Vaikarai*, the Mother gave (for *Vaikarai*) the impression of Her feet with Her Blessings. I believe the magazine is doing well. He had another chore, done with love. *Everyday*, for over 40 years or more, one could have seen him, nearly lying on a blackboard, almost one with it, copying down a passage or a poem from Mother or Sri Aurobindo. This board is hung at the entrance to the main Hall—all can read as they “Q” past for the counter. He poured all his attention and care into this, as into all else he did—the regular lines, the word spacing, the handwriting etc. were remarkable, near perfect. Someone is keeping that tradition alive.

Sitaram did the washing of vessels for many years. He might have continued to do so longer, but he developed an allergy and Dr. Dilip Dutta prevailed over him to stop the washing. Fortunately he agreed to pass on the work to others (Rani, then Prashant took over). Prashant was also one of his trusted helpers who took care of him and accompanied him on his walks (exercise). Sitaram went for these walks and did his magazine work nearly till the last day. He carried on, with help, much of his work. But he was always apologetic saying, “Oh! I am disturbing your work.” He even told Prashant a few days before he departed, “Prashant, you have done so much for me. A little remains to be done!” How prophetic the statement was!

Sitaram’s heart too was growing weak and weary. He must have foreseen the approaching end. Some time towards the end of January 2007, a thought crossed Sitaram’s mind; “I have not told anything to anybody. My time is approaching. Those close to me may feel sad!” So he did finally say some interesting things.

(Much of what follows is what he said in those one or two weeks or 10 days before he passed away. I have put some of it in first person, even though those are not his exact words—they were told to another who told me. Second-hand, one may say.)

The Journey’s End

“My days are coming to an end. You need not tell anyone. But when I am gone, keep my body for some time. Don’t take it away in a hurry! Cremate it and wait some time (at the cremation ground). Don’t come away in a hurry.

“The Mother’s music may be played. But whisper in my ear ‘Sri Aurobindo Saranam mama’. You may not tell or call anybody. Meditate 10-12 days—4 persons like they did for Noren Das Gupta (Manoj’s father). When and if suggestions come for feeding on 10th or 12th day—don’t interfere, don’t say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Keep silent.”

On his birthday, 12th December—Sitaram went upstairs, to Sri Aurobindo’s

Room. He had difficulty (physical) but felt better afterwards. When the February Darshan was approaching, he said he would go “upstairs” although by now he was ill and weak. Those close to him said, “You can’t climb all those steps. You said you are weak.” Sitaram protested, “No, no, I *must* go.” He even conspired with Prashant: “Let us run away and go for the Darshan.” Anyway, he prepared himself, got ready the usual “offering” and was taken early on the 22nd (the day after Darshan). He expressed a wish to sit on the Mother’s terrace for as long as he wanted to,—and not to be disturbed. He was there for 45 minutes. He came back and declared, “I have offered myself with the ‘offering’ (of money)!”

The days passed—25th February—Sitaram was not sleeping much. He called Dr. Dilip Dutta and asked for some medicine; he wanted to get at least two hours sleep. (He could not sleep well those days—the last two months.)

A week went by. On the 2nd of March he went out for his usual walk—with help—came back to his room and said, “I will not eat anything.” But later, he said, “Give me a small piece of toast and milk.” That was the last nourishment he took before setting off on his ‘Homeward’ journey. He told his attendants, “Tell me when you come, where you go or when you sit here.” (He perhaps wanted to know who was near him at all times.) Through all this he would do whatever he could—a little bit. He would sometimes say he was busy! When asked, “How are you busy, being indoors all the time?” he smiled and said, “*Boka* (foolish one)—I wake up early, finish my ablutions, take my Complian, wash myself and sit for prayer. I pray to the Mother and our Prabhou. I pray first for the whole world, for India, for Pakistan, then all the Centres, the devotees and Ashramites. I then pray for the Dining Room workers.

“I then go for my bath. After that I go to the Samadhi, the Meditation Hall and Nolini-da’s Room, then I move on to the Reception Hall before I return to the Dining Room. Here I meet my ‘*Gundu*’ (he was referring to a photo taken when the Mother was 3 years old. *Gundu* means ‘chubby child’. This was his favourite photo. He had it all over the place in many sizes.) I then meet my friends, then back to my room.” This programme sounds good enough and normal—though a bit unusual—for any well-meaning sadhak. But it is extraordinary when you realise that *all this time Sitaram never left his room!*

He continued, “I then eat a little, rest, do the magazine work, lunch, walk (if fit enough), then I sit in my chair and repeat my ‘prayer’ of morning before dinner. Then I go to bed and pray for myself.” (At last!)

He ended with, “*Boka*,—how then you ask me—‘How are you busy?’.”

This is one of those unbelievable things you *have* to believe—because it is Sitaram who says it. He was one of those rare men *by* whom you judged the event.

On the 3rd of March, about 12:30 p.m. Sitaram evinced some pain in his stomach. He was given some medicine. The night came on and early morning at 4:30 a.m.—Prashant had to call Dr. Gayatri. Vishwabandhu too came later. He vomited a few times. The doctors said he should be taken to the Nursing Home. But Sitaram had

already warned his close friends *not* to take him to the Nursing Home even if he suffered. So there he lay—his breathing became heavy. He then called softly to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo five times and left this world as quietly as he had lived in it. The day was a full moon day—*Holi Poornima*—a day when the gods of our town went for a sea-bath. Sitaram too took a holy dip, merging into that vast ocean of Love, into his Mother’s arms.

I would like to add here a few unusual dreams Sitaram had during the first month of this year. Were they part of the buildup before the final curtain?!

The Dreams

(1) I was in the Dining Room courtyard, and had collected many flowers. The Mother appeared in front of me and said, “Give me the flowers.” I gave Her the flowers.

(2) I was standing in the queue at the Counter, but my dish contained flowers. The ‘Mother’ appeared and asked me to give her the flowers. I understood that she was not the Mother. I said, “Go away, I will not give them to you.” The figure disappeared—the face was veiled.

(3) Again I was in the queue with a dish. The Mother appeared smiling and said, “Give me”—and I gave Her the dish.

(4) I saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo sitting together on the SIDDHI day—1926. I went and lay down at Their feet. I feel I am always at Their feet.

(5) (*This was a month before he departed.*) I went running to the Mother after my work as in the old days. To my utter disappointment no one was there. I felt very sad. Suddenly the Mother appeared, and I said “Ma, I am very sorry I am late. Then Ma said, “I will not give you Blessings. I want something from you!”

I dipped my hand into my pocket, and into Her outstretched hand I laid my life!

I returned to the Dining Room. I thought, “As I have surrendered my life to Her, I have nothing. The Mother will take me away.” (End of dream.)

With that I would end my story of Sitaram the Silent.

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

Batti’s note:

One must read two writings of Sitaram’s—rather than just go through my story of him. The first one is a transcript of a radio broadcast (AIR). Sitaram was one of five chosen by the Mother for the talk. (Pavitra-da was another.) This talk of Sitaram’s

gives us a glimpse of the inner Sitaram—albeit only the bit he reveals—it is quite a bit. Even that little shows a man of great depth of feelings, a man of simplicity and humility. [See the next piece in this issue.]

It is a pleasure and a privilege first to come across one such, and then be close to a beautiful person. We might easily have missed him.

Thankfully we didn't.

The second—a free rendering of Subramanya Bharati's poem on Kannan—makes one feel that Sitaram “enjoyed”, as did Subramanya Bharati, the suffering dealt out by Kannan (Krishna). [The free English rendering of the Tamil poem will appear in the November issue of Mother India.]

...the sign of the divine worker is that which is central to the divine consciousness itself, a perfect inner joy and peace which depends upon nothing in the world for its source or its continuance; it is innate, it is the very stuff of the soul's consciousness, it is the very nature of divine being. The ordinary man depends upon outward things for his happiness; therefore he has desire; therefore he has anger and passion, pleasure and pain, joy and grief; therefore he measures all things in the balance of good fortune and evil fortune. None of these things can affect the divine soul; it is ever satisfied without any kind of dependence, nitya-trpto nirāśrayaḥ; for its delight, its divine ease, its happiness, its glad light are eternal within, ingrained in itself, ātma-ratiḥ, antaḥ-sukho'ntar-ārāmas tathāntar-jyotir eva yaḥ. What joy it takes in outward things is not for their sake, not for things which it seeks in them and can miss, but for the self in them, for their expression of the Divine, for that which is eternal in them and which it cannot miss. It is without attachment to their outward touches, but finds everywhere the same joy that it finds in itself, because its self is theirs, has become one self with the self of all beings, because it is united with the one and equal Brahman in them through all their differences, brahmayoga-yuktātmā, sarvabhūtātma-bhūtātmā. It does not rejoice in the touches of the pleasant or feel anguish in the touches of the unpleasant; neither the wounds of things, nor the wounds of friends, nor the wounds of enemies can disturb the firmness of its outgazing mind or bewilder its receiving heart; this soul is in its nature, as the Upanishad puts it, avraṇam, without wound or scar. In all things it has the same imperishable Ananda, sukham akṣayam aśnute.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 184)

HARMONY OF LIFE

(This is the full text from which some excerpts were broadcast by All India Radio, Pondicherry, on February 21, 1968.)

Q.1: *Mr. Sitaram, what made you come here?*

A: I should say it was the voice of Sri Aurobindo. I was a boy in my early twenties, when I happened to read the book *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo. I was thrilled. Subsequently when I took up *The Synthesis of Yoga* and then his other writings the magic spell on me was complete. He does not take us to a dream land or a fairy place. It is here on this earth itself, he makes us see the harmony and beauty and wonder of it all hidden everywhere. This earth is a sacred place; it is the chosen field of God. Man is the destined instrument. There is a beauty and a joy and a divine harmony above us, within us. We have only to bring them out in our external lives. It will be done. It is being done. It is God who is doing it. The result is sure and inevitable. But what about the innumerable discords we see around us today? They are only a temporary phenomenon, an intermediate phase, a stage in our difficult evolution. There is no abiding reality behind them. They are superficial and impermanent. They are bound to disappear as we grow in our souls. This is how perhaps I understood Sri Aurobindo.

Now, what is this voice behind these inspired words, words that convey the Supreme Truth to the heart of the listener, and make a profound change there? Is it not that age-long voice of God that ever comes to man again and again calling him to his immortal destiny? Is it not that sweet voice of the eternal Flute-player attracting every human heart out of its sorrow to a Divine Bliss? That same voice of divine Love which in the Gita cries "Come to me, I shall deliver thee from all sin and evil. Do not grieve. Thou art dear to me"; and again on the battlefield of Kuru-Kshetra it says "Fight and enjoy a prosperous kingdom." And today it is the same voice that in Sri Aurobindo is calling man to a far greater fulfilment, to exceed the last boundaries of ignorance and enjoy here on the earth a Divine Life of bliss and harmony for ever. The soul that has heard this call, can it remain content with mortal days and ordinary life? It takes a plunge headlong. That is how you find so many here in the Ashram and I am but one of them.

Still, where is the proof that the Divine Life of Harmony can be achieved now and not at a later age centuries hence? The proof is the Mother Herself and Her daily active life. She has achieved this complete harmony in Her own life and is expressing it in all Her activities. That is not all. She is giving ample proof that She can do it in others too—to the extent that they sincerely want it. And that is the Ashram.

The life of the Ashram is a Divine melody, an exquisite music composed and played by the Mother. It is this that attracted me to join the Ashram as it does to so many others.

Q. 2: In retrospect, how do you think that you have achieved the purpose of coming to the Ashram?

A: We are in the middle of the journey. The ship is moving on in the enormous ocean. Our captain is God Himself. "Always our Captain holds the rudder well, He does not sleep." We have full confidence in our Captain. We have passed through many a storm and thunder safely because of Him. I am not to worry how far I have come, how far it is still from the goal. All that is the Pilot's business. He is competent, all-knowing and mighty. We have put our entire trust and responsibility on Him. That way it is safest. I am only one of the many oarsmen. I have only to obey His generous and loving command and do the small bit of my job well and go to sleep without worrying about the rest. He will see to everything in time.

Q. 3: What is your contribution to the harmony of life which is achieved in this place?

A: The harmony that you find in the Ashram to-day is due exclusively to the presence of the Mother who has realised God long ago and is expressing that great inner harmony in Her own life and in the life of the Ashram.

Q. 4: Do you think your individuality has merged completely in this great institution?

A: I don't think so. Every one here is a unique musical instrument in the grand orchestra conducted by the Divine Mother. You may not be able to distinguish a particular note in the general orchestra but the individuality is always there, be it veena or flute or whatever it is. It has a unique role to fulfil in the general orchestra, which no other can do. It is so with everybody in the world. Each one is unique, and the part he has to play, the role he has to fill, the mission he is to accomplish in the world is also unique. He cannot be replaced.

Q. 5: What do you think is your best wish to the Mother for her 90th birthday?

A: I would rather like to present a garland of flowers. The garland of my whole life of wild flowers I would like to place at Her divine feet with adoration and love. Along with that I would wish to offer a song of gratitude and thanksgiving. That song should come from the depths of my heart and it should be the song of my soul.

SITARAM

THE PARTITION OF INDIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Part 1

In the first article of this series, (see *Mother India*, August 2007) it was stated that in addition to the political system, the other cause of India's problems was the partition of India and its acceptance by the Government of India as final.

There is a widespread belief that India, as a nation, is a creation of the British. The argument is that since India was unified under a single political rule only for a few brief periods of its history, it is an artificial State. It is believed that it was only the British who created the idea of India as a single nation and unified it into a political State.

This belief or myth is not accidental. It was deliberately taught in the British system of education that was established in India. John Strachey, writing in *India: Its Administration and Progress* in 1888, said:

This is the first and most essential thing to remember about India—that there is not and never was an India, possessing any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious; no Indian nation.

This belief was evidently fostered and encouraged as part of the British policy of 'divide and rule'. But what is generally not sufficiently known and recognised is that the idea of the fundamental unity of India is much older than British rule. It is not a recent growth or discovery but has a history running back to a remote antiquity. And this idea had many components such as geography, culture, religion and spirituality.

However, when the British came to India in the 17th century, India was badly divided politically and the British taking full advantage of the situation then prevalent annexed the whole of India.

During the next century of British rule, as part of their policy of divide and rule, the Indian subcontinent was divided into several States, resulting in the formation of Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and finally, Pakistan in 1947.

This division of the subcontinent into several States is causing great harm to the whole area politically, economically and even culturally in the form of a serious religious divide. In particular, the creation of Pakistan has engendered serious problems for both India and Pakistan as well as for the other nations in the subcontinent. We shall take a brief look at the history and background of this unfortunate event.

Background

India, as it is understood today, attained its freedom from British rule on 15th August 1947. On 2nd June 1947, Lord Mountbatten who was then the Viceroy of India made a proposal to divide India on communal and religious lines creating two independent States, India and Pakistan. On 3rd June 1947, Mother wrote this note after hearing on the radio the declaration of the Viceroy to Indian leaders, announcing Britain's final transfer of power to a partitioned India:

A proposal has been made for the solution of our difficulties in organising Indian independence and it is being accepted with whatever bitterness of regret and searchings of the heart by Indian leaders.

But do you know why this proposal has been made to us? It is to prove to us the absurdity of our quarrels.

And do you know why we have to accept these proposals? It is to prove to ourselves the absurdity of our quarrels.

Clearly, this is not a solution; it is a test, an ordeal which, if we live it out in all sincerity, will prove to us that it is not by cutting a country into small bits that we shall bring about its unity and its greatness; it is not by opposing interests against each other that we can win for it prosperity; it is not by setting one dogma against another that we can serve the spirit of Truth. In spite of all, India has a single soul and while we have to wait till we can speak of an India one and indivisible, our cry must be:

Let the soul of India live for ever!! (*Emphasis added*)

On the 15th August India attained its independence while Pakistan was born on 14th August.

On the 15th August 1947 Sri Aurobindo gave a message. Here is an extract from the message:

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition. Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back

into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. **It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.**² (*Emphasis added*)

In a message to the Andhra University in 1948, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

On the contrary, India was deliberately split on the basis of the two-nation theory into Pakistan and Hindustan with the deadly consequences which we know.³

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo had said in an interview with K.M. Munshi in 1950:

Pakistan has been created by falsehood, fraud and force.⁴

Much later, on December 18, 1971, after the Bangladesh war, Mother remarked:

...the different parts of Pakistan will demand separation. There are five of them and by separating, they will join India—to form a sort of confederation. That is how it will be done. It is not for this time also.⁵

It is evident from the above messages that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not approve of this division and partition of India; they foresaw the grave consequences that would follow and were looking forward to the day when it would be dissolved and a confederation of India be formed. It should also be evident today that the Indian subcontinent is going through a severe ordeal and test as predicted by the Mother;

indeed, one can see that almost all the predictions made by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are now happening.

The Consequences of Partition

Let us now see the consequences of Partition in the subcontinent.

Firstly, the partition resulted in one of the most extreme forms of violence and probably one of the largest migrations of population in history. In the wake of Partition the number of deaths throughout India and Pakistan numbered around one million, while some fifteen million refugees moved across the new borders in Punjab and Bengal. In addition, tens of thousands of girls and women were raped or abducted. The high casualties and tremendous population dislocation was a huge burden for both India and Pakistan. The position of *mohajirs*, or migrants from India, in Pakistan remains a dangerous political problem, while in India the influx of refugees from Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) has become a source of great unrest.

Secondly, the division of Punjab cut through Punjab's well-developed infrastructure systems, disrupting road, telephone, and telegraph communications, but most importantly, interfering with the region's vital irrigation system. Today, these water problems are plaguing current Indo-Pakistani relations in Kashmir.

Thirdly there are the territorial and boundary disputes, the most serious one being the Kashmir dispute which is still a festering sore for the whole subcontinent. In addition, there are border problems, such as infiltration from Bangladesh, infrastructure problems and river problems.

Fourthly, as a result of Partition, there have been a large number of communal riots all over the country and this is a constant source of tension.

Fifthly, India and Pakistan have fought four wars and the arms race is in full swing; at present it is not only an arms race, but it has become a race for nuclear arms. The prospects are terrifying and the consequences of a war can be a disaster not only for the subcontinent but also for humanity at large.

Sixthly, the spectre of terrorism has engulfed the whole subcontinent. After the war in 1971, when Bangladesh was born, Pakistan has systematically exported terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, first in the subcontinent and then even to the Western nations including the United States and Great Britain.

Finally, despite all attempts in making SAARC a viable and powerful body for economic growth and unity, the resistance and intransigence of Pakistan has become a stumbling block to any progress on this front.

The Mistake in Accepting Partition

Many perceptive authors and political commentators see clearly the mistake in accepting Partition as the solution to the problems of the subcontinent. We quote

from an article written by Rafiq Zakaria, a former Congress MP. He writes:

Developments of the last few weeks compel us to wonder whether the partition of India was not the greatest blunder that the Congress leaders, in particular Nehru and Patel, committed. They agreed to it because they were made to believe by the then Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, that it was the best solution of the Hindu-Muslim dispute. In fact, it turned out to be the worst.

Ram Manohar Lohia has explained in his book, *The Guilty Men of Partition* that the Congress leaders were too tired, and hungry for power, and so they gave in, much against the advice of Gandhi. In the wake of the carnage that followed, one million Hindus and Muslims died and 15 million were mercilessly uprooted.

Soon thereafter both Nehru and Patel regretted their decision. In Nehru's words: "When we decided on Partition I do not think any of us ever thought that there would be this terror of mutual killing after Partition. It was in a sense to avoid that that we decided on Partition. So we paid a double price for it, first, you might say politically, ideologically; second, the actual thing happened what we tried to avoid."

Patel confessed, also rather late, that he should never have consented to Partition. As he put it: "You cannot divide the sea or the waters of the river." He said that Partition was wrong because no one could "destroy the reality that we are one and indivisible".

But even after more than 50 years, we do not seem to be free of the curse; it is continuing to eat into the vitals of our polity. It has not only endangered our stability, but what is worse, threatened our security. Moreover, Jinnah's two-nation theory has become a millstone round India's neck.

At first it was Kashmir which caused the hostility; it subjected us to three wars. Now it is terrorism, which has already killed 70,000 of our people. Last month the terrorists, trained and sponsored by Pakistan, attacked Parliament, the very heart of our democracy. No Indian leader has tried as hard as our present Prime Minister to establish friendly relations with Pakistan; but instead of responding, the Pakistani leadership has spurned every move of his.

In my latest book: *The Man who Divided India* (Popular Prakashan), I have diagnosed the permanent damage done to South Asia by Jinnah's pernicious two-nation theory, on which Pakistan is based. I have pointed out that unless Pakistan gets rid of it there will be no peace in South Asia. It has not only proved to be the most serious threat to India's security but has also done the greatest harm to the Muslims of the subcontinent.

Later in the same article he writes:

Kashmir is an offshoot of the same divisive 'two-nation theory'. It has nothing

to do with the right of self-determination of its people. If it is tampered with, it will not only destabilise our secular republic of which it is the cornerstone, but may provoke a bloody backlash against 140 million Muslims who are more than the Muslims in Pakistan. America and the rest of the Muslim world should take serious note of it.

The Root Cause of Partition

Having seen the disastrous consequences of Partition, let us now see what the root causes of Partition were and examine the foundations on which Pakistan was created.

It is a well-known fact that Jinnah was the founder and architect of Pakistan. Yet in 1916, Jinnah was totally opposed to the idea of a separate electorate for Hindus and Muslims. In the words of Krishna Iyer, “He opposed the Muslim League’s stand of favouring separate electorate for the Muslims and described it ‘as a poisonous dose to divide the nation against itself’.” He collaborated with the Congress and actively worked against the Muslim communalists, calling them enemies of the nation. He had been much influenced by the speeches of Naoroji, Mehta and Gokhale whom he adored. Naoroji as Congress President had emphasised the need for “a thorough union of all the people” and pleaded with Hindus and Muslims to “sink or swim together. Without this union, all efforts will be in vain”, he added. Jinnah was in full agreement with this view. He deprecated the “contrary separatist policy advocated by the League”.

And yet within two decades, Jinnah totally reversed his position; whether this was done for political reasons or some other reason is not the question here. This is what he stated in justifying the demand for a separate State of Pakistan:

You must remember that Islam is not merely a religious doctrine but a realistic and practical code of conduct. I am thinking in terms of life, of everything important in life. I am thinking in terms of our history, our heroes, our art, our architecture, our music, our laws, and our jurisprudence. In all things our outlook is not only fundamentally different but also often radically antagonistic to the Hindus. We are different beings. There is nothing in life, which links us together. Our names, our clothes, our foods they are all different; our economic life, our educational ideas, our treatment of women, our attitude to animals. We challenge each other at every point of the compass.

He went on to say:

To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state.

It was this kind of argument and vision that led ultimately to the formation of Pakistan. It must however be pointed out that Jinnah's concept of two nationalities is false and was invented by him to further his own interests.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

...the idea of two nationalities in India is only a new-fangled notion invented by Jinnah for his purposes and contrary to the facts. More than 90% of the Indian Mussalmans are descendants of converted Hindus and belong as much to the Indian nation as the Hindus themselves. This process of conversion has continued all along; Jinnah is himself a descendant of a Hindu, converted in fairly recent times, named Jinnahbhai and many of the most famous Mohammedan leaders have a similar origin.⁶

And today, Pakistan is facing an acute dilemma; the dilemma is whether to follow the principles of the Jinnah of 1916, a moderate Islam or the Jinnah of 1940—a radical Islam.

Pakistan's Islamic Foundations

Let us now look at the tenets and demands that dominate the section of Islamic orthodoxy of the Jinnah of 1940 on which was based the demand for a separate Pakistan. It must be noted that this section represents only one interpretation of the Islamic teaching, that is to say, the more aggressive section. It is this section that is at the root of terrorism all over the world; and these different interpretations of Islam are at the root of the problem facing Pakistan today.

Three Basic Postulates

The three important demands that dominate the Islamic orthodoxy *as adopted by Pakistan's government* are:

- (1) the 2-nation theory,
- (2) global loyalty to Islam superseding sovereignty of man-made countries, and
- (3) Islamic triumphalism.

These are summarised below:

1. *The 2-Nation Theory*: Pakistan was carved out of India based on the theory that Muslims require their own separate nation in order to live in compliance with Islamic Law. This theory is another form of *segregation* and Islamic *exclusiveness* and imposition of Islamic "Law" upon the public sphere. This is the exact opposite of both pluralism and secularism. Once the population of Muslims in a given region crosses a threshold in numbers and assertiveness, such demands begin. Once this ball is set in motion, the euphoria builds up into frenzy, and galvanises the Pan-Islamic

“global loyalty”. The temperature is made to reach boiling point until Muslims worldwide see the expansion of their territory as God’s work. Many political observers believe that the Western nations and the United States may be faced with this experience at some point during the next few decades.

2. *Pan-Islamic Loyalty Superseding Local Sovereignty*: Islamic doctrine divides humanity into two nations that transcend all boundaries of man-made countries. All Muslims in the world are deemed to be part of one single nation called *dar-ul-islam* (Nation-of-Islam). All non-Muslims are deemed to belong to *dar-ul-harb* (the enemy, or Nation-of-War). This bipolar definition cuts across all sovereignty, because sovereignty is man-made and hence inferior and subservient to God’s political and social bifurcation. Islamic doctrine demands loyalty *only* to Islamic Law and *not* to the man-made laws of nations and states, such as USA, India, etc. Among the consequences of this doctrine is that a Muslim is *required* to fight on the side of a Muslim brother against any non-Muslim. This has often been invoked by Muslims to supersede the merits of a given dispute at hand. Orthodox Islam calls for a worldwide network of economic, political, social, and other alliances amongst the 1.2 billion Muslims of the world. Pakistan invokes this doctrine to claim Indian Muslims as part of *dar-ul-islam*, with Pakistan designated as caretaker of their interests. The Al Qaeda global network of terror is simply the extreme case of such a “network” mentality turning violent against the *dar-ul-harb*.

3. *Islamic Triumphalism*: A central tenet of Islam is that God’s “nation”—i.e. the *dar-ul-islam*—must sooner or later take over the world. Others, especially those who are in the crosshairs, as prey at a given moment, see this as religious imperialism. Pakistan’s official account of history honours Aurungzeb *because* he plundered and oppressed the infidels, i.e. Hindus and Buddhists. Likewise, many other conquerors, such as Mohammed of Ghazni, are portrayed as great heroes of Islamic triumphalism. (Even Pakistan’s missile is named after an Islamic conqueror of India in the Medieval Period.) Given this divine mandate, the ethos of aggressiveness and predatory behaviour is promoted and celebrated in social life, which non-Muslims see as Islamic chauvinism. September 11 was a misjudgment of timing and *dar-ul-islam*’s ability to take over. But any orthodox Mullah or Imam would confirm God’s edict that eventually Islam absolutely must take over the world.

Islamisation in Pakistan

Islamic texts are being introduced into Pakistani military training. Middle ranking officers must take courses and examinations on Islam. There are even serious attempts under way to define an Islamic military doctrine, as distinct from the international military doctrines, so as to fight in accordance with the Koran.

An eminent Pakistani writer, Mubarak Ali, explains the chronology of Islamisation:

The tragedy of 1971 [when Bangladesh separated] brought a shock to the people and also a heavy blow to the ideology of Pakistan... More or less convinced of their Islamic heritage and identity, Pakistan's government and intelligentsia consciously attempted to Islamise the country.

The history of Islamisation can be traced to the Bhutto era. General Zia-ul-Haq [a great friend and ally of the U.S.] furthered the process to buy legitimacy for his military regime. The elements of communal and sectarian hatred in today's society are a direct consequence of the laws that the dictator had put in place. He made all secular and liberal-minded people enemies of the country. They were warned again and again of severe consequences in case of any violation of the [Islamic] Ideology of Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif added his own bit, like mandating death penalty to the Blasphemy Law. During his tenure in 1991, the Islamic Sharia Bill was passed by the Parliament, and the Blasphemy Law was amended to provide death sentence for uttering any derogatory word against the Prophet Muhammad. With the failure of the ruling classes to deliver the goods to the people, religion was exploited to cover up corruption and bad governance. The process of Islamisation not only supports but protects the fundamentalists in their attempts to terrorise and harass society in the name of religion. There are published accounts of the kind of menace that is spread by religious schools run by these fundamentalists.

Khaled Ahmed describes how this radicalisation of Pakistan is continuing even today:

In Pakistan every time it is felt that the ideology is not delivering there are prescriptions for further strengthening of the shariah... Needless to say, anyone recommending that the ideological state be undone is committing heresy and could be punished under law. The Council for Islamic Ideology (CII) is busy on a daily basis to put forth its proposals for the conversion of the Pakistani state into a utopia of Islamic dreams. The Ministry for Religious Affairs has already sent to the Pakistani cabinet a full-fledged programme for converting Pakistan into an ideal state. We have reached this stage in a gradual fashion, where these state institutions have become directly responsible for encouraging extremism.

This hole is so deep that the Pakistan Government, while promising to de-radicalise Pakistan, must reassure the people not to fear the 'threat' of secularism. It was recently clarified in the following terms: "No-one should even think this is a secular state. It was founded as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

While America still has enormous racial inequality 150 years after the abolishing of slavery, the important point is that it is committed to racial equality. Similarly, despite many flaws in India's pluralism, the State is committed to it. What counts is a commitment to steady improvement. India has had one of the most aggressive and

ambitious affirmative action programmes in the world. The results, while far from perfect, have produced many top-level Muslim leaders in various capacities in India, and a growth of Muslims as a percentage of total population. But in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Hindu population has decreased from 11% in 1947 to around 1% today, as a result of ethnic cleansing.

Pakistan's Identity Crisis

The problem for an educated Pakistani is to figure out when and where his history started. If it is to start from 1947 in the geographical area that is now Pakistan, then there is very little past for him to build an identity. If it is to be from the time of Mohammed, then his history is outside his land. If it is prior to that, then his history is largely a Hindu-Buddhist history, a past he wants to deny.

He must invent history to answer the question: Why was Pakistan created? Mubarak Ali, a prominent Pakistani scholar, explains the predicament:

Since its inception Pakistan has faced the monumental task of formulating its national identity separate from India. Partitioned from the ancient civilisation of India, Pakistan has struggled to construct its own culture; a culture not just different and unique from India, but one appreciable by the rest of the world. The overshadowing image of the Indian civilisation also haunted the founders of Pakistan, who channelled their efforts in making the differences between India and Pakistan more tangible and obvious. The fundamental difference between India and Pakistan was based on the Two-Nation theory, strengthening Pakistan's Islamic identity.

The University Grants Commission of Pakistan made Islamic Studies and Pakistan Study compulsory subjects at all levels of the education system, even for the professional students. This gave the government an opportunity to teach the students its own version of history, especially the Pakistan ideology, which is described as something like this:

The struggle was for the establishment of a new Islamic state and for the attainment of independence. It was the outcome of the sincere desire of the Muslims of the subcontinent who wanted Islam to be accepted as the ideal pattern for an individual's life, and also as the law to bind the Muslims into a single community.

In asserting this identity, Pakistan is in a state of dilemma.

If Pakistanis were seen merely as Indians who converted to Islam, then they would seem no different than the Indian Muslims, who are equal in number to

Pakistan's total population, who are better educated and economically placed, and who enjoy greater social freedom than their counterparts in Pakistan. Hence, *the very existence of Pakistan as a separate nation rests upon constructing an identity for itself that is radically different from India's*. But you cannot build a nation on a negative identity. One might say that a birth defect of Pakistan was its lack of a self-sufficient positive identity. Such a positive identity would neither be a negation of India, nor be an imperialistic claim of authority over all *dar-ul-islam* of the subcontinent.

Kamal Azfar, a Pakistani writer, explains the dilemma:

There are two concepts of Pakistan: the first empirical and the second utopian. The empirical concept is based on solid foundations of history and geography while the utopian concept is based on shifting sands. Utopia is not an oasis but a mirage. Samarqand and Bukhara and the splendours of the Arab world are closely related to us but we do not possess them. Our possessions are Mohenjodaro and Sehwan Sharif, Taxila and Lahore, Multan and the Khyber. We should own up to all that is present here in the Indus Valley and cease to long for realities not our own, for that is false-consciousness.

This obsession to be seen as neo-Arabs has reached ridiculous extremes, such as Pakistani scholars' attempts to show that Sanskrit was derived from Arabic. Even Persian influence on Indian culture is considered impure as compared to Arabic. Pakistan's un-Indian identity easily gets turned into anti-Indian rhetoric. In short, hatred for India has been required to keep Pakistan together, because Allah has not done so. Pakistan is largely a garrison state, created and sustained using the Hindu-Muslim divide.

Today after 9/11, Pakistan is supposed to be in the forefront of the war against terrorism. This is being strongly opposed by the clerics who support the war against the United States and other Western powers. Musharraf is thus in an acute dilemma. **Today, Pakistan is facing a major problem: it is whether it should be governed as an *Islamic State* or merely as a *State for Muslims*.**

Assessment by 'Foreign Policy' Group

In order to understand better the consequences of the partition of India and more pointedly the consequences of the division of the subcontinent of India, we are presenting some extracts from an objective assessment by an international group studying the condition of nations and in particular a study of what is termed now as "Failed States".

An independent research organisation by name 'The Fund for Peace', supported by a group called 'Foreign Policy' presented the third annual Failed States Index. The aim was to provide a clearer picture of the world's weakest States. Using 12

social, economic, political, and military indicators, they ranked 177 states in order of their vulnerability to violent internal conflict and societal deterioration. The index scores are based on data from more than 12,000 publicly available sources collected from May to December 2006.

The 12 parameters have been identified under three broad categories. They are: *Demographic Indicators*, *Economic Indicators* and *Political Indicators*. These indicators include such items as: Mounting Demographic Pressures and Massive Movement of Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons creating refugee problems, uneven Economic Development along Group Lines, Sharp and Severe Economic Decline and Criminalisation and De-legitimisation of the State, Abuse of Human Rights and widespread corruption.

What does "State failure" mean?

A State that is failing has several attributes. One of the most common is the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Other attributes of State failure include the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to interact with other States as a full member of the international community.

Are there examples of States that have pulled back from the brink of failure?

Yes. The most dramatic ones are those that did it without outside military or administrative intervention. In the 1970s, analysts predicted dire consequences, including mass famine and internal violence in India, citing rapid population growth, economic mismanagement, and extensive poverty and corruption. Today, India has turned itself around. It is the world's largest democracy, with a competitive economy and a representative political system.

An Overview of the State of Pakistan

Here is a summary of an overview of the State of Pakistan as seen by the 'Foreign Policy' group.

The modern State of Pakistan came into being in 1947 following a partition of India and has been plagued by chronic unrest ever since. Pakistan has a population of approximately 165 million and population growth rate of 2.09%. It is also an impoverished and underdeveloped nation, with an annual GDP per capita rate of \$2,400. A simmering conflict with India over Kashmir, as well as the inability of the government to crack down on radical groups in the autonomous regions of Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province, have been the source of wider regional instability.

Social Indicators

The increase in social tension comes from a spike in clashes between government security forces and militants in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province. From June to December 2005, clashes occurred almost non-stop resulting in the deaths of hundreds of suspected militants as well as Pakistani security forces. In addition, a widening rift between the Government of General Pervez Musharraf and the powerful Pakistani security apparatus and religious leaders became increasingly evident throughout the year, the latest example being the confrontation in Lal Masjid. Pressured by the U.S. Government to crack down on Islamic fundamentalist groups operating within the country, particularly in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Musharraf appeared to be losing the balancing act of trying to appease the U.S. while simultaneously not alienating the country's powerful mullahs.

Economic Indicators

Pakistan's economy, already suffering from low levels of foreign investment and a 2005 inflation rate of 9%, was further damaged by the October earthquake. It is officially estimated that 32% of the population live below the poverty line, although the real number is likely to be much higher.

Political/Military Indicators

Pakistan's political and military indicators all remained high in the FSI 2006, reflective of the deep divisions within the country and continuing hostilities with neighbouring States. Pakistan has a deplorable human rights record, particularly with regard to women. In addition, the indicator score for security apparatus remained high, as the shadowy Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) continued to operate as a state within a state. The ISI is believed to wield significant support from Islamic jihadist groups and tensions between the agency and the Musharraf government have been exacerbated by the systematic crackdown on religious groups and madrassas. General Pervez Musharraf's leadership has continually been tested since he assumed power in a military coup in 1999. His cooperation with the U.S. in the Global War on Terror, and his crackdown on religious fundamentalists, has undermined his domestic legitimacy to a certain extent with parts of the population sympathetic to the jihadists.

With one major exception, the Pakistani military is well trained and remains under the control of the state, with General Musharraf as the Chief of the Army Staff and Head of State. The questionable element is the ISI, which is believed to operate with near complete impunity.

The police contain both civilian and paramilitary wings. Both the civilian police and the paramilitaries commit human rights abuses and are highly corrupt.

The judiciary is overburdened and susceptible to outside manipulation, particularly from powerful religious leaders who monitor the proper interpretation of Sharia law.

The civil service is generally well trained and professional, although underpaid and susceptible to manipulation.

Prognosis

The future of Pakistan is largely dependent on the ability of General Musharraf to maintain the precarious balancing act between cooperating in the Global War on Terror while appeasing the powerful military and religious leaders that are crucial to his power base.

Fighting by a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and in the lawless Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan has the potential to spread instability across Central Asia.

Impact of Failed States on Other States

It is an accepted axiom of the modern age that distance no longer matters. Sectarian carnage can sway stock markets on the other side of the planet. Anarchic cities that host open-air arms bazaars imperil the security of the world's superpower. The threats of weak States, in other words, ripple far beyond their borders and endanger the development and security of nations that are their political and economic opposites.

Today, two countries among the world's 15 most vulnerable, North Korea and Pakistan, are members of the nuclear club. Their profiles could hardly be less similar: The former faces the very real prospect of economic collapse, followed by massive human flight, while the latter presides over a lawless frontier country and a disenchanted Islamist opposition whose ranks grow by the day.

It is also important to note that among the failed States or those in danger of becoming failed States, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka rank high and are facing serious problems on many of the parameters indicated above. All these States are part of the Indian subcontinent. There is also a warning that the biggest neighbouring State—India—could be in danger because of the proximity of these failed States. This is what the report says:

In some of the world's most dangerous regions, failure doesn't stop at the border's edge. It's contagious.

It is no coincidence that many of the world's failing states tend to cluster together. Porous borders, cultural affinity, and widespread under-development often bind populations. And when some live in a failing state, their woes can quickly spill over into a neighbour's backyard.

Pakistan heads the table for the failed States with 100 points; it is followed by Bangladesh with 95.9 points, Nepal with 93.6 points and Sri Lanka with 93.1 points and Bhutan with 86.4 points; and India comes in with 70.8 points.

India needs to take steps to remedy the situation both within and in the subcontinent lest it gets engulfed with problems of its neighbours and becomes itself a failed State.

(To be continued)

KITTU REDDY

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O India, land of light and spiritual knowledge! Wake up to your true mission in the world, show the way to union and harmony.

23 September 1967

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India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind.

India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life.

*

In the whole creation the earth has a place of distinction, because unlike any other planet it is evolutionary with a psychic entity at its centre. In it, India, in particular, is a divinely chosen country.

*

It is only India's soul who can unify the country.

Externally the provinces of India are very different in character, tendencies, culture, as well as in language, and any attempt to unify them artificially could only have disastrous results.

But her soul is one, intense in her aspiration towards the spiritual truth, the essential unity of the creation and the divine origin of life, and by uniting with this aspiration the whole country can recover a unity that has never ceased to exist for the superior mentality.

7 July 1968

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, pp. 367-68)

BRIAR ROSE

A Grimm's fairy-tale

*Not the surface
but the essence of things
is the theme of the fairy story.
Inside goes the mysterious way.
In us and nowhere else
is eternity
with her worlds,
the past and the future.*

Novalis

Introduction

BRIAR ROSE is a well-known fairy story. Ostensibly a fantasy tale for children, it has a much deeper significance, for all the characters and events are of a symbolic nature and together express a profound knowledge of the universe and of man himself. In fact 'Briar Rose' veils the great truth of the cycle of creation, death and resurrection—a cosmological myth myriads of years older than the New Testament resurrection story. But at the same time it is also a parable of man's individual soul according to the occult wisdom that says:

inside = outside, or microcosm = macrocosm.

* * *

In olden times there lived a king and queen

time

The tale happens in olden times, that means outside ordinary time.

who said every day: 'Oh! if we would have just one child!' and yet never a one was born to them. One day, when the queen was in her bath, it happened that

king and queen

The king and queen represent the cosmic father and mother, god and nature, spirit and matter, the yin and yang, the male and female principles of the great beginnings. We might consider them as the dual aspect of the One, as force of manifestation and of play.

a frog skipped out of the water and said to her: “Your wish shall be fulfilled; before a year passes you shall have a daughter.”

a frog

Appropriately, the frog heralds the new creation, for it is the stone-age symbol of motherhood. Shaped like the uterus, the maternal organ, the frog was also considered the first creature to emerge from the waters of life and so was revered as the first-born goddess, the eternal woman.

As the frog had said, so it happened, and the queen gave birth to a girl who was so beautiful that the king almost lost his senses. He ordered a great feast to be held, and invited to it not only all his relatives, friends, and acquaintances, but also all

a girl

A daughter is born to the king and the queen: life on earth. Relatives, friends, acquaintances represent the other gods.

the wise women because he wished that they might favour the child and be well disposed to her. There lived thirteen in his dominions, but since he had only twelve golden plates out of which they could eat, one had to stay at home.

The feast was celebrated with all the magnificence possible, and as soon as it was over the wise women presented the infant with their wonderful gifts: one with virtue, another with beauty, a third with riches, and so on, with everything that is to be desired in the world.

Just as the eleventh had finished speaking,

the wise women

The king also invites the twelve wise women—the twelve creative powers of the universe, the twelve aspects of the mother goddess put forth for the terrestrial play. These powers have been variously designated; the story mentions virtue, beauty and wealth. We might add wisdom, strength, harmony and ecstasy, truth, grace, perfection and light. They correspond to the 12 sons of Aditi we meet in the Brahmanas, the 12 seats of the gods in the Edda, the 12 Valkyries, the 12 Norns, the 12 months of the year.

the thirteenth lady suddenly stepped into the hall. She wanted revenge because she had not been invited, and without paying her respects or looking at anyone she exclaimed loudly, “The princess shall prick herself with a spindle on

the thirteenth lady

The thirteenth lady, the uninvited guest, is Death, the element of destruction, who enters the terrestrial play.

her fifteenth birthday and fall down dead.” And without a word further she turned her back and left the hall. All were terrified, and the twelfth fairy, who had not yet given her wish, then stepped up. Because she could not cancel the evil wish, but only soften it, she said: “But she shall not die,

her fifteenth birthday

It is significant that the princess should die on her 15th birthday, for in this way adulthood, marriage and motherhood are denied to her. These are the three fulfilments of womanhood. Life will be cut short before its true purpose is realised.

only fall into a sleep of a hundred years’ duration.” The king, who naturally wished to protect his dear child from this misfortune, issued a decree that every spindle in the kingdom should be burnt.

All the gifts of the wise women were fulfilled, and the maiden grew so virtuous, beautiful, gentle and clever that every one who saw her fell in love with her.

Now it happened on the day when she was just fifteen years old that the queen and the king were not at home and so the girl was

***only fall into a sleep
of a hundred years’ duration***

The twelfth fairy represents resurrection and rebirth. Death’s sleep will now only be temporary and there will be a reawakening. The sentence cannot be lifted entirely, but can be deprived of its finality. Death is thus robbed of ultimate victory and the triumph of Life, its immortality, is assured.

Like a jewel of many facets a myth reflects many realities: of the cosmos, but also of the microcosm, of man himself. And so we see unfold now the winter and springtime story of earth, but we are faced, too, with psychological truths pertaining to man and independent of his cause-and-effect thinking, truths acting within their own laws—the truths of the inner world.

left alone in the castle. The maiden looked about everywhere, going through all the rooms and chambers as she pleased, until she came at last to an old tower. Up the narrow winding staircase she tripped, until she arrived at a small door. In the lock of it was a golden key, and when she turned this the door sprang open.

left alone

The princess is left alone. This implies that the guardian powers of man’s psychological make-up were absent. The old tower, the winding staircase, the small door, the lock and the golden key are all frequent dream-symbols for someone who is exploring his inner being.

There in the little room sat an old woman with a spindle, busily spinning flax. "Good day, my good woman," said the princess. "What are you doing here?"

"I am spinning," said the old woman, nodding her head.

"What thing is that which twists round so merrily?" inquired the maiden, and she took

an old woman

The old woman at the spinning wheel is Fate. She is Clotho, the weaver, one of the Norns; Ananke, the veiled Mother of the unknown. Here Briar Rose meets her own destiny and the physical limits of her being set by an inexorable power which even the gods fear.

the spindle to try her hand at spinning. Scarcely had she done so when the prophecy was fulfilled, for she pricked her finger; and at the very same moment of pricking she fell back upon a bed which stood near, in a deep sleep. This sleep extended over

the spindle

The spindle is the revolving wheel of Life on which the thread of this and future lives is created unbroken, one without end.

the whole palace. The king and the queen, who had just come home, entering the hall fell asleep, and all their courtiers with them. There slept the horses in the stables, the dogs in the yard, the doves upon the eaves, the flies upon the walls, and even the fire upon the hearth; all ceased to stir—the meat which was cooking ceased to frizzle and the cook at the instant of slapping the kitchen boy, who made a mistake, lost his hold and began to snore too. The wind also fell entirely; not a leaf rustled on the trees around the castle. Now round about the castle

the whole palace

The sleep extends over the whole palace: earth enters its winter sleep. The body of man also, the house of his soul, sleeps. The servants and animals are parts of the body seen from the inside or in dream reality as separate beings and activities. They too must fall asleep, for in death even the dream body, when its vital principle slumbers, becomes inactive.

a thick hedge of briars was growing, which every year grew higher and higher, till the castle was quite hid from view, so that one could not even see the flag upon the tower. Then there went a legend through the land of the beautiful maiden Briar Rose, for so was the sleeping princess named, and from time to time princes came endeavouring to penetrate through the hedge into the castle; but it was not possible, for the thorns held them as if by hands, and the youths were unable to free themselves, and therefore perished miserably.

After the lapse of many years there came another

a thick hedge of briars

Only a kind of vegetative life, the hedge of briars around the castle, continues, a protective circle around our innermost secrets. Briar Rose sleeps. The rose is a symbol of the human soul, the flower of man, and has to be found and wakened if we are to realise our true potential and live an eternal life. The souls of most men and women are sleeping princesses aware neither of themselves as souls nor of the fairyland, the psychic world, around them. A long evolution of many years or many lives perhaps is necessary before they awaken.

king's son into the country, and heard

king's son

To be a king's son means to be destined to be a king, a ruler of that kingdom which is in man: an initiate, a yogi, a sage.

an old man tell the legend of the hedge of briars: how that behind it stood a castle where slept a wondrously beautiful princess called Briar Rose who had slumbered nearly a hundred years, and with her the queen and king and all their court. The old man further related what he had heard from his grandfather, that many princes had come and tried to penetrate the hedge, and had died a miserable death. But the youth was not to be daunted, and however much the old man tried to dissuade him, he would not listen, but cried out:

an old man

The old man, the guru, appears, telling how, in spite of the frightening obstacles, the inner defences may be penetrated in meditation. Part of the education of a king's son is the exploration and conquest of death.

“I fear not! I will come through and see Briar Rose!”

I fear not!

Only he who knows no fear can become lord of the kingdom, conquer the subconscious, and kiss it into consciousness.

Just at that time came the last day of the hundred years when Briar Rose was to awake again. As the young prince approached the hedge the thorns turned to fine large flowers, which of their own accord made a way for him to pass through uninjured and again closed up behind him. In the courtyard he saw the horses and sporting hounds lying fast asleep and on the eaves were the doves with their small heads beneath their wings.

As soon as he went into the house there were the flies asleep upon the walls, the cook still stood with his hand near the face of the kitchen boy, and the maid at the board with the unplucked fowl in her hand.

He went on and in the hall he found the courtiers lying asleep, and above, by the throne, were

***at that time came the last day
of the hundred years***

Perhaps it was the passing of the ice-age, or simply returning spring, which inspired the first version of the story. Once the necessary time has run its course, however, once man has persevered and prepared himself sufficiently, the thorns of the subconscious not only make way, but change into fine large flowers. The long time of preparation is over, and time, which had seemed to be an enemy, now becomes a friend and helper. It is the last day of the hundred years. The lower nature has been mastered, the consciousness liberated; the yogi blossoms into psychological perfection.

the king and the queen asleep. Then he went on farther and all was so calm that he could hear himself breathe, and at last he came to the little chamber where Briar Rose slept. There she lay, looking so beautiful that he could not turn away his eyes, and he bent over her

the king and the queen

In our psychological parable king and queen represent here the higher faculties of man, his heart, and his mind, or his feelings and reason.

and kissed her. Just as he touched her with the kiss, Briar Rose opened her eyes, awakened, and looked kindly at him. Then they went down together, and the king and queen awoke, and the whole court and everyone all looked

and kissed her

The kiss is given and the spell broken as Briar Rose awakes. According to Germanic tribal law, the kiss symbolises marriage as 'initium consumationis nuptiarum'. Another myth motif of the kiss is its power to restore full consciousness and even to produce the remembrance of former lives. The kiss of a god traditionally confers immortality, and so in this story the kiss overcomes the finality of death and brings about rebirth.

with round eyes at each other.

with round eyes

With Briar Rose, all awaken: the courtiers—the gods of the semiconscious world—the servants and animals of the dream world. But this is an awakening to a new life, for they all looked with round eyes at each other, like the eyes of a newborn baby. There have been fundamental changes in the nature, supraconscious has met with the conscious in a great uplifting movement and the world is seen in a new light, from a different poise. The being is no longer in the grip of the subconscious, and previously dormant elements of the personality have been awakened to full activity.

Now the horses in the stables got up and shook themselves; the dogs wagged their tails, the doves upon the eaves drew their heads from under their wings, looked around and flew away; the flies upon the walls began to crawl on; the fire began to burn brightly and cook the meat; the meat began again to frizzle, the cook gave his lad a blow upon the ear, which made him call out, and the maid began to pluck the fowl furiously.

And then

the horses

Horses were for our paleolithic forefathers symbols of vital energy, of speed, and in the Upanishads they are respiration itself.

the wedding of the prince and Briar Rose was celebrated with great splendour, and to the end of their lives they lived happy and contented.

the wedding

The story ends with the conscious union, the 'unio mystica', of all the numerous parts of man's personality, from its foundation in the unconscious to its summits of being and consciousness and bliss. This oneness alone can bring to man and his soul the happiness and the contentment which the fairy story mentions. Life is fulfilled. A conscious soul has risen from its long sleep.

MEDHANANDA

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THE NEW CHINA AND SOME RELATED QUESTIONS

ONE of the most debated subjects at present among economic and business circles is the rapid economic resurgence of China and also India. This new economic revolution in China raises some important questions regarding the present admirable effort by China to tackle its economic problems and also the future of this great Asiatic nation. In this article we examine these questions in the light of an integral spiritual perspective.

The Economic Blitzkrieg

A remarkable feature of the Chinese economic resurgence is the planned, methodical and systematic way she is tackling the economic problem. The first phase of economic liberalisation in China led to a rapid creation of wealth through a predominantly urban-oriented growth with a primary emphasis on manufacturing and building the infrastructure. Recently some of the American CEOs who were in India complained about the poor state of infrastructure in India. One of the important factors which makes China the most favoured destination for foreign investors is the excellent infrastructure like roads, transportation, power and telecommunication. This gives an indication of the proactive approach of the Chinese to economic development.

However the Chinese have not remained satisfied with this first flush of economic resurgence. The Chinese planners are already drawing the blueprint for the next phase of growth. In this second phase the thrust areas will be, first, rural development; second, education—primary education in schools and higher education in universities; third, research and development in frontier areas of science and technology like genetics, bio-technology and IT. The objective of this second phase of growth is equitable redistribution of wealth and creating the knowledge and human resources needed for future growth.

It would be interesting to see how the New China tackles the problem of distribution of wealth, which is one of the most difficult and challenging problems of modern economics. In our modern age, we have attained great success in creating wealth but failed rather miserably in distributing wealth. As the environmentalist Lester Brown points out “modern man has excelled in production but failed in distribution”.¹ So it would be instructive to watch the Chinese tackling the problems of equity. For the Chinese are not only good at planning, they are also great at implementing. Plans are carried out and materialised and not allowed to remain too long as words and ideas in dusty and voluminous documents, as it happens quite often in India.

The Problems of Equity

We have discussed briefly some of the strengths and possibilities of the New China.

Now, to the questions which apply not only to China but also to India. The first question is: can economic inequality be eradicated by purely outward methods like technology and government policy? Absolute equality may not be possible in the economic life. But a just and fundamental equity which does not lead to conflict and violence is perhaps a realisable ideal. But even this lesser equity requires a certain amount of moral progress in the community.

The measure of equity in a community depends very much on the moral condition of what is called in modern sociology as the power élite. In all communities, at a certain stage, there emerges a powerful minority made of those who own, control or have access to large chunks of wealth, power, knowledge or technology, who take major decisions on the allocations of these resources and who implement these decisions. They are the rich, powerful, strong, knowledgeable, skilled, educated, professional, managerial and administrative class of the community. If this power élite remains corrupt, selfish, greedy, exploitative and clings to its vested interest then most of the available wealth, resources and technology and whatever benefits are generated in the process of development are mopped up by this minority, creating a big gulf of inequality between the powerful minority and the vast majority composed of the rest.

There will be a certain amount of “trickle down” of the wealth and power to the lower levels of the economic and social hierarchy in the course of time due to external factors like new technology, government regulation, pressure of social activism or idealism. For example, in our modern age, since the days of the Industrial Revolution, there has been a gradual trickle down of wealth and power into the professional, administrative and working middle class. Recently, there was a considerable expansion of the wealth of the middle class in India due to economic liberalisation and the IT “revolution”. But in the perspective of Sri Aurobindo’s thought, external factors and circumstance like technology or government policy are the results of a deeper cause which is the push of the evolutionary nature towards equity. For equality is a fundamental human value and one of the evolutionary aims of Nature in humanity. So there is a constant pressure of the evolutionary force of Nature on the consciousness and life of the community to diffuse to the many what is gained by a few. And Nature makes use of external factors and circumstance to effect her evolutionary aims.

This is probably the deeper truth behind the concept of the “Invisible Hand” of Adam Smith. According to Adam Smith, considered as the Father of Modern Economics, there is an “Invisible Hand” that leads the private interests of individuals and groups to socially desirable ends. He believed that private interests of people are “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of their intention.” In our spiritual perspective, the invisible hand is the evolutionary force of Nature. Our human society progresses smoothly when the communal mind and life, especially its leaders or the power élite, knowing or unknowingly follow the push of Nature towards equity. But if they resist, clinging obstinately to their power, wealth and privileges

and refuse to share it with the rest of the community then Nature gets her work done through violent methods like war, invasion and bloody revolutions like the French or the Russian. However, equity achieved through these external pressures, circumstances and compulsions cannot be stable because it is subject to the vicissitudes of the outer environment.

For a smooth, accelerated advance towards enduring equity there has to be a mental, moral and spiritual progress in the community, especially among the power élite, leading to a free and voluntary redistribution of wealth, knowledge and power in the community. By moral progress we mean not merely an ethic or a moral code but a real inner development, in terms of growth in honesty, charity, compassion, social responsibility and the urge to give and share. By mental and spiritual progress we mean an understanding, preferably an intuitive and experiential understanding, of the unity and interdependence of life and the higher laws and aims of evolution. In other words, we may say, there has to be a conscious, willing and understanding consent to the laws and workings of Nature towards equity.

Thus we can see that even an outer economic problem like equity requires for its lasting solution an inner change. This inner change must be the higher aim of education—not merely knowledge, skill or information. Even better aims like creativity or innovation are not enough. If the creative and innovative are corrupt, selfish and greedy, then they become part of the exploitative power élite. As modern spiritual thinkers like Sri Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurthy have repeatedly emphasised, most of our outer problems have their roots in our inner nature and without a positive inner change there cannot be a permanent solution to our external problems.

This inner change requires a new system of education by which higher values like truth, beauty, goodness, compassion, liberty, equity and fraternity remain no longer as noble abstractions or sentiments in the upper layers of our mind, but are brought down to penetrate and suffuse the impulses of our will and vital force and the instincts, feelings and sensations of our heart and flesh and become intrinsic elements of the very substance of our consciousness.

But this is a long-term solution to the problem of equity. In the short term, until this ideal of inner change is accepted and accomplished by humanity, outer methods have to be used. Therefore, we cannot say that external methods and approaches to equity are of no value.

Technology, management and economics... social and economic reforms and strong government policy in favour of the poor and the weak... organised resistance of the masses against the unjust and powerful exploiter... individuals and institutions which can organise this resistance and champion the cause of the weak and the poor against the rich and the strong... a vigilant, courageous and free media which highlights injustice, oppression and exploitation... innovative ideas which can enhance the productivity, efficiency or living standards of the poor or empower the weak...—all these are helpful in our fight for equality. However, without inner change outer methods

are uncertain in their results. But at the same time, until the inner change is well established, outer methods are needed and helpful in preparing the external environment. So we should not be trapped in the 'either/or' thinking of the human mind. Outer effort and inner change are not mutually exclusive. Even while using all possible outer methods in our struggle against inequality we can advance simultaneously towards the permanent solution through education and inner change.

Whatever we have discussed so far the value of equity applies equally to all other values like liberty, fraternity, harmony or progress. For a sustainable and enduring realisation of these values in our outer life, the main principles of the strategy are, first, a deeper understanding of the inner significance of these values and their inner realisation in the consciousness of people; second, as this inner realisation progresses, to allow it to express itself freely and spontaneously in the outer life; third, to create an external environment favourable to the progressive manifestations of these values in the outer life.

The Problem of Culture

The second question on the New China is related to cultural influences. Opening of the Chinese economy has brought in the influences of an alien culture. Media reports say that Chinese youth are enthusiastically imitating the commercial and pop culture of the West. Is this good for a nation like China which has in its own ancient heritage, a deep, subtle and beautiful culture? When nations like India and China abandon their own rich culture and imitate an alien and inferior culture, it is like someone who divorces his chaste, noble, beautiful and cultured wife and runs after a glamorous nautch girl!

We are not here indulging in cultural chauvinism. We are judging a culture by its capacity to ennoble and elevate the human consciousness. Our strictures are not against the positive and original values of the modern Western culture like liberty, equality, fraternity, progress or even the pragmatic values of the modern corporate culture like efficiency, productivity, customer service and innovation. All these values are needed for an integral fulfilment of human life. What we call inferior is an aspect of the contemporary commercial culture of the West which promotes crude sensationalism and superficial glamour. This distinction has to be made because when some of the fanatics of culture in India rail at "Westernisation" or "Western" influences, they give the impression that all that belongs to the West is bad, which is utterly false. There are ancient western cultures like Hellenic Greece which are as great and beautiful as that of India or China. And there are also many positive features in the modern Western culture. Alien cultural influences should not be rejected but have to be assimilated with a creative discrimination throwing out what is harmful and synthesising what is positive and beneficial in the alien culture with the essential ethos of one's own native culture.

The Destiny and Mission

The third question is related to the mission and destiny of China. Let us assume that China becomes the greatest economic, political and military superpower. Let us also assume she beats all other nations in the game of development and tops the list in all development parameters like the Gross National Product, Per Capita Income, health, literacy, gender equality, quality of life, or human development index. Is this the end of the game? Is economic prosperity and outer development the highest potential or destiny of China and also India? This is an important question concerning the spiritual destiny of Asia and two of its greatest nations which represent the twin powers of the spiritual genius of Asia. This question cannot be answered in a few sentences. We have examined this subject in greater detail in a separate article in the previous issue. But we would like to conclude our article with Sri Aurobindo's significant remark on the destiny of India, which could be applied to all great civilisations that in their quest for modernity sacrifice their ancient spirituality:

There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. There is a question whether she may prosper more harmlessly in the outward life yet lose altogether her richly massed and firmly held spiritual experience and knowledge.²

M. S. SRINIVASAN

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WHO BROUGHT ME TO PONDICHERRY?

I WANTED to become a physician but the Lord had given me birth for His service at Pondicherry and so, for my liberation, for my progress, for making me eternally His own, He brought me here. It is not “I came here”; it is “He had decided it, therefore...”; else I would not have been able to leave home. This will be clear when you read what follows.

In the years 1942 to 1946, there were strange and unforeseeable upheavals in my life, sudden unexpected developments took place without my willing or knowing. I had every kind of experience: sweet and bitter, good and bad, lessons worth remembering and lessons worth forgetting. The Divine Shakti brought them about, as if disregarding my own will and nature, so that I learned to see this world for what it really is and not desire or turn to it again. She made me fail in everything I did so that I understood the worldly life in all its aspects and turned resolutely towards the spiritual life.

I abandoned college during the social disruption brought about by the ‘Quit India’ agitation. My father was very upset, but some Force was at work and I could not but submit to it. Then, against his wish, I went into business, and failing in it, was in misery. When I myself did not know what I was doing or why, how could anyone else? Father could not be blamed for declaring angrily, “He has lost his head!” It was true, I see now, but some Force was making me do these things: they were necessary so that thenceforth I belonged to Her alone.

The war-time job I had obtained ended with the close of the War in 1945 and I had to go to live with my parents at Saabalwad. Only She and I know how I spent those days, harassed all the time by thoughts of wanting to leave. But where was I to go? What was I to do? Nothing was clear.

Then one day in September 1946, as I lounged in our drawing-room, my mind completely blank, my elder paternal uncle’s son, Takhtsingh-ji came to me and invited me to join him on his trip to Idar. “I am taking the car; come along for a ride; we’ll be back in the evening,” he said. After he left, a voice whispered in my ear, “This is an opportunity to leave the house.” All of a sudden, a Force seemed to have come and filled me with courage and enthusiasm. I packed some clothes, took what little money I had, and took father’s permission to go to Himmatnagar. Two of my *Kaku-bhais* (my father’s uncles), lived there and to say I was going there seemed a good subterfuge to keep the family in the dark. After a deep last look at them all, I left home for ever.

I arrived here, at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, unexpected and unknown, knowing nothing about the place except its name. Yet, my experiences have convinced me, it was the Mother who brought me.

The car in which the three or four of us started, stopped just as we left the village! My companions got down and tried very hard to get it going again, but in vain. Seeing them fail, my worry turned to dread and I told myself, “If I fail to leave today, I shall

never be able to leave home.” The moment this thought struck me, the engine sputtered to life! Everyone was relieved that we would finally make it to Idar. I too calmed down and felt that my leaving was destined.

At the outskirts of Idar the engine stopped again! Takhtsingh-ji told me, “Better take a horse-carriage and rush to the bus-stand, you have to go to Himmatnagar and it is almost time for the bus to leave. It will take long to repair our car; this time we need to call a mechanic.” I said, “I prefer to take the train, but if I miss it I will rejoice you here and go back to Saabalwad.” I took a horse-carriage to the railway station. The train was just leaving and I jumped in without a ticket.

At Himmatnagar, our friend Somalal Soni who had gone to school with us in Idar, climbed into my small compartment and sat just a couple of rows behind me. I panicked, for I had always treated him as an elder brother. “What will I tell him if he sees me? I am in a disturbed state, not at all clear about what I am doing. If he asks where I am going and why, I am bound to break down and reveal everything, ruining my escapade, for I will have to go back with him.” I turned my face away, trying to hide from his line of vision. “If he recognises me, I will say I had fallen asleep and will now go on to Ahmedabad and later return to Himmatnagar.” Somehow he did not notice me throughout the journey and I got down at Ahmedabad after him. In 1953, when I went to Gujarat, I met him and related this episode. “Not once but several times I had looked at every other passenger in our compartment and there were not many of us,” he exclaimed. “And I did not recognise you in spite of being so close for so long! How did that happen?” I said, “I am myself still amazed by it. I was sure you would see me any moment and confront me and yet you didn’t! It was the work of a great Shakti. What can you do if the Divine diverts your attention?”

In September 1946, the carnage let loose by Jinnah on 16 August, was raging fiercely in Ahmedabad and trains were packed with people in flight. I huddled in a corner of the station. “What to do now? Where to go? Return to Saabalwad? Or, now that I have left home, proceed further? Let me first go to Rishikesh. But with my asthma, I won’t survive in its climate, especially its monsoon and winter. How about Gandhi’s ashram at Wardha? But I want to be a Sannyasi, renounce the world and live a peaceful happy life in God. In that case I must go to Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram at Pondicherry. There first, and if I am not admitted there, to Wardha, and if I don’t find a place there, spend the rest of my life in Rishikesh.”

I had not read anything about Sri Aurobindo Ashram. All I knew was what Shri Chandrakantbhai Rawal once told me when we were in motor-car business at Devlali-Nashik: the wife of one of his relatives in Bombay died within a year of their marriage and, heartbroken, he wrote for permission to live in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The permission did arrive but by then his family had persuaded him into remarriage and he stayed on in Bombay. But while he missed the opportunity, the mere recollection of his story saved my life and I have become integrally Theirs!

The moment, in my corner at the Ahmedabad station, the thought of going to

Sri Aurobindo Ashram arose, my mind became peaceful. An unknown Shakti brought courage into me and I got up and purchased a ticket to Bombay. The train left that night at 11.30. I had not eaten and slept off. Next morning I got down at Dadar and bought a ticket for Poona. Here too communal atrocities were forcing people to flee the city. My train left in the evening. Sometime during the night I got down at Poona and went to an Irani restaurant opposite the station. I hadn't eaten for two days and was very hungry. As I ate, thoughts assailed me again: "Go back home, go to your friend who lives in this city, go to Gandhi's Wardha;" then again the last and decisive, "Go first to Sri Aurobindo's Ashram." Again it brought peace and courage and strength. I got up, went back to the station and enquired about the train to Madras. Someone said, "Join this queue, tickets are now being issued for Madras." I bought one and got in as soon as the train arrived.

After two nights, at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning the train reached Madras. I got down, and crouched in a quiet corner. I had learned a little English but without practice could not speak properly; Tamil, I was hearing for the first time. Troubled, dejected, lost, reduced to weeping: "How far is Pondicherry? How to go there? There is very little money and what if I am not allowed to live there?"

Such thoughts were bewildering and suffocating me when, suddenly, I looked up and saw a uniformed coolie, turbaned and bearded, standing in front of me and laughing. "Where do you wish to go?" he asked in Hindi. His appearance and laughter frightened me. "This man knows I am a stranger and ignorant of this place, he is going to cheat me," I thought and said, "Nowhere. I have no luggage and don't need you." And I looked down hoping he would go. But when I looked up again he was still standing in front of me. He laughed again and said, "Just tell me where you want to go and I will help you." Still frightened, I pretended to be angry, "I don't want to go anywhere; can't you see I have no luggage; why are you pestering me, go to someone who may need you; I will continue to sit here like this." He moved away, still smiling. My worry increased. After some time when I looked up he was standing nearby. He said, "You have come away from home, but why should you be afraid? Tell me where you wish to go and I will help. I have come for that; why are you afraid of me?" I was stunned. How did he know all this? I decided then that if I was to die, let it be at his hands, and inwardly I surrendered myself to him. "I want to go to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry but know nothing about it or how to go there; so I am sitting here, wondering what to do."

The moment I finished, he picked up my small handbag and said, "Come with me, I will explain everything to you. From here (Central Station) it is a long way to Egmore Station. We have to go there, the trains to Pondicherry leave from there." We set off. After a while we came to a restaurant. He stopped. "You have not eaten for a long time, go and eat. I will wait outside." I was astonished, "How did he know? Why is he so concerned about me!" My bag was in his hands; I just couldn't bring myself to take it. He sat on the pavement. I went in and sat where I could see him. While

gulping down my breakfast my eyes kept going to my bag: two sets of clothes and half my money were in it, what if he ran away with it? Guessing my condition, he shouted, "You still don't trust me. I have not come to steal your bag. Have you forgotten I have promised to help you?" I choked with emotion but I controlled my tears and joined him.

As we set out, I was saying inwardly, "How stingy and selfish of me not to have invited you to eat, even if for form's sake! But I have so little money and I don't know where I am going or what is going to happen to me." Meanwhile he was telling me all that I needed to know for my journey: I must buy a ticket to Villupuram and there take a bus to Pondicherry. There was nothing to be afraid of there; there were many Gujaratis at the Ashram who would help me; I will find a place to live.

At Egmore, he reassured me again and yet again. Around midday, when he started to leave, I offered him one rupee,—one single rupee for one who had been with me for six hours, had not asked even for a cup of tea, and provided me with every piece of information I might need! He looked at it and said, "I know you are short of money; don't worry and go in good faith; everything will be all right." Then, with a broad smile, he turned and disappeared. I could learn nothing about him then, but now, when I remember all this I break down like a child. I have heard that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have confirmed that Their help does extend in this way to people coming here.

After he left me, while enquiring about my train, I found out that tickets were not being issued because of a strike in town but the train would leave at midnight. I boarded it without a ticket and in the morning paid the ticket collector. I got down at Villupuram; there were many buses leaving for Pondicherry but no seats were available. I sat in a corner. At 3 or 4 o'clock a little boy approached me and told me in broken Hindi, "If you sit here like this, you'll be nowhere. Give me some money I will buy you a ticket and find a seat for you in the bus." I gave him the money and in a short time he came in the next bus and called me to the seat. It was dark when I reached Pondicherry. Resolving to go to the Ashram in the morning, I ate at a small restaurant and slept on its pavement.

I imagined that like those of the ancient Rishis, Sri Aurobindo Ashram would be far away from the town, beside a river in some jungle or on a hill beside some streams amidst Nature's beauty, where sadhaks had built themselves a few huts and spent their days meditating in peace, joy and fraternity, and I would become one of them.

Next morning, after walking a little, I saw a policeman and spoke in English but he asked "French? Tamil?" I asked back, "English? Hindi?" and he shook his head; but when I said "Sri Aurobindo Ashram?" he signalled me to proceed in the direction I was going. I came to the building which is at present the Ashram Dining Room. There, on enquiring again, I was sent to the Vinayaka temple and finally, standing near the gate of the Ashram, asked a passerby the direction to the Ashram. He smiled

and pointing to the gate said, "This is the Ashram." He left me gaping at the gate. "Is this really the Ashram? But it is in the middle of the town!" Meanwhile some people came and entered.

Those days Mother used to give "balcony darshan" around 6.15 in the morning. Those people had come from there but I took them for townfolk visiting a temple, for they were not dressed as inmates of monasteries are expected to be. Inmates here are free to dress as they wish. I don't think there is anywhere an ashram like this where the whole stress is on the inner spiritual discipline. I followed them inside but a bearded man at the gate stopped me and asked many questions. "I come from Gujarat and know nothing about this Ashram but I want to settle down here." I still remember the scorn in his laughing remark, "Ah, so you have come here after trying to stay in other ashrams and been thrown out from everywhere, right? But it is not so easy to get permission to stay here, understand?" I was shocked and my heart cried out, "Why did I come here? I ought to have died before coming to such a place." But I replied quietly, "No, I have not gone anywhere else. I come straight here from home." Just then a wiry elderly Gujarati sadhak with long hair and beard came by. The gateman told him, "This boy is Gujarati and wants to live here but knows nothing. Explain everything to him." (This rude sadhak later left the Ashram because he could not live in harmony with the others.)

The elderly sadhak took my hand and led me outside and explained things very sweetly. I recalled what that 'coolie' in Madras had told me about being helped. The old sadhak was Shri Ambalal, our Albert-da's father. In later years, whenever I saw him I used to bow to him but he would hold my hands and say, "We are all children of the Mother and therefore brothers. We should bow only to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother." He gave me an advice which is useful to all of us here: "The Divine has brought us here to do His work; when we go, we will have to account for our actions. If we have acted well we shall rejoice but if we have wasted our time we shall be ashamed. So make sure you don't have to repent later." That day, he asked me to have patience and sent someone to help me find and rent a room in a boarding house. "Go and eat and rest. Write a letter to the Mother and give it to me this evening. I will send it to Her and we shall await Her reply."

I sat down to write the letter, but what to write? I knew something about Sri Aurobindo but nothing about Mother. I made several drafts but tore them all up and slept. Suddenly I awoke as if someone had wrenched my ear, and in that half-dazed state I was made to write, "You know everything. I have come to stay at Thy Feet." Then I went back to sleep.

In the evening I gave it to Ambalal-bhai. He read it and exclaimed, "You know the Mother quite well!" I kept quiet but my heart smiled, "Yes, but how well, I alone can say." He continued, "I shall send this letter to Her. I may tell you that some sadhaks have noticed you and written to Mother that if She permits you to stay, they have work for you." Next day, Mother asked him to bring me to the balcony darshan

and we stood together but a bit away from the rest. Thereafter She sent word that I was to stand near the Service Tree around noon. Later I was asked to join the night meditation and Pranam. Ambalal-bhai sent someone to buy me a garland and told me, "Place it in Mother's lap, offer some money, then bow and do your pranam." At Pranam, the Mother blessed me with Her hand on my head. Next day, I received permission to stay and was provided with the facilities given to sadhaks. That day I began work in the dairy; since then I belong entirely to Her. All I desire now is to progress by serving Her. And I pray that everyone recognises and benefits by Her Presence.

In 1929, when asked how people from all over the world have gathered here often even without their knowing why, Mother had said, "We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life. We are of one family¹ and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth." [CWM 3:3] When a soul is ready to serve in the Mother's Work, it is guided by Her and rushes here like an iron filing to a magnet. That is why one spontaneously feels at home here, this is how many of us have felt about our coming here. After coming here I began to find my childhood aspirations being realised.

There are people here who would not fit in the ordinary world and would be rejected; but each has a special quality, a unique possibility, which those outside don't have; that is why they could renounce the ordinary life and come here. They are striving for the Divine, something unthinkable to those outside. So, whatever our apparent shortcomings, we are Mother's children and She will make us progress gradually until one day She will gather us up in Her arms and make us completely Hers. Let us not entertain the slightest doubt about this.

Victory to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother!

MAHENDRAKUMAR

1. It is profoundly true in reality; there are large "families of beings" who work for the same cause, who have gathered in more or less large numbers and who come in groups as it were. It is as though at certain times there were awakenings in the psychic world, as though lots of little sleeping children were being called to wake up: "It is time, quick, quick, go down!" And they hurry down. And sometimes they do not drop at the same place, they are dispersed, yet there is something within which troubles them, pushes them; for one reason or another they are drawn close and that brings them together... People meet and recognise each other only to the extent they become conscious of their psychic being, obey their psychic being, are guided by it; otherwise there is all that comes in to oppose it, all that veils, all that stupefies, all those obstacles to prevent you from finding yourself in your depths and being able to collaborate truly in the work. You are tossed about by the forces of Nature.

The Mother, 18 March 1953 [CWM 5:2]

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of July 2007)

Our Mother of Mystery

Chitra, Suprabha, Tapati and I used to study German with Medhananda-da. We translated the Mother's book, *La Découverte Suprême* with him. In fact, the final German version that came out was our translation with Medhananda-da's corrections and modifications. Obviously the effort was ours. One evening the four of us along with Medhananda-da went to the Playground and surrounded the Mother. We told Her with a lot of enthusiasm:

"We must publish *La Découverte Suprême*, Mother. We need one of your photographs."

The Mother simply smiled. We were a little taken aback. The Mother then said: "It's a good idea to have a photo of mine in this book—but which one?"

"That's exactly why we've come to you. Tell us, which photograph shall we use?"

The Mother kept smiling. After some time She said:

"Why don't you use a photo of mine which shows how I would look at a hundred?"

And She burst out laughing. We somehow could not fathom this mysterious utterance of the Mother.

Before our eyes emerged the picture of an extraordinarily young and beautiful woman. We were firmly convinced that the Mother's body would indeed be transformed when She was a hundred. Her body would be integrally transformed with the light of the Supermind. Our hearts filled up with an unearthly joy at that thought.

On seeing our reaction the Mother once again broke into laughter.

But Her exquisitely beautiful face kept swimming before my eyes. What a face, unforgettable!

One day, just as the Mother was entering the Tennis Ground, an Ashram photographer came forward to take a picture. The Mother looked at him and said with a laugh:

"Don't take a photo now. Take one when I am a hundred years old!"

And She broke into the limpid laughter of a young girl. I was standing next to the Mother and we were all quite taken aback. What was this mystery coming from the Mother? How could we humans get a clue to understand Her utterances and Her acts? She kept everything about Her cloaked behind a veil of mystery.

Many years later, (the Mother had left her physical body by then), I was coming out of the Ashram when one of the elderly sadhaks offered me a flower called '*Psychological Perfection*' by the Mother. At once it flashed on my mind that almost every evening when the Mother used to come down to the Meditation Hall, She blessed

everyone by giving this flower. I do not know why but I just could not help exclaiming:

“When the Mother comes back, then we will once again receive this flower from Her hand.”

I realised what I had said and felt a little embarrassed.

“Do not mind what I just said,” I quickly added, “I always feel that the Mother is coming back.”

The sadhak replied removing my discomfort:

“Of course, She will return. You are absolutely right.”

I could feel his profound conviction in what he said.

“Let me tell you something. Many years ago, I once went to the Mother for some work. After telling me various things the Mother suddenly remarked:

“‘I am going to leave this body.’

“I just stood there in stunned disbelief. I had never imagined that I would hear this.

“‘I shall give up this body, no doubt, but I shall return. And you will be able to recognise me because my new body will look exactly like the present one.’”

I was thrilled on hearing this from an old sadhak. An unearthly joy filled my whole being in silence.

“I hope when the Mother comes back, we will still be there to see Her.”

The sadhak looked at me slightly dismayed and said:

“This thought has never crossed my mind.”

And saying this he went on his way to wherever he was going. I just stood there speechless. The Mother shall surely return, this thought kept going round and round in my head.

The Mother has said many things about this new body to Satprem. She even described Her form. This description was so vibrant that we all felt that it was this body of the Mother that would take on that new form. But Satprem understood at once with his sharp intelligence and asked the Mother:

“Hasn’t this new form entered your subtle body already?”

The Mother changed the topic and started speaking about something else. If this is not the sweet maya of the Mother then what is? In *Notes on the Way*, the Mother has given such detailed descriptions of the transformation of each envelope of the body, but it is beyond our capacity to understand that in fact She is describing the transformation of Her subtle body. How we used to impatiently wait for each coming issue of the *Bulletin*! Who knew that the Mother would leave this present body? She had covered our understanding with Her sweet maya.

Sri Aurobindo has written in *The Mother*:

All the scenes of the earth play have been like a drama arranged and planned and staged by her with the cosmic Gods for her assistants and herself as a veiled actor.

The Mother had determined all the events from before but we could not grasp that with our intelligence, we did not have a clue. Champaklal-ji told Sri Aurobindo one day:

“I cannot understand how Mother could give different explanations to different people, different answers to different persons, for the same person, for the same question.”

Sri Aurobindo replied gravely:

“She has her reason for saying it.”

When the Samadhi was prepared for Sri Aurobindo, the Mother had already made arrangements at that time to make a second chamber above Sri Aurobindo’s. However, we could not understand anything. Why, we could not even imagine it in our dreams. The Mother after all is “a veiled actor”.

Sri Aurobindo has written in his *Bases of Yoga*:

The ways of the Divine are not like those of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we can know. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

Dear Mother,

Your love for poor me is still my lodestar and I am grateful.

My dear child,

My love wants to lead you to the goal and it is bound to succeed.

With my blessings.

29 March 1940

The Mother

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM, Vol. 16, p. 214)

THE STORY OF GOLCONDE

(Continued from the issue of July 2007)

3

The Mother's visits to Golconde

THE following section regarding the Mother's visits to Golconde has been put together based on the information given by Mani-ben, Pushpa, Lilou, who were part of the Golconde maintenance staff of that time. As they do not remember clearly the dates of Her visits these have not been mentioned here.

For some time the Mother used to give interviews in the Golconde Office. Her chair was placed on the western side of the office near the shutters. She came there after Her game of tennis was over. Later She gave the interviews in the Playground. Once, after an interview, She went to see Mani-ben who had suffered severe burns.

On another occasion, She visited Diana who was then very ill.

One day, while coming down after an interview in Golconde, the Mother stopped midway on the stairs. Mona asked the Mother, "Mother are you tired?" The Mother said, "No, but whenever I come here I find that there is a fear settled on these steps and each time I remove it." Then we understood that as there was no railing on the first flight of the steps the elderly visitors used to feel a little afraid.

Once three Japanese people, one lady Toshi, and two young men, Earnest and Paul had come here and stayed in the Ashram. The young men had come especially to teach the Japanese method of paddy-cultivation where two or three harvests can be taken per year. The Mother had given the name "Bhupriya" to one of the young men. Dakshinapada-da, father of Pranab learnt this method from them. These young men had also made a beautiful small Japanese Garden at the back of the Tea-basement of Golconde. There was a lake with a wooden bridge painted in bright red and green. They also constructed a miniature with fossils, representing the Mother's painting 'Ascent to Truth'. This group planted the Realisation Tree that is there now.

At this time one of the inmates of Golconde, Gautam Chawla and the Japanese lady Toshi arranged an exhibition of the Mother's Japanese things which She had brought with Her. Gautam and Toshi used to go up to the Mother and bring the items given by the Mother. Later, Mother had asked only Gautam to come and collect if any more items had to be taken. They were innumerable, extremely beautiful, precious and rare. Toshi was all admiration for the items given by the Mother. She found them aristocratic and beautiful according to the highest taste of Japanese Art. Mother had

a black kimono with her own symbol. All Japanese Masters used to have such kimonos with their own emblems. The symbol on the Mother's kimono had a triangle with a lotus inside it, and, like a circle around the triangle, a snake biting its own tail. When asked for the significance, She said triangle with lotus signifies human aspiration and the snake biting its own tail signifies eternity or immortality.

We quote from *Bulletin* 1955:

The quarterly exhibition this year on the 15th August was held at Golconde instead of at the University Library. It was an exhibition on Japan and consisted almost wholly of articles from Japan which the Mother had Herself used there and brought with Her in 1920. The arrangement of the exhibition was in four separate rooms. The first showing "The Country", the second "Art and Culture", the third the comparison between the old (1915) and the new (1955), and the fourth "Home Life". In setting up the exhibition we had the assistance of recent Japanese members who were also in attendance each day in their national costume. They had, in addition, prepared a Japanese Garden in the Golconde grounds and a number of Bonsai or Dwarf trees which is so typical of Japanese Horticultural art. It was a very successful exhibition and attracted many visitors not only from the Ashram but from the town as well.

This exhibition was held on the third floor in the double rooms, in the West-wing. The Mother came to inaugurate it. While going back She visited Gautam Chawla's room which was on the other extreme of the same floor. From his room Mother looked to the north and saw a building which was badly in need of repair. She asked the young men, Mona Sarkar and others to repair it. When She looked to the south the Ashram balcony was visible. Dyuman-bhai was standing there. Mother commented humorously: "Oh! Dyuman is giving Balcony Darshan?"

The Mother visited also the Japanese Garden prepared by these people. These young men had also made a small Japanese Rockery Garden in the Sports Ground near the Mother's Room there.

Once there was a violinist visiting the Ashram. The Mother came at night after her Playground activities to listen to his music on the first floor, in the last room, West-wing number one, where Her own piano was kept and looked after. Madame Kasparie accompanied him on the piano. The Mother had invited a few Ashramites to listen to the music.

Mother came once also to listen to Marie Amélie, a concert pianist play on the piano. Sutapa sang a song accompanied by Marie Amélie on the piano.

An exhibition of paintings by the Ashram artists and some photographs by the Ashramites were exhibited in Golconde. The Mother came to see the exhibition. Here there was one painting by Krishnalal of a blue wave. The Mother liked it very much and sat in a chair in front of it, watching it for some time.

When the Mother's son, André-da, came to the Ashram for the first time, the Mother waited to receive him much ahead of time at the Golconde entrance facing the road. Everyone present sat around Her. As one enters Golconde on the right hand side there is a wall which was in brick at that time. The Mother expressed the wish that on the wall there should be a painting of which She had a vision, showing the Mother blessing the whole world gathered around Her. Now, this wall is plastered and there is a painting by Krishnalal depicting the Mother's idea. (See *Mother India*, June 2007, pp. 450-55 for more details about the Golconde mural.)

The Mother had chosen a room on the third floor to be allotted to André-da, and She went there to wait for him. Later, this room would always be kept for André-da. Very rarely, when necessary, it was used by some special guest. As André-da had not come at the expected time, She told Mona that there could be a telegram in the Ashram. As Mani-ben stepped out of Golconde to find out, she met Dyuman-bhai who was bringing a telegram for the Mother. André-da had sent it to inform Her about his arrival being delayed.

Once in 1949, She called a group of Ashramites to Golconde and read out to them Her play, "*Vers l'avenir*", which was to be staged in our theatre on December 2 for the School Anniversary. She would also call the actors chosen to recite '*Savitri*'. She would Herself read out these passages to them. These readings were always done on the third floor, West-wing, in one of the double rooms.

Originally in Golconde the overhead water-tanks were made of iron. They were getting rusted. So Udar, Bula-da, Chandu-bhai thought that these could be replaced with cement tanks. But, before they could proceed they had to have the Mother's permission for this change. So, the Mother came to Golconde to inspect the condition of the existing tanks. She went up to the top floor using the main staircase but to go on to the roof the Mother had to use the back staircase. This staircase was narrower and steeper. She found it difficult to climb on Her own. She took Pranab's help and went up. Udar and the others explained to the Mother their difficulties and suggested building cement tanks. Thus the cement tanks were built after getting the Mother's approval and since then, there has been no problem.

Now, after sixty years, a new batch of Golconde maintenance staff is carrying on the legacy of scrupulous work and are maintaining the building and its surroundings as it was when it was first opened. We end this part of our report with the following lines from Amra Neville, one of the present members of the maintenance team.

Golconde maintenance

Mona would always tell us that when the Mother came here (to Golconde) She said that the pure lines of the architecture (in the rooms) should not be spoiled by keeping things on top of the furniture. This instils in some of us a sense of the beauty of

the place that we should try to maintain. We also feel (at least I do), that Mother is always watching Her creation and, at any time, She may walk in, to see that all is done neatly and beautifully fitting with the care She has taken in building this Golconde.

Maintenance consists of several jobs:

1. Allotting tasks to the maids and supervising that all the doors and furniture and shutters are wiped everyday.
2. Wooden furniture is protected with wax polish applied by hand. In this damp and salty air the polish has to be redone often. The maids are the best at this because they are patient and meticulous.
3. One has to constantly keep watch over all the electrical and plumbing works and have things repaired as soon as possible, bearing in mind the age of the fittings as well as how perfectly, carefully and thoughtfully they had been installed in the first place.
4. All the linen used (e.g. mosquito-nets, sheets, covers, pillow-covers, mattress-covers, even dusters etc.) undergo wear and staining. They need to be constantly checked, cleaned, repaired and eventually replaced.
5. Similarly as with (3) the furniture, locks, hinges, masonry and shutter-fittings need to be maintained properly. Luckily they are so simple that they need relatively little maintenance. But in such a big building that still means constant work.
6. Water and electricity supply need careful watching, as we do not have a generator or a well.
7. The garden and ponds also need to be kept clean, creepers and grass trimmed; and ponds taken care of, i.e. the water plants, fish and quality of water.
8. Residents and visitors—their arrival and departure and their cooperation in keeping things neat and clean have to be looked into; their clothes to be washed, dried and sorted.
9. Keeping stock of supplies of cloths, soap, cleaning equipment, sandpaper and polish, etc.
10. Keeping accounts of all receipts and expenditures, in the acceptable manner.

Mona and her helpers organised the work of the maids in such a way that each of them has a job and is accountable for the task given. Of course, one cannot fully depend on their ways, so, one has to always be with them to help them do things thoroughly and efficiently, and respond immediately if there is a problem. Mona used to tell us that one has to know the work perfectly oneself before one can expect the maid to do it well. She would show us by doing it herself. When that is not done, the quality of the work deteriorates.

This building is so beautiful with such a harmonious atmosphere, that for me it is well worth all the work, especially as the Mother is constantly helping us.

Thank you, Mother.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, "When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it." To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided; you will have at best only glimpses of this greater life. For although certain experiences and realisations may come to you in meditation or in your inner consciousness, your body and your outer life will remain unchanged. An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life, is of no great use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world, they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1929-30, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 24-25)

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of July 2007)

17. Biographer of Saints

It was the singular good fortune of Shaivism in Tamil Nadu to have had a biographer for the Nayanmars in the great poet Sekkizhar. Arulmozhi Thevar of the Sekkizhar family was the Chief Minister of King Kulottunga II who ruled over the Chola realm in the twelfth century. A pious Shaivite, he was not happy with the king's addiction to the Jain epic, *Jeevaka Chintamani*. More than the Jain religion, the epic's engagement with erotic descriptions seems to have repelled him. A king who was to be an inspiration for the realm could not be allowed to drown in the pit of moral decadence! However, the king said he respected epic poesy. Could Arulmozhi Thevar present him with a Shaivite epic that could equal the poetic delights of *Jeevaka Chintamani*? The challenge was taken up and *Peria Puranam* (*The Big Purana*) was born.

Sekkizhar belonged to the Vellala caste and was a great scholar. The *Peria Puranam* gives us biographical details about sixty-three servitors (Nayanmars) of Shiva. He chose to write about the great devotees mentioned by Sundarar in his poem, 'Tiru Thonda Tohai'. It is said that Sundarar once went to the Tiruvarur temple. On the way to the sanctum, a few devotees were sitting in the Devasiriya Mandapam and singing prayers. In his hurry he did not salute them and went in. Viranmindar, one of the devotees, became very angry at the insult and burst out: "Henceforth both Sundarar who failed to salute us and Shiva who accepts his salutations are strangers to us!" The presiding deity, Tyagaraja, explained to Sundarar the greatness of his devotees. Chastened and realising the true norms of bhakti yoga, Sundarar indited a poem opening with the line: "I am a servitor of the servitors of the holy people who live in Tillai (Chidambaram)." Sixty-two devotees are listed by name in the poem apart from general references like "those who were born in Tiruvarur" and "the sages who wear the holy ash". Sekkizhar added Sundarar himself to the list and his epic poem became immediately popular as the *Life of the Sixty-Three Saints*. It is also possible that Sekkizhar wished to set up a parallel list of saintly personages for Shaivism as the Jains revered the sixty-three "salaka Purushas" and have the epic, *Tri Sashti Salaka Charithram*.

Peria Puranam is highly valued for its literary merit as well as its devotional ambience. Though there is a list of sixty-three, there is eminent variety in the presentation of the histories. Some are long, some short. There is also a careful planning of the architectonics of the epic. We open with Sundarar in Kailas and close with his ascension to the Mount Kailas. These stories, retold down the centuries in prose and verse, made into songs and used for religious lectures have become part of the

consciousness of the Shaivites of Tamil Nadu. Many of the incidents have also been sculpted in the panels of the Darasuram Temple built by Kulottunga II's son Raja Raja II.

Eleven Books to echo the eleven verses of 'Tiru Thonda Tohai' with a prefatory and a concluding Book make up the epic's matter which is charged with bhakti all over. As Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says:

The 'sixty-three' and a 'motley' assembly of the Shiva-intoxicated, some movingly and memorably 'Vocal' but many dumb in their overmastering devotion to the Lord; drawn from all regions of Tamil Nadu (and even beyond), and from all castes, classes, professions, stages of life, and from both sexes; householders all, yet ascetic in their renunciation of meat, hunting, anger, pride and greed; and addicts of a divine humanism that swears by service of the interpenetrating universes of man, flora and fauna. The 'sixty-three' make a world of ardours, aspirations, intensities, contradictions, seeming aberrations, sore trials, startling transcendences, yet it is a world wonderfully held together and sustained by the Bhakti *élan vital*, by the love of God, and of the God in all, and the unfailing ambience of Divine Grace.¹

It is a mind-boggling array of characters and incidents that make up the epic but a crystalline clarity rules over all. The Tamil language is made supple and soft to suit the devotional mood even as we open the epic with the famous verse, "Ulagellaam". The word, 'ulagellaam' (all the living beings) is said to have been pronounced by Shiva when Sekkizhar stood in the sanctum of the Chidambaram shrine, self-lost in prayerful absorption. Immediately the poet continued:

He is difficult to be realised by all living beings
And worshipped; crowned with the crescent and the Ganges,
He dances in Chidambaram as an infinite brilliance;
We hail his lotus-like, ankleted feet and pray to him.²

Sekkizhar then gives a beautiful description of Mount Kailas which is the very image of good deeds as holy people live here. A servitor of Shiva, Alalasundarar fell in love with two heavenly damsels, Kamalini and Anindita who were culling flowers for Shiva's worship. Such base thoughts have no place on the divine hill, so Shiva banished Alalasundarar to the earth and to live with the damsels who would also be born there. However, he promised the distraught devotee that he would save him on earth for a life of devotional piety.

1. G. Vanmikanathan, *Peria Puranam: A Tamil Classic on the Great Saiva Saints of South India* (1985), p. ix.

2. 'Payiram', verse 1.

Born to the pious Sadayanar of Tirunavalur, Alalasundarar was now known as Nambi Aroorar. One day the chieftain Narasinga Munaiyaraiyan saw the child playing on the streets. He was so struck by the beauty and promise of the boy that he requested the parents to allow him to bring up Nambi Aroorar. Sadayanar and Isaijnaniyar gave their consent and so the boy became the foster-son of the chief of Tirumunaippadi. Soon he grew up to be a handsome young man well-versed in scholarship.

Sekkizhar calls the life of Sundarar “The Purana of Waylaying and Saving”.³ Sundarar’s wedding was fixed and the marriage was in full swing when Shiva came into the pandal as an old man:

With a waist-garment
 which swayed side to side as he walked,
 displaying beneath it the ancinty
 of the loin-cloth low down on the abdomen,
 With a bamboo stick,
 To the head of which a white cloth and blades of kusa
 Grass had been tied
 Held in one hand,
 With faltering steps.⁴

He was welcomed gladly by the assemblage. But everyone was taken aback when the old man said that Nambi Aroorar was actually his slave and could not marry without his permission. Asked to produce proof, the old man proffered a palm leaf which stated the fact that it was actually a generational slavery. The bridegroom was nonplussed. Angered by what seemed to be a deliberate insult, Aroorar tore the leaf to bits, saying this was a mad fellow (*pithan*). The old man said that he was a resident of nearby Vennainallur and if the assemblage would follow him, he would show them the original as Aroorar had torn up only a copy of the original deed. Aroorar agreed and all of them followed the old man who went into the sanctum of the Shiva temple at Vennainallur and vanished. Aroorar realised that he had been waylaid by the Lord in this novel manner and began singing of Shiva’s greatness using the word, ‘pithan’ as the opening syllable:

Mad One, crescent-crowned,
 My Lord, full of compassion!
 I shan’t forget you.
 Forever my mind meditates upon you.
 You have chosen to reside

3. For a detailed account of this incident see the essay, ‘The Handome Singer’ in this series, April 2007.

4. Canto I, verse 31. Translated by G. Vanmikanathan.

In grace-laden Vennainallur,
 On the southern bank of Pennai river.
 Having become your slave
 How can I deny the fact?⁵

Thus began the outpouring of devotion-laden poems from Sundarar which are recited and sung with fervour even today. This is how Shiva waylaid Sundarar, points out Sekkizhar and presently turns to a series of devotees starting with Tiruneelakandar. Sundarar will reappear now and then as a connecting link and the concluding portions of *Peria Puranam* are about his ascension to Kailas.

While all the biographies in the *Peria Puranam* have a glow about them, some have a special appeal. The opening tale is about Tiruneelakandar who was a potter. As he kept repeating ‘Tiruneelakandam’ (The holy Blue-Throated One), he was called Tiruneelakandar. He led a happy life with his young wife. However, one day when he returned home after having spent a night with a courtesan, his wife bitterly asked him “to touch us no more in the name of Tiruneelakandam.” The potter became sane but it was too late. As she had used the plural “us”, he took it to mean the entire womanhood, gave up his extra-marital affairs and refrained from touching his wife also, though they lived in the same house for several decades.

One day a Shaivite yogi gave his begging bowl to Tiruneelakandar for safe-keeping. When he returned after his travels, the bowl could not be found. Tiruneelakandar’s offer of new bowls were met with disdain. The Shivayogi accused the potter of stealing. When the hapless potter remonstrated, he was asked to hold his wife’s hand, take a dip in the lake and pronounce an oath to proclaim his innocence. Nothing would change the mind of the Shivayogi. Finally, Tiruneelakandar and his wife decided to hold the two ends of a stick and dive into the tank:

As they held the ends of the stick to bathe,
 The ash-smear'd yogi said: “Hold on
 To your wife by hand.” The blameless potter
 Then explained his past to those around.

The potter-couple who immersed in the lake
 Lost their old age: young again,
 They seemed to be re-immersed
 In the lake of flowers showered from above.

Those who perceived this wonder did not see
 The Vedic yogi who had been there.

5. Book Seven, Decad One, verse 1. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

“How come this!”, they marvelled and then saw
Shiva with Parvati on the sacred Bull.⁶

The life of Tiruneelakandar is a fine example of how the Bhakti Movement carried on social reform in a big way. The Enemy Number One for Bhakti Movement was casteism. Caste-born differences have no place in the world of bhakti and even the so-called “untouchables” are given a very high place in the movement. The validity of Sekkizhar for the social life of Tamil Nadu may be gauged by the way the various life histories have been used to instill moral values in the life of the common people. The epic is recited, sung and serial lectures on Sekkizhar’s work are arranged all the time. The story of Tiruneelakandar had even been made into a very popular movie in the forties, starring M. K. Tyagaraja Bhagavatar. So too the story of Nandanar, the Dalit devotee.

Nandanar was born in the settlement (*cheri*) of Dalits in Adanur. We get to have an accurate picture of the living conditions of this marginalised community. The settlement was made up of tiny huts covered by old thatch. Hens and puppies ran all over the place. The pots for hatching eggs were half buried in the sand. The people were happy in their own way. Nandanar carried on his family service of making drums for temples and tying guts for the veena. Often he would be found self-lost, singing of Shiva. Occasionally he would go to visit sacred sites. Once he went to Tirupungur. Conscious of his caste-status, Nandanar remained outside the temple gates and prayed. Shiva’s compassion moved the Nandi to the left so that the devotee could watch the Linga in the sanctum clearly.

Nandanar’s greatest desire was to go and worship in Chidambaram. The day did dawn when he went to Chidambaram but was unhappy that he had no right to go to the sanctum for worship. With the help of the priests of the temple, he purified himself thoroughly by entering the fire and rose as a sage. It is interesting to note that Sekkizhar’s treatment of Nandanar in the background of caste has been questioned too. G. Vanmikanathan, an intense devotee of Sekkizhar and his epic, says:

It must be confessed that this account of Sekkizhar of the transfiguration of Nandanar, the dealer in the carcasses of dead animals, into a holy sage goes against the grain of all the special characteristics of the chronicles recorded in the *Peria Puranam*. A potter gained mukti as a potter, a fisherman as a fisherman, a toddy-tapper as a toddy-tapper, everyone of the sixty-three except Tiru-naalai-p-povaar (Nandanar) gained mukti without undergoing the ordeal by fire as Nandanar had to.

Sekkizhar has not done justice to the poignant pathos inherent in the life-story of Tiru-naalai-p-povaar.⁷

6. Canto 2, verses 38-40. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

7. *Peria Puranam*, p. 564.

Vanmikanathan finds the narrative to be somewhat offensive in the context of the Magna Carta of the Bhakti Movement. Consider Tirunavukkarasar's hymn:

Billions of riches, trillions of riches,
 giving them both to us,
 were they in addition to give us
 suzerainty over the earth and the heavens too,
 perishable wretches, their wealth,
 we will not esteem
 if they are not single-minded devotees
 of Maadevan.
 (On the other hand),
 even if they are lepers
 with all their limbs eaten away and rotting,
 Pulaiyars who revel in skinning the carcasses of cows
 And eating the carrion,
 Provided they are devotees to Him
 Who has hidden the River Ganga
 In His matted locks,
 Note that they are the God we worship!⁸

However, Sekkizhar's version of Nandanar's life has been a great help in eradicating casteist prejudices among the educated. Other chronicles like that of Naminandi Adikal, the pious Brahmin, also have helped in spreading the message of universal brotherhood and encouraging the religious view to prevail upon man's divisive mental constructions.

Some of the biographies deal with quiet, self-effacing devotees. Sekkizhar's story of the cowherd Anayar brings out the poet's mastery of carnatic music. Born in the Yadava community, Anayar learnt soon the art of mesmerising the cows with his expert playing of the flute. Sekkizhar says that Anayar wedded the seven notes of music to the *Panchakshara* leading to a universal delight of self-absorption. In fact the tale is full of shanta rasa. As Anayar sought to exhaust the inexhaustible reservoir of music made up of ever so many melodies projected through the triple stairway of octaves (*mandra*, *maddhya* and *tar*), the flora and fauna of the wilds were caught in Shiva consciousness. A divine quiet reigned everywhere. Nature ceased to be red in tooth and claw. The snake slithered on the peacock, the lion and the elephant stood in pairs and the tiger stood close to the cow. On one of the days when a superior calm descended on the area where Anayar played the flute, Shiva himself felt drawn to the music. He appeared there along with Parvati and blessed the devotee with a permanent

8. Book Six, Decad Ninety-five, verse 10. Translated by G. Vanmikanathan.

place in the heavens. This is a canto where the sheer description of music by the poet holds us in thrall. There is no action and we are effortlessly raised to higher regions of consciousness.

Another beloved story is about Pusalar whose name is associated with the celebrated Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram built by Rajasimha (Narasimharvarman Pallava II) and his son Mahendra III. In ancient times, there was a poor scholar named Pusalar in Tiruninravur. His one desire in life was to build a temple to Shiva. As he had no money, he proceeded to build a temple in his imagination. Brick by brick he built it and once it was completed in his mind's eye, he even chose a day for its consecration! Strange to say, that was the date chosen by Rajasimha for consecrating the Kailasanatha Temple. The Lord appeared in the king's dream and said he would have to postpone the sanctification as he would be busy with the consecration of Pusalar's temple at Tiruninravur.

The king was amazed and went in search of Pusalar and found the "temple builder" as the villagers called him. The king saw no temple. When questioned, all that Pusalar could say was, "did the Lord really take notice of my desire?" The king saluted the devotee with reverence and returned to his capital. Pusalar's sincerity became legendary and he is honoured as a Nayanar of whom Sekkizhar sings in his *Peria Puranam*:

Let us recollect Tiruninravur's Pusalar
Who wished to build a temple to Shiva
But had not the wherewithal.
And how he built a temple in his mind.

Having decided, he tried for money.
"How shall I build without capital?"
He began collecting every thing needed
To build, all in his imagination.

He got materials and carpenters,
Decided upon a date to lay the foundation,
Planned everything according to agamas
And built without sleeping even at night.

He (the King) came to the place and asked
Those present: "Where is Pusalar's temple?"
"Pusalar has built none," they replied.
"Let all scholars come," the king said.

After consecrating Shiva in the mind-temple
At the auspicious time, and having performed

Worship for a long time after,
The devotee reached the Feet of Shiva.⁹

The legend indicates the richness of the times in temple-building activities accompanied by the dissemination of Sanskrit Puranas to associate the temples with the Great Indian Tradition.

Not all the stories exude such quiet and peace. The Nayanmars were extremely selfless, and that led them to behave in a severe manner. Iyarpagai readily parts from his darling wife; Manakkanjarar shears away the lovely tresses of his daughter on her wedding day; Kalikkambar cuts off his wife's hand as she has not shown proper humility towards the devotees of Shiva; Eripathar cuts off the trunk of the royal elephant for upsetting a basket of flowers meant for Shiva's worship; the hunter Kannappa gouges out his own eyes to staunch the flow of blood from the Linga; Moorkar murders innocents to get money to feed Shiva's devotees; Sathiyar sliced off the tongue of anyone who criticised Shiva. All these instances of rajasic love pale before the chronicle of Chiruthondar.

Paranjothiyar was a minister of Narasimhavarman Pallava and had been instrumental in the Pallavan victory over the Chalukyas. After retirement he settled down in his ancestral village, Chengattangudi and served the devotees of Shiva. His humility earned him the sobriquet 'Chiruthondar'. He married the gentle Venkattunangai and had a son, Seeralan. The young fellow was very bright and began attending school. One day a Bhairava came to his house. On being requested to take food, the devotee of Shiva said Chiruthondar would not be able to meet his requirements in food. When Chiruthondar protested, the Bhairava said quietly: "Ah! I need to have the curry made of the meat of a son held by his mother and cut down by his father!"

Chiruthondar and Venkattunangai discussed the problem. As no mother would really agree to holding her son when the father killed him, they decided to offer their own son Seeralan for the macabre feast. A little later, the Bhairava was asked to come in and have his food. He asked for the little boy to join him but Chiruthondar said it was not possible. The guest would not eat till the boy came. What a dilemma!

The couple felt helpless and went out of the house, calling for Seerala. "Seerala! Come soon! Shiva's devotee wants you to eat along with him!" And such was Shiva's grace, Seeralan ran towards them as if he was returning from school. When the three went in there was no Bhairava, nor any plantain leaf filled with human meat. Shiva and Parvati now appeared and blessed the affectionate family. In this manner, there are waves upon waves of poetic narration in Sekkizhar's epic. They are sometimes soft, sometimes harsh, but always tend towards a calm of mind with the passions stilled. It is because of *Peria Puranam* that we have a dependable record of the lives of the Nayanmars. Little known bhaktas like Chirappuliyar, Kalikkamar and Narasinga

9. Canto 65, verses 1,5,6,12, 17. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

Munayarayar have been immortalised by the work which also tells us that there was a Buddhist devotee, Chakkiyar among the Nayanmars.

Three women have a place in *Peria Puranam* as Nayanmars. Karaikal Ammaiyar,¹⁰ Mangaiyarkarasiyar and Isaighaniyar. Born in the Chola dynasty, Mangaiyarkarasiyar was married to the Pandya king Nedumaran. She retained her Shaivite faith while Nedumaran was a Jain. She helped the young Jnanasambandhar with maternal solicitude in the propagation of Shaivism. Sekkizhar has only three verses on this noble lady, but all of them celebrate the triumph of womanhood:

A queen of women, our goddess, Chola princess,
A Lakshmi who saved the Pandysans from ill fame,
She spread the message of Ash in Tamil Nadu
With the help of Jnanasambandhar.

She was blessed by words of praise
By the jewel among brahmins, Sambandhar;
For long the Shaivite consort of Nedumaran endured;
Together they were blessed with Shiva's grace.

Hail the lady who enriches the Pandyan land
As the rich area of never-failing Kaveri;
Now to speak of noble Nesar of Sali family
Who wove dresses and loin-cloth for devotees.¹¹

It may be pointed out here that Sekkizhar has such a high opinion of women that he considers the entire womankind faultless. There is not a single villainous woman in the epic and all the women are ever laiving in Shiva consciousness. Men there are who are headstrong, impractical and foolish, but women are just perfect. Such is the priceless gift of Sekkizhar to women.

Having written down the life histories of sixty-two Nayanmars, Sekkizhar gets back to where he had left off in *medias res*, with Sundarar embarking on his sacred career as a hymnodist. We see Sundarar chiefly as "God's Companion" whose romantic life and performance of miracles fall in place thanks to the mellifluous poesy of Sekkizhar. *Peria Puranam* concludes with the Book of the Iravatham Elephant. Sundarar goes to the Chera land to meet his friend, Cheraman Perumal Nayanmar. One day when Cheraman Perumal was away, Shiva sent Indra's white elephant,

10. For a detailed account of this Nayanmar's life and works see the preceding essay, 'The Lady of Karaikal' in this series, July 2007.

11. Canto 66, verses 1-3. Translated by Prema Nandakumar. Each chronicle flows into the next by mentioning the name of the Nayanmar in the following canto. The life of Nesar follows that of Mangaiyarkarasiyar in the *Peria Puranam*.

Iravatham, to bring Sundarar to him. Sundarar mounted the pachyderm which then flew to Mount Kailas. On hearing of this, Cheraman Perumal mounted his royal horse, recited the Panchakshara in its ears that made the horse fly in the air and overtake the Iravatham! The friends were received with joy in Shiva's presence and Sundarar once again took up his post as Alalasundarar in Kailas.

Peria Puranam, indited in the 12th century, was received enthusiastically by non-Tamil regions also. In Kannada country, the Nayanmars were hailed as the Purathanas and the epic facilitated the growth of Veerashaivism. The earliest Kannada version of the epic is Hari Hara's *Shivananda Ragale* (13th century). The Devasiriya Mandapam in Tiruvarur inspired the Anubhava Mandapa of the *vachanakaras*. The Veerashaiva *vachanakaras* also came from all walks of life and belonged to different castes. Basaveshwara refers to many of the Nayanmars like Siruthondar, Nambi Aroorar and Cheraman in his *vachanas*.

Apart from its place as a manual of marvellous bhakti, *Peria Puranam* has been a Tamil classic for its language as well as architectonics. It brings up the rear for the Shaivite scripture in Tamil, the *Panniru Tirumurai* and is the direct inspiration for the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta. To conclude with the words of T. N. Ramachandran, a renowned Shaiva Siddhantin who gives the message of the epic in a nutshell:

We cannot borrow God. We must effect His new incarnation from within ourselves. Divinity must descend, somehow, into the matter of our own existence and participate in this peculiar life process. Our Nayanmars achieved this. It is of them Sekkizhar's work speaks with authenticity.¹²

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

12. *Saint Sekkizhar* (1994), p. 100.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A Blueprint for Tomorrow

Civilisation of Tomorrow (4 vols): Auro India; Auro World; Deva Sangha; Concept of the Deva Sangha; Bharat Jago; Beyond Hinduism; How I Came at the Feet of the Divine Mother by Dr. V. Manmohan Reddy. All published by The Mother's Integral School, Hyderabad.

At a time when cynicism appears to be ruling the lives of most men, Dr. V. Manmohan Reddy has come out with a series of booklets outlining the future of India and the world in the light of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Those who know Dr. Reddy have always admired the passion with which he views spiritual matters. Indeed, he has dedicated his whole life for the dissemination of the Master's vision. Even so, in his latest outpourings, he has surpassed himself. The series of booklets testifies to the strength of his conviction in the future of India and of humanity at large.

As I went through the booklets, I was struck by the way Dr. Reddy has assimilated the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. He presents the ideas in a manner which is very lucid and straightforward. In many quarters in the outside world, there is often a request to interpret Sri Aurobindo's works in the context of the present turbulent political scene. An effort was made in the early years prior to Sri Aurobindo's passing to look at contemporary events from an Aurobindonean perspective. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) then wrote a series of editorials in *Mother India* interpreting contemporary events and contentious issues such as the Kashmir problems, Red China, the Korean War, Secularism and Spirituality, the crisis over Pakistan and in Tibet. Regrettably, we do not have the physical presence of the Master who had in many instances guided Amal Kiran in concrete terms. In the absence of this saving light, outlining a social vision of the Aurobindonean kind is not easy. It goes to the credit of Dr. Manmohan Reddy that he has, on the whole, assumed a balanced tone and avoided hasty generalisations. While those familiar with Sri Aurobindo's literature may find the ideas spelt out here familiar, the novelty lies in the manner Dr. Reddy brings them together and advocates a line of action as the essential need of the hour. That a senior citizen like him can exhibit such energy and earnestness while the younger generation prefers a placid existence, is of course the paradox of our times.

Dr. Reddy writes like a man with a mission—the desire to see a new India, anchored to deeper spiritual principles, in tune with her inner spirit, able to shake off the age-long shackles and marching ahead to fulfil her destiny in the world. Such an approach may appear to be utopian in the present context, but Dr. Reddy is undeterred. To understand the secret of his spirit, one must read his account *How I Came at the Feet of the Divine Mother*. His life story records his idealistic upbringing, above all,

the influence of his parents who were endowed with great moral and spiritual qualities. The Darshan of the Mother in 1949 became a turning point as did other Darshans in 1958 and 1959. He outlines his education and the founding of the Institute of Human Study, the parting from his brother Prof. V. Madhusudhan Reddy in 1983, and finally the starting of the “Mother’s Integral School” in 1985. He chronicles other projects as well, such as the “Aurobharati Guest House” at Pondicherry.

The recurrent idea in Dr. Manmohan Reddy’s writings is the concept of the Deva Sangha, a term that was first used by Sri Aurobindo when he wrote a letter to his brother Barindra Kumar Ghose and encouraged his disciple Motilal Roy of Chandernagore to start a spiritual commune. It was an article of faith that Swaraj should lead to Samrajya. That is to say, a heightened spiritual consciousness ought to result in effective action in the world. This was of course easier said than done. Clearly disapproving of the manner in which the community was functioning, at a later stage, Sri Aurobindo dissociated himself from the Chandernagore experiment. It was left to the Mother to found and give direction to the fledging spiritual community at Pondicherry in 1926. So much after all depends on the role of the leader.

Manmohan Reddy sums up the key ideas of Sri Aurobindo in very precise terms. He avoids quotations, has assimilated the thought and presents it in very readable prose. In his exposition, the theory of creative evolution runs parallel to the history of India and the future of the world. And thus, he draws our attention to the office and limitation of Reason, to the problems of the Nation State and Secularism, Marxism and Capitalism, Religion and Communalism, biological cloning and Supramental advent, the contribution of the East and the West, Hinduism and beyond. It is, however, in the book *Civilisation of Tomorrow* that he delineates his vision. He laments the present reaction, the result of human beings’ failure to grasp the evolutionary drive in Nature. He pleads for the right attitude towards the individual and society, prosperity and equality. In all these, the keynote clearly is the need to grow in one’s consciousness, to elevate oneself from the norms of ego and self-centred behaviour. In one word, to replace the present consciousness that is divisive and fragmented by one that integrates and sees the fulfilment of one with the fulfilment of all.

While Reddy’s approach is persuasive, his books could do with better editing. Some material is overlapping and repetitive and makes the effort somewhat slipshod and unprofessional. At times, the logical coherence of arguments is broken by the sudden introduction of items and ideas that do not flow in a sequential manner. The books require a tighter structure and copy-editing.

These aspects apart, the booklets score well. Perhaps after better editing, they could be widely distributed so that the message of Sri Aurobindo reaches a wider audience. I have read and enjoyed these offerings and congratulate Dr. Manmohan Reddy for his labour of love. We certainly share his enthusiasm for the India of tomorrow.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

NAVANIT STORIES

PATHA-DARSHAK ¹

“WHO could he be? Looks like an idiot.... Such strange characters are not easily found.... Must be a mad man....” Such conjectures whizzed through the mind of Nasarvan-ji as he stared at a man with a long white beard and long white hair, rushing about to find a suitable seat in the train on a platform of the Poona railway station. “Such an unusual face...; such a peculiar dress...; such strange eyes...!” The Parsi youth’s curiosity knew no bounds.

As Fate would have it, the old man came by and entered Nasarvan-ji’s compartment. Parsis are, as a race, fun-loving, jolly souls, always ready for banter; so Nasarvan-ji thanked his Khudai for this immeasurable opportunity that He had sent to him. Quickly he whispered to the people sitting in his cubicle, “*Sambhaaljo haan,*² this is some mad fellow.” Thereafter the whole group began to glance anxiously at the newcomer who sat amidst them. Once such an idea enters one’s mind, it is over; whatever the poor fellow does appears to be symptomatic of insanity.

The train started. Soon it entered the famous Khandala ghat—Kashmir of the Deccan, enchanting ranges of hills, a rich kingdom of plants and trees that enthralled the soul through the senses, sparkling streams like scattered pieces of the diamond necklaces broken and fallen from around the necks of Apsaras flying over this heaven on earth, streams hurrying to the waiting ocean. Only the ill-fated would not strive to fill his being with this rapturous environment. That bizarre man thrust his neck out of the window and began to drink it in through his eyes.

Nasarvan-ji bent and whispered to the others, “You see? Didn’t I tell you? He is mad. The idiot! His head will hit one of these pillars and our train will be delayed. But we shall not let him fall; be ready.”

As the train proceeded the scenery became even more irresistible, as if the Lila of *vanadevis*³ had crossed the boundaries and Matter was psychicised. As if the gods were sprinkling *amrita* from the skies, the ghats were now bathing in a gentle rainfall and beauty was oozing from their every pore. That white-bearded man pushed himself further out of the window; or rather his body was being pulled out by the goddess of Beauty.

“This fool will now definitely fall out, but I shall not let him,” exclaimed Nasarvan-ji and jumped up from his seat and grabbed the man’s legs from behind.

Turning round at this unexpected development that man asked, “Yes, brother, what is the matter?”

1. Guide of the Path.

2. Take care, friends.

3. Goddesses of the forests.

“We here are not going to allow you to fall out of the window,” Nasarvan-ji said, letting go of the man’s legs.

Now the man understood why all these people around him had been glancing at him surreptitiously and exchanging strange looks and gestures. And he smiled.

“Well, old man, what were you peering at, leaning out of the window so dangerously all this while?”

“*Aambo thoonkyo; monh purr thoonkyo*”,⁴ the man declared.

Nasarvan-ji turned to his companions and spoke with his eyes, “See, was I not right about this man? Which normal man would say such a thing?”

That man took out a diary from his pocket and wrote in it: “*Patha-darshak amra-taru*.”⁵

The Parsi youth bent over and read it. An educated man, he realised that this man was not uneducated; *patha-darshak amra-taru* was written in a beautifully formed handwriting; a madman couldn’t have written this. He could be a scholar, only an eccentric one.

“Kaka,” he politely enquired, “what is this riddle, *aambo thoonkyo*?”

“‘The mango tree spat’ means it ridiculed us. ‘Can you recognise the little seed that I was?’ it asked. ‘It has kept its vow. But have you kept yours? You are still just a seed, no better than a lifeless stone! You have not nurtured the seed of divinity embedded in you and made it to flower and fruit like a mango tree.’”

“Kaka, please forgive me. We were fools to have taken you for a madman. Can you tell us your name, please?”

“Shiv-ji.”

“Shiv-ji-kaka, won’t you please explain to us this vow of the seed?”

“All right. The vow it was born with, its *raison d’être*, was to grow into a mango tree. Hence it burrowed deep into the soil and in time grew into this tree. It has fulfilled the purpose of its existence by providing shelter to so many creatures against wind and rain and heat, by enriching the atmosphere with the scent of its flowers, and by producing fruits that are coveted by the whole world. It has fulfilled its vow.

“‘I have fulfilled my vow,’ it now spits in our face, ‘but have you?’

“Indeed, how many of us, my friends, have manifested the flowers and fruits latent in the seed of divinity that is embedded in our inmost being? Observe and enjoy the Lila of Nature in this heavenly place, as I have been doing, and you will realise that these trees and plants have indeed fulfilled their vows.

“That is why I wrote *patha-darshak amra-taru*. And this *patha-darshak* tells us:

“‘To become Narayana is the purpose of your birth as *nara*. Giving yourself up to *Kāma-agni*, the fire of Desire will only reduce you to ashes; imprisoning yourself into the illusory formations of your mind, binding yourself to your external *sanskāras*,

4. The mango tree spat; it spat on the face.

5. The path-showing mango tree.

your blind physical habits, will only lead to atrophy, disaster, and death. Seek rather to establish yourself in the soil meant for you, then drink deep from its depths, and receive freely and fully the forces that seek to descend into you, and you will, one day, flower and fruit into a superman.

“From *nara*, O man, become Narayana!”

PUJALAL

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

The Vaishnava form of Vedantism which has laid most stress upon this conception expresses the relation of God in man to man in God by the double figure of Nara-Narayana, associated historically with the origin of a religious school very similar in its doctrines to the teaching of the Gita. Nara is the human soul which, eternal companion of the Divine, finds itself only when it awakens to that companionship and begins, as the Gita would say, to live in God. Narayana is the divine Soul always present in our humanity, the secret guide, friend and helper of the human being, the “Lord who abides within the heart of creatures” of the Gita; when within us the veil of that secret sanctuary is withdrawn and man speaks face to face with God, hears the divine voice, receives the divine light, acts in the divine power, then becomes possible the supreme uplifting of the embodied human conscious-being into the unborn and eternal. He becomes capable of that dwelling in God and giving up of his whole consciousness into the Divine which the Gita upholds as the best or highest secret of things, uttamam rahasyam. When this eternal divine Consciousness always present in every human being, this God in man, takes possession partly or wholly of the human consciousness and becomes in visible human shape the guide, teacher, leader of the world, not as those who living in their humanity yet feel something of the power or light or love of the divine Gnosis informing and conducting them, but out of that divine Gnosis itself, direct from its central force and plenitude, then we have the manifest Avatar. The inner Divinity is the eternal Avatar in man; the human manifestation is its sign and development in the external world.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 14-15)

The Gita may well have a thousand commentaries, but a time will never come when a new one will not be needed. There can be no such world-renowned scholar or man of deep knowledge as can write a commentary on the Gita on reading which we can say, that is enough, it will not now be necessary to add another commentary on the Gita, everything has been grasped. After expending all our intellectual powers, we can hope to understand and explain only a few facets of this knowledge. On being engrossed in Yoga or by works, all we shall be able to say is that we have had experience of some of its truths, or have applied in the course of this life one or two of the Gita's teachings in actual practice.

Sri Aurobindo

(English translation of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali writing *Gitar Bhumika*)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

Three Steps towards the Supreme Identification.

Give all you have, this is the beginning.

Give all you do, this is the way.

Give all you are, this is the fulfilment.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 109)

With Compliments from B.