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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE HILL-TOP TEMPLE

After unnumbered steps of a hill-stair
I saw upon earth's head brilliant with sun
The immobile Goddess in her house of stone
In a loneliness of meditating air.
Wise were the human hands that set her there
Above the world and Time's dominion;
The Soul of all that lives, calm, pure, alone,
Revealed its boundless self mystic and bare.

Our body is an epitome of some Vast
That masks its presence by our humanness.
In us the secret Spirit can indite
A page and summary of the Infinite,
A nodus of Eternity expressed
Live in an image and a sculptured face.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 154)

A THING THAT HAPPENED

[From *Karmayogin*, n° 28, 15 January 1910]

It is not the policy of the *Karmayogin* to dwell on incidents whether of the present administration of the country or of the relations between the ruling caste and the people. To criticise persistently the frequent instances of highhandedness and maladministration inevitable under a regime like the present does not lead to the redress of grievances; all that it does is to create a prejudice against the reigning bureaucracy. The basis of our claim to Swaraj is not that the English bureaucracy is a bad or tyrannical Government; a bureaucracy is always inclined to be arrogant, self-sufficient, self-righteous and unsympathetic, to ignore the abuses with which it abounds, and a bureaucracy foreign and irresponsible to the people is likely to exhibit these characteristics in an exaggerated form. But even if we were ruled by a bureaucracy of angels, we should still lay claim to Swaraj and move towards national self-sufficiency and independence. On the same principle we do not notice or lay stress on the collisions between Englishmen and Indians which are an inevitable result of the anomalous and unnatural relations existing between the races. It is the relations themselves we seek to alter from the root instead of dealing with the symptoms. But the incident at Goalundo detailed in this week's *Dharma* is one which the country has to take notice of, unless we are to suppose that the movement of 1905 was the last flaring up of national strength and spirit previous to extinction and that the extinction has now come. We have received a letter from the sufferer translated into English, it is from his own account that we summarise the facts.

A Brahmin Pandit with the title of Kavyatirtha, ignorant of English, was proceeding with two Bengali ladies from Mymensingh to Calcutta on Sunday the 2nd January by the Kaligunge mail steamer, and reached Goalundo at 11 o'clock at night, too late to catch the Calcutta train. He and some other passengers decided to spend the night in the steamer. While he was going down to look after his luggage, a European came up to him, caught his wrapper, twisted it tightly round his neck and said in Hindustani, "Who are you?" Getting no answer to his request for an explanation except the repetition of the question, he replied that he was a passenger. Thereupon without farther parley the Englishman proceeded to drag the unresisting Pandit to another steamer lying alongside. On the way the latter appealed to the sub-agent of the Steamer Company, a certain Sarat Babu, but, after a word from the Saheb, was told that he must accompany the aggressor to the Company's agent, with a name which the Pandit caught as Joyce. It was not, however, to the Agent, but into a first-class cabin where there were three other Europeans and two English women, that the Brahmin was dragged and the door closed behind him. No sooner was he in the hands of this company than he was charged with having abused the Englishman whom he had never seen before in his life, and a savage blow dealt him in the left eye which cut the skin and

set blood flowing freely. Blows after blows were rained on head and body, the head being cruelly battered, the lips cut open and some of the teeth loosened. His appeals for mercy were answered by a shower of kicks with booted feet on his head and the English women joined in the pastime by beating him furiously on the thigh with a dog chain. The unfortunate Bengali was by this time sick, stunned and almost senseless with the beating. The pain of the blows falling on his already bruised and battered head was intense and the iron chain drew blood with each cut. Fortunately he happened to fall against the door and it flew open. With difficulty he managed to crawl to the staircase; but at this moment the Englishman drew a revolver and, pointing it at him, cried out "Shala, I will shoot you." In terror of his life the Brahmin managed anyhow to plunge down the stairs and dropped almost senseless at the bottom. His eyes were clotted with blood, but he caught a glimpse of Sarat Babu coming near him with a European whom he conjectured to be the Agent Mr. Joyce. A few words were spoken between the two. Afterwards Sarat Babu returned and told the Pandit that he could expect no redress from the Company, but he might bring a criminal suit if he cared to do so. The farther happenings of that night need not be entered into, except to note the extraordinary conduct of the Company's officers who almost immediately separated the two steamers and took the Kaligung mail into midstream where they kept it until the Europeans had escaped in their steamer to Naraingunge. It was only possible to discover from the luggage labels that they belonged to a jute factory in Nakail near Aralia. There were some Bengali passengers present, including a pleader from Jessore and an employee of the Sealdah District Superintendent's Audit office but, though they sympathised with and cared for their compatriot after he had escaped with his life, there was none to assist him at the moment of the outrage, nor could even the piteous cries of the ladies awake a spark of resolution anywhere in those present. The Samitis of young men are disbanded, the cry of Bande Mataram has sunk to rest, and royally-minded individuals like the perpetrators of this murderous assault can finish their imperial pastime unhindered.

We feel a great difficulty in dealing with this case. We are not in the habit of dealing in violent language, yet to write coolly of it is a little difficult. And if we describe the assault as an infamous atrocity or describe these English gentlemen and ladies as cowardly ruffians and fiendish assassins, we have to recollect that such phrases are properly applied to Indian Terrorists and we may be prosecuted under Sec. 153A if we apply them to Europeans who, after all, did nothing but amuse themselves. Moreover, any indication of the proper deserts of these people, however carefully expressed, might expose us to forfeiture of our Press and prosecution under the new laws. If we point out that such things seem to happen with impunity under the present conditions in India, Sec. 124A is lying in wait, ready to trip us up, and the Andamans or twenty years' hard labour with handcuffs and fetters loom before our uneasy apprehensions. We do not know whether, considering how the Sedition law is being interpreted in Bombay, Nagpur and the Punjab, even mentioning this incident may

not bring us within its provisions. It is impossible, however, to pass it over in silence, and we proceed, therefore, to make a few observations, treading amid the pitfalls of the law as carefully as we can.

First, we have a word to the Government of East Bengal. It is very busy dealing with romantic dacoities, shapeless conspiracies, vague shadows of Terrorism, Arms Act Cases, meetings of Reform Councils overstocked with landholders and Mahomedans. We do not know whether it has any time or interest to spare for little sordid unromantic incidents of this kind. If it has any spare time, it might do worse in its own interests than glance once at that night's doings at Goalundo. It is obviously impossible to appeal to the law. Even if the identity of the assailants were fixed, the culprits would at once bring a trumped-up countercharge, say, of robbery, dacoity, Anarchism or any handy accusation, and the word of a hundred Bengalis, of whatever position or honourable antecedents, would not weigh with any but an exceptional Judge, against that of a single Englishman, whatever his antecedents or education. The only probable result would be to add a term of imprisonment to the Pandit's misfortunes. Even to reveal his name might expose him to the gentle mercies of the local Police in his District. All we can do, therefore, is to advertise the Shillong Government of what has happened and give them the chance of action.

Then, we have one word to say to the nation. The assault was motiveless and seems to have been committed merely because the Pandit was a Bengali and the Europeans felt in the mood to hammer a Bengali, perhaps out of the race-hatred which organs like the *Englishman* are busy fomenting with perfect impunity. There is no other explanation of the facts. The thing has happened and we wish to say at once that nothing in our remarks must be held to mean that we advise retaliation. But incidents like these never happen to a brave, patriotic and self-respecting nation; they happen only to those who cower and fear and, by their character, justify men who think themselves entitled to treat them like slaves. When the Bengalis showed themselves in the first ardour of 1905 a brave, patriotic and self-respecting nation, these incidents ceased to happen. If they are now reviving with features of a studied atrocity absent from similar brutalities in the past, it must be because we are ceasing to deserve those appellations. The nation is cowering in silence under the terror of repressive laws, all symptoms of national life are discouraged by the leaders and the elders as dangerous and untimely. Those who dare to speak words of hope and courage to the people, are denounced by your vernacular journals, shut out by carefully devised creeds and regulations from the body you still call the National Congress, boycotted by some of your District Conferences. If the Government see anarchists and dacoits in every bush, you see deportations and house-searches in every lal-pagri. You cower in your homes, speak your opinions in hushed whispers, allow the national spirit to die out and your Mother to go down again into the black pit from which we raised her. And this incident at Goalundo is the first ominous warning God gives you of the inevitable result.

There is only one way to uphold a nation's honour and to compel outrages upon it to cease automatically,—and that is to show that we are a nation and not a herd. If by any means within the law, the perpetrators of this outrage can be made to feel that Bengal is cannot be half-battered to death with impunity, it should doubtless be done. But no personal anger, no violent language or violent actions are needed. The reawakening of the national spirit ready to act fearlessly and blamelessly—for self-defence and prevention of a crime are blameless,—on every emergency great or small, will of itself be sufficient.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 408-12)

A perfect perfection comes only by living in the supreme and the whole Divine. Then the soul of man is united with the Godhead of which it is a portion; then it is one with all beings in the self and spirit, one with them both in God and in Nature; then it is not only free but complete, plunged in the supreme felicity, ready for its ultimate perfection. He still sees the self as an eternal and changeless Spirit silently supporting all things; but he sees also Nature no longer as a mere mechanical force that works out things according to the mechanism of the gunas, but as a power of the Spirit and the force of God in manifestation. He sees that the lower Nature is not the inmost truth of the spirit's action; he becomes aware of a highest spiritual nature of the Divine in which is contained the source and the yet to be realised greater truth of all that is imperfectly figured now in mind, life and body. Arisen from the lower mental to this supreme spiritual nature, he is delivered there from all ego. He knows himself as a spiritual being, in his essence one with all existences and in his active nature a power of the one Godhead and an eternal soul of the transcendent Infinite. He sees all in God and God in all; he sees all things as Vasudeva. He is delivered from the dualities of joy and grief, from the pleasant and the unpleasant, from desire and disappointment, from sin and virtue. All henceforth is to his conscious sight and sense the will and working of the Divine. He lives and acts as a soul and portion of the universal consciousness and power; he is filled with the transcendent divine delight, a spiritual Ananda. His action becomes the divine action and his status the highest spiritual status.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 581)

‘IF WE HAD A TRULY LIVING FAITH...’

January 11, 1914

EVERY moment all the unforeseen, the unexpected, the unknown is before us, every moment the universe is created anew in its entirety and in every one of its parts. And if we had a truly living faith, if we had the absolute certitude of Thy omnipotence and Thy sole reality, Thy manifestation could at each moment become so evident that the whole universe would be transformed by it. But we are so enslaved to everything that is around us and has gone before us, we are so influenced by the whole totality of manifested things, and our faith is so weak that we are yet unable to serve as intermediaries for the great miracle of transfiguration.... But, Lord, I know that it will come one day. I know that a day will come when Thou wilt transform all those who come to us; Thou wilt transform them so radically that, liberated completely from the bonds of the past, they will begin to live in Thee an entirely new life, a life made solely of Thee, with Thee as its sovereign Lord. And in this way all anxieties will be transformed into serenity, all anguish into peace, all doubts into certainties, all ugliness into harmony, all egoism into self-giving, all darkness into light and all suffering into immutable happiness.

But art Thou not already performing this beautiful miracle? I see it flowering everywhere around us!

O divine law of beauty and love, supreme liberator, there is no obstacle to Thy power. Only our own blindness deprives us of the comforting sight of Thy constant victory.

My heart sings a hymn of gladness and my thought is illumined with joy.

Thy transcendent and marvellous love is the sovereign Master of the world.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 54-55)

RADHA'S PRAYER

O THOU whom at first sight I knew for the Lord of my being and my God, receive my offering.

Thine are all my thoughts, all my emotions, all the sentiments of my heart, all my sensations, all the movements of my life, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood. I am absolutely and altogether Thine, Thine without reserve. What Thou wilt of me, that I shall be. Whether Thou choosest for me life or death, happiness or sorrow, pleasure or suffering, all that comes to me from Thee will be welcome. Each one of Thy gifts will be always for me a gift divine bringing with it the supreme Felicity.

13 January 1932

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother III, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 210)

WHAT SRI AUROBINDO MEANS TO ME

I WAS at College when I first heard of Sri Aurobindo. I read somewhere that he was a master of English as well as familiar with several other languages both ancient and modern. I also learnt that he was a great Yogi who had the power to appear in many places at the same time! What impressed my young mind was not so much this alleged power as his multi-linguism. I took it for granted that a great Yogi should be able to flout the common laws of space and time. But I was struck by the fact that this spiritual figure should be at home in such a number of languages and therefore of literatures. Here was somebody who possessed a Light from beyond our earth and yet saw meaning in earthly endeavour and expression. Such a seer could not but have some meaning for me.

However, I was engrossed in my own pursuits and they were not always such as might lead one to the spiritual path. The analytic intellect had grown rather strong in me and I came to carry like a challenging flame the modern temper of doubt and denial. During a short period I professed downright materialism and atheism. There was for me no Soul, there was for me no God. An idealistic vein in my nature loved great poetry and kindled up to great art: their “immortal longings” struck a responsive chord in my heart, but the modern temper held sway on the whole and the name Sri Aurobindo receded into the background.

A series of unexpected events jolted my intellectual self-sufficiency and sent my emotional part looking for a permanence behind transient things, a support of some love which would be eternal and all-understanding. The all-understanding-ness was an important desideratum. For I was quite a bit of a complexity, my mind and character having a great many sides which sometimes drew me in different directions. I now started searching for a Guru. A number of Sadhus and Yogis I caught hold of, asking them for some satisfying revelation. It was in this period of a vague Godward turn that I came across a Theosophist who was also an art-critic. When he saw that I was on a spiritual quest he said: “Nobody except Sri Aurobindo will satisfy you.” This was strange, coming from a Theosophist whose world is chockfull of occult Masters forming a coterie among themselves and leaving no room for any outsider like Sri Aurobindo. My friend added: “Sri Aurobindo has the Cosmic Consciousness.”

The Theosophist’s testimony in general and this phrase in particular joined up with the memorable impression made by the statement that Sri Aurobindo was a multi-linguist. But I still did not realise the exact nature of the spiritual life which he represented. The basic meaning of his Yoga had not yet gone home to me. Then a most amazing coincidence happened. I went to Bombay’s well-known Crawford Market to buy a pair of shoes. I took my purchase away in a box wrapped by the shopkeeper in a sheet of newspaper. On uncovering the box the news-sheet fell back disclosing a big headline: “A Visit to the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo.” Immediately I devoured the article. It gave a broad idea of the earth-accepting and life-transforming

Yoga practised in the Pondicherry Ashram. All kinds of work, all activities of thought, all movements of literature and art were sought to be taken up into spiritual life and given their fullest value. I felt nothing in me would be suppressed and discarded, everything would be fulfilled in the light of the Eternal and the Infinite. I wrote to the Ashram, seeking permission to come and live there. The reply was encouraging. So I made my pilgrimage to Pondicherry in the shoes that had brought me that eye-opener of an article.

I was twenty-three at the time. Yoga is not easy on any account—and for a young man it was bound to be pretty difficult at first. For, however life-accepting, no Yoga would be worth its name if the old turns of life were not rectified and dedicated to the Divine. Asceticism was never imposed in the Ashram, but to take everything with an inner detachment and equanimity was the constant call—and every minute was meant to be a gesture of remembering the Divine and offering oneself to Him. A subtle discipline in the midst of a wide freedom lay at the basis of this “Integral Yoga”. Yes, it was not a smooth canter all the way. But the returns were great. There were intense inner experiences. The discovery of an inmost self whose very nature is bliss, the sense of being free from the shackles of the body, the enlightening influx of a force from above the brain-mind—these were no small rewards. And the rewards were all the more rich because of the source from which they flowed: the grand personality of Sri Aurobindo, the beautiful presence of his co-worker, the Mother.

And the Master and the Mother came close to us with their gracious abundance of love and light in a thousand ways. The Mother met us again and again each day, a guide and helper in every problem. The Master, who a year before I joined the Ashram had withdrawn from public contacts in order to concentrate on the momentous work in hand and bring about its consummation sooner, was very far indeed from being a world-shunning recluse. He kept in touch with us all the time by writing profusely to us in answer to our questions on every imaginable topic. His interest in our literary activities was immense. He carried on his own literary creation too. Up to the end of his life he kept up his correspondence with me.

Not only did he want my self-critical faculty to be on the alert, but also asked me to comment on the epic he had been writing for years, *Savitri*, whose 23,803 lines of superb blank verse are at once a legend and a symbol and a philosophy, charged everywhere with what the ancient Rishis called the Mantra and what *Savitri* itself sums up in Mantric utterance:

Sight’s sound-waves breaking from the soul’s great deeps.

Patently he considered all that my well-meaning impudence felt to be occasional shortcomings or oversights in the colossal poem. Mostly he demonstrated to me my errors of judgment but now and again he gladly acted on my suggestion. Here was a Guru who never sat on a deliberate pedestal but built for himself a throne of thrones

in our hearts and minds by his intimacy and naturalness and that rare humility which stands always in front of the inexhaustible Infinite whose touch lends “a Yonder to all ends”.

The most divine being that I could ever hope to meet, Sri Aurobindo was also the most human person I have ever met. Nor was his humanness definable only in terms of his affectionate fatherly attitude which led us onward and upward by the very splendour of spirit he brought so close to us. Its definition has also a deep evolutionary meaning. Sri Aurobindo represented at the same time descending Godhead and ascending Manhood. The whole passion of man’s history, the whole arduousness of man’s aeonic adventure lived in him. He was no isolated sudden wonder, not merely a haloed visitor from another and brighter world come down on earth to set our air ablaze for a while and make us eager to go soaring into his empyrean. He stood as a gatherer-up of all our problems and difficulties into himself, making them part of his own flesh and blood so as to know them from the inside and find their final solution. Repeatedly has he said that unless he had passed through every difficulty to which his disciples were subject and unless he had discovered and exemplified on his own pulses the conquest of them he could never assure us that they could be overcome by us.

All through his own ordeals—the trials of a spiritual pioneer, the first invoker and realiser of the hitherto unmanifest “Supermind” which holds the original truth, the perfect model of every term of the cosmic evolutionary travail—all through the challenges of his Yoga he had the liveliest sense of humour. The transcendental Bliss of the mystic in him he humanised into a laughter ready for any occasion. He has even joked unreservedly about himself. And his divine levity has often shot with sunshine the clouds in which so many of his disciples got wrapped time and again. When my friend Nirodbaran, whom he had dubbed “Man of Sorrows”, wrote to him after a Darshan: “Your Himalayan austerity and grandeur take my breath away, making my heart palpitate”, he replied: “O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all you people?”

Our age is one in which old pomp and ceremony are laughed to scorn. Sri Aurobindo’s laughter has never been derisive, but he has made light of conventions and creeds that have outlived their use. The period in which he was educated in England—from his seventh to his twenty-first year—was, as he put it, “the heyday of materialism”. The mind of materialism has been simultaneously a liberator from age-long superstitions that curb the scientific drive of rationality, and a confiner within a new dogmatism of physical experiment and mathematical formula. Sri Aurobindo, the evolutionary Avatar, could not but allow the representative currents of modern thought to run through his being and come forth transfigured. In his early life he passed through a genuine phase of agnosticism. So he knew intimately how to deal with a mentality such as mine had once been. He has spoken of gigantic doubts through

which he had to cut his way to spiritual certitude. He has even said, incredible as it may seem from the lips of the greatest contemporary Yogi: “I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality.”

And he has followed up with the words: “I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting—I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake,—a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence.”

Here, in the universal significance, the lesson of aspiring will-power for the whole world, with which he, who bore within himself the supreme status that has need of nothing, filled the labour of his incarnate days—here is what Sri Aurobindo pre-eminently means to me.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(*The Sun and the Rainbow*, 1981, pp. 10-15)

*Apart he lived in his mind's solitude,
A demigod shaping the lives of men:
One soul's ambition lifted up the race;
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.
The universal strengths were linked with his;
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,
He drew the energies that transmute an age.
Immeasurable by the common look,
He made great dreams a mould for coming things
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 44-45)

THE STORY OF GOLCONDE

(Continued from the issue of October 2007)

4

The Builders of Golconde

THE Ashram of 1938 was very different from what we see today. There were hardly 200 inmates. All of them, adults, young or old, had chosen to follow Sri Aurobindo's Yoga under the Mother's guidance. There were a few buildings, mostly rented ones, for housing them. There were about eight to ten departments, each of which had started when some need of one type or another had arisen in the collective life of the Ashram. Most of the inmates, women or men, were given some work in these departments as a means of their sadhana, a way of offering themselves to the Mother. Life was indrawn, concentrated. The surroundings were quiet. The all-pervading aim was to be involved in one's inner quest through every activity, whether personal or for the collectivity.

In the following pages we have attempted to gather information regarding all those who participated in this construction. The basic information is an adaptation of the compilation by Shraddhavan: "Golconde: A Look Behind", which was published in *Mother India* in 1989-1990.

Professionals and Helpers from Abroad

The Mother had got a piece of land and wanted to build a dormitory to house the disciples in a beautiful building. Antonin Raymond, a friend of Pavitra, agreed at his request to take up the construction of this dormitory. Antonin Raymond used to work under the celebrated American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. He was Czech by birth and became a U.S. citizen afterwards.

...an unexplainable confidence in me from Sri Aurobindo brought about his request for my photograph, upon the receipt of which he apparently formed a judgement of my character and sent me a considerable amount of money for expenses to cover the transportation of my wife, son and myself to India.

(Extract from Antonin Raymond—An Autobiography)

He came to the Ashram in 1938, accompanied by his wife, Mme. Naoemi, and their only child Claude, a charming little boy of eleven.

Mrityunjoy, a sadhak who had joined the Ashram in 1929, also participated in

the construction of Golconde. He has left a written account of his experiences of that time.

The Mother had remarked after seeing them—that they were both “specimen of the best human stuff”.

...I frankly asked Pavitra what the Mother had meant exactly by Her words. “These people know nothing of the spiritual life,” I said ... Pavitra explained to me that being an Indian, I have, from my very childhood, been accustomed to judge men by their charitable disposition, their kindness to people and their religious tendencies. But, the Raymonds obviously did not pretend to be religious, and they were far from being charitable in the way an Indian would wish them to be...

Yet, as I spent more time with them—I would see their finer human qualities: the refined taste and idealistic thinking, the wide scope even in their material outlook. And the genuine interest they had in doing things as perfectly as possible.

We quote a few lines from the autobiographical article by Raymond, regarding his impressions of his stay in the Ashram:

Our eight months at the Ashram (in 1938) were extremely fruitful and instructive. Not only was the life in this Indian monastery the revelation of another way of life, but the conditions under which the work of the building was done were so remarkable when compared with those we had known in this materially bewildered world, that we lived as in a dream. No time, no money, were stipulated in the contract. There was no contract. Here indeed was an ideal state of existence in which the purpose of all activity was clearly a spiritual one.... Time and money were of secondary value. The situation was quite other than the usual one of being pinched between a client and a contractor. Here everything was done to free the architect completely so that he might give himself entirely to his art and science.

Mme. Naoemi, his wife, had taken to designing furniture and furnishings for her husband’s buildings. Here she experimented with varnishes, mixing the varnish elements in different proportions, to find a mixture that might best stand the local climate. She worked in a small dilapidated shed in the open space near the construction site, where later the Harpagon Workshop was built. Chandulal had given her a painter to help her in this job.

Antonin Raymond and his family left Pondicherry for U.S.A. in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II.

George Nakashima, a Japanese-American was Antonin Raymond’s assistant

architect who was sent by him to Pondicherry for Golconde work. He came towards the middle of 1936 for his first visit and went back to Japan after a month's stay here. He came back again in 1938 to work on Golconde.

He was the first foreigner with whom the sadhaks came in contact. "Very soon this handsome short-statured young man became intimate with some of the sadhaks," wrote Mrityunjoy. On his first visit in 1936, he was to give a detailed report of the site, climate etc. to his chief in Japan. He worked out all the designs for putting up a building in that environment. He had the idea of having louvre windows in the building for complete ventilation. He wrote:

Here I was received warmly by the Mother Mirra, and members of the Ashram. It was not long before that I joined them at meals, participated in the few occasions like the evening meditation... Since I felt I was receiving more than I was able to give—the answer to all my searches, finally conferring meaning to my life—I refused a salary and joined the community. Sri Aurobindo gave me the name of Sundarananda, which translates from Sanskrit into English as "one who delights in beauty"....

Golconde was something of a "do-it-yourself" project. I found myself not only the designer, but something of a general contractor.

He worked in close collaboration with Chandulal, the Ashram engineer. "It was the first high-strength reinforced concrete building in India." In Pondicherry there was no source of getting steel or cement. At that time it was cheaper and easier to import steel rods with test certificate from France and cement from Japan. "So Chandulal and I worked together ordering material. We got steel from France," wrote Nakashima. These steel rods arrived at Pondicherry by ship and had to be brought to the shore by means of the native boats and unloaded on the beach. From here they were piled up on bullock carts and brought to the site which was the area where later the Harpagon Workshop was built. Upon arrival, the steel rods were so bent that they had to be hammered straight.

As it was the first building of this kind, a mini-Golconde—a one-room model was built first by these two engineers. Nakashima's job was that of assistant architect; he had to follow his chief's bidding and do the day-to-day planning of details, the calculations and drawings. He also supervised on site the erection of the form-works for the concreting.

"Gradually our building rose," wrote Nakashima, "...with the devotion and concentration of the Ashram spirit we were able to achieve a workmanship of extraordinary quality... There were many innovations, such as the large thin, bowed concrete roof tiles..." Special moulds were made to cast curved roof tiles of 5' x 3.5' and 1" thick so that reinforcement did not get corroded because of insufficient cover. Nakashima observed, "... (When completed the work was so well done that) the

concrete had almost a metallic ring when struck, rather than the usual thud.” Mrityunjy wrote:

...being himself a first class carpenter, he worked alongside the local Tamil carpenters. He had to deal with coolies also. ... He was very friendly with the workmen. They did not know each other's language. This became difficult sometimes. Yet he seemed to be managing them better than I did my coolies and mechanics, whose language was familiar to me... I was in fairly close contact with him, and so I had a good opportunity to observe and appreciate the neat, meticulous, concentrated, hard-working and cheerful spirit of the typical Japanese character. Gradually I noticed that not only was his work going on outwardly for the construction of the building, but work was going on inwardly in him too, for the construction of himself.

George Nakashima left in 1939 after Japan had invaded China. “It was a most difficult decision,” he wrote. He returned to the United States and established himself there at New Hope, Pennsylvania as one of the foremost furniture designers in America.

Francicek (or François, as he was known here) Sammer, a Czech architect, a student of Le Corbusier was Antonin Raymond's assistant. He was chosen by Raymond to go to Pondicherry to build Golconde. He was quite a tall young man who became friendly with the sadhaks and stayed here for four years. His work was more in the office, making drawings and calculations. This office was Chandulal's office in the main Ashram building. He was on site when actual concrete laying was done. He designed the furniture of Golconde. He helped the sadhaks working in the construction work. Apart from working in Golconde he did some other work inside the Ashram building. The Sanchi style pillars in the Ashram courtyard were constructed by him to support the Service tree. The Mother liked these supports very much. He also did some cupboards in the front portion of Pavitra's room, in the first floor of the main Ashram building.

Regarding Sammer, Udar wrote:

...I had the very happy opportunity of working with him and learning so much from him. François was a perfectionist, and very much in the manner of the Mother, believed in “perfection in detail”. The perfection of the work done at Golconde added to the fame of this building....

I informed the Mother about all this and she was very pleased with such a way of working....

Another fine approach was how beauty and utility were combined. Around the building of Golconde there are water-tanks and water-canals connecting those tanks, with the use of underground canals from one side of the building to the

other. This makes a very beautiful boundary for the building, as if it were tied with a silver ribbon. In the tanks and also in some of the canals there are water plants, water lilies, goldfish and such things. All this is so very beautiful. Also, these serve well in watering the garden.

In 1942, during the World War, Sammer left the Ashram to join the British army. Many years later he contacted Pavitra, expressing his wish to participate in Auroville work as an engineer.

Agnes, wife of François Sammer, joined him in Pondicherry sometime after his arrival here. Sri Aurobindo gave her the name “Agni”. She was not a professional but she did whatever work the Mother required of her to help the Ashram. Though not a tailor herself, at the Mother’s request, she ventured to prepare men’s trousers, shorts, and shirts for the workers of the Golconde. Pushpa-ben, Albert’s mother helped her. In those days sadhaks used only *punjabis* and *dhotis* and there were no tailors in the Ashram to do such work. She left the Ashram in 1939 before the war started. She came back once in 1972 and stayed here for some time.

Professionals and Helpers from the Ashram

Batti gives a very appropriate picture of the work by sadhaks at that time (*Mother India* 1998, p. 98):

Times were different. Attitudes were different. Means were less but meanings were more. The sadhaks therefore achieved much with very little. Their assets were faith, devotion and persistence or perseverance. . . . They, whether engineer or plain worker, poured not only their sweat but also their heart-felt love into the job. They took great pride and derived greater joy working. They could, after long years, say with the same pride and joy: “I was there.”

Among the engineers who participated in the building of the Golconde was Chandulal, the engineer of the Ashram. He had no previous training in concreting works. Jatin Bal, another engineer of the Ashram, who was a mechanical engineer with a degree from Edinburgh University, was the only engineer here who had some previous experience working with concrete. He had worked in a British Construction Company for three years before joining the Ashram, where he had had the opportunity to be exposed to such work. Pavitra, our third engineer, was an engineer from the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique of Paris. He was connected to Golconde work but having other important assignments in the Ashram was not involved in the construction work as much as the other two. His work was more that of a guide, and he was a link between the Mother and the other engineers, from abroad or from the Ashram.

Chandulal and Nakashima built the first model room of Golconde. Nakashima gives a beautiful picture of the engineers working here:

When it came to the construction, there were three of us working on it: Jatin Bal, a Bengali engineer, Chandulal, the Ashram engineer and myself. You have to work together on it. It was a team work. We got going on the building. The three of us supervised. Everyone pitched in and it was a wonderful kind of feeling.

Mrityunjyot recounted:

The work, as it started physically from the plans on paper to the digging of the earth, revealed itself as an opportunity for the disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who volunteered for the work, to make an attempt towards an all-out offering to serve the Divine through a new contact with people of the most materially developed countries with their technical knowledge and corresponding formation of mind and nature. So the story of Golconde's birth and growth is revealing!

The main architect Antonin Raymond commented:

The purpose, as a matter of fact, of the dormitory was not primarily the housing of the disciples: it was the creating of an activity, the materialization of an idea, by which the disciples might learn, might experience, might develop, through contact with the erection of a fine building...

He highlighted some special aspects of work in the Ashram as observed by him.

On the job, ...perfect order was maintained, every nail was counted. Among the various disciples chosen to work on the building, this one engrossed in the business of testing the soil might have been a retired dentist; that one responsible for opening and closing the gate—he actually had been a banker—did his job with a conscientiousness impossible to obtain in a world where a man listens for the sound of the five o'clock whistle. There were engineers amongst the disciples: everyone lent a hand.

The work went on steadily, and as most of it was done by hand, it was done to great perfection. Some of the operations were delicate and very difficult, as for example precasting the large roof tiles 4 x 6 feet, setting the reinforcement, exactitude of form work, grading and cleaning the aggregate. It was done with an excellence such as I would not have achieved even in Japan. As a result, I am told that the dormitory building now, after 30 years, is in perfect shape and an object of admiration for all who visit it.

Mrityunjoy wrote:

I never knew that I would be one of the main workers at Golconde for five, six years, dealing with the labourers and the technical group of workmen with sand, cement, crude oil and machines. But it became one of my main jobs; some days I even worked 14 hours there, especially when a big concreting work was on... I was a layman from the standpoint of construction work: but Sammer and other engineers and architects instructed and guided us so well that after one or two years we could understand as well as any supervisor or technical advisor, and we conducted the work with the workmen very confidently.

Here are a few more lines from Mrityunjoy's reminiscences where he makes some interesting observations regarding the work for Golconde. These throw light on many unknown aspects of the situation.

...Raymond's original idea was that the entire construction of the building should take about six months. The total estimated cost was one lakh rupees. ... Steel bars of various lengths and diameters were ordered from France; zinc sheets to be used for the window-louvres were ordered from Italy; electrical and sanitary appliances and most of the other fittings were to come from Japan.

...The first shock to the chief architect, and a formidable one, came when the Mother announced that Sri Aurobindo did not approve of his proposal to employ four to five hundred workmen daily for the work. Sri Aurobindo had said, She explained, that employing outside workmen would bring in some "labour movement"... Though it went against the architect's plan, that decision immediately slowed down the tempo and it meant that the cost of construction would also necessarily increase.

...From the first stage of the real concreting work, the unskilled labour and lack of modern equipment proved to be a big obstacle to the planners. Raymond's calculation of the cost was based on his original idea of taking a large number of paid labourers and completing the work in six months. Sri Aurobindo wanted the work to be done with the workmen that our engineer Chandulal already had, those who were in tune with the Ashram atmosphere and had become like a part of the family... Later, when the work was going on in full swing, some more paid workmen were sanctioned but only a very few.

...But anybody who has the knowledge and experience of such a huge construction will not be able to believe that it was actually done with so few labourers. Of course it was not possible to complete the building within a short time as had originally been planned. ... Soon after the construction of Golconde got underway, the Second World War broke out. That hindered everything beyond imagination, at every step of the work. The price of materials began to shoot up

almost daily, and the hope of receiving the consignments already ordered from France, Italy and Japan had to be abandoned. The work moved on at almost a snail's pace. Yet the morale of the people behind the work—the engineers, architects and others—remained ever high, with the constant help and encouragement of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who were kept in constant touch with the daily details. The work never actually stopped; we were all kept busy, although the output was much less, due to the world-circumstances.

During the concreting days we had to be on site more than twelve hours a day. Instead of six months, it took about six years to finish the concreting; it ended somewhere towards the end of 1945.

(Meanwhile, by the end of 1942 all the three architects had left, due to the deterioration in the international situation.)

We must remember here the other sadhaks who participated actively in this work. Information regarding these inmates was mostly gathered from some sadhaks of the Ashram. We mention the names of only a few of them whose records we have found in our enquiries. There could have been some more.

Sanjiban, one of the Ashram artists, was there right from the beginning of the work. He had to supervise the job done by the workers.

Romen, a young man was involved in the concreting work. Soon after, Romen left the Ashram for sometime. Sanjiban, with the Mother's approval became also a part of the concreting team under Chandulal. He worked right from the basement up till the roof, on the curved tiles. It was a precision work of rolling etc. If there was any mistake, the tiles would break after the overnight curing in water. Working on the curved tiles was exciting and demanding. Sanjiban worked with the vibrator in concreting work. He came in close contact with Antonin Raymond, Sammer and Nakashima. Both Raymond and Sammer were also painters in water-colour and the Ashram artists learnt a lot from them due to this interaction.

Later, to some of his art students and to a few friends, Sanjiban had said something interesting. He had told them that the Mother had instructed them to choose only the "**living pebbles**" for the concreting work. This is what they did by choosing the heavy pebbles and discarding the lighter ones which did not seem quite solid.

Krishnalal, again another artist of the Ashram, also used to work there.

Nishikanta, another artist and better known as a poet, was also one of the team. He used to stay in a small room on the premises.

Kalyan, a hydrological electric engineer by profession, trained in Italy, was part of the concreting team. After each day's work he would go to the Mother who listened very attentively to his report of all the work done by their team that day.

The main store of the building service was situated in the present 'Drawing office' building, situated at the corner of the rue St. Gilles and François Martin. A

sadhak, Ramchandra, was in charge of that store. He arranged his material for storing meticulously as per the Mother's guidance. High cupboards were arranged against the walls. There were partitions of various sizes in these cupboards. All the material needed for building work, even the nails were arranged meticulously according to their size. This was the main store from where materials were issued for all the building work, including that of Golconde.

Poornananda was also part of the Ashram Building Service. He was in charge of a store which was situated where the Harpagon stands today. He was given the job of keeping stock and taking care of all the steel rods used for the building. It seems the rods were always neatly stacked according to size and there was not a spot of rust on them! (*Mother India*, 1998, p. 98) There was also one room in Golconde which was used as store by Poornananda. In the store, all the cement bags were rearranged everyday, from the top to the bottom of the pile. This was done to prevent the possible hardening of cement which could have happened if stacked in one place for too long a time. All paint tins were thoroughly cleaned after use. So were the empty cement bags. These were arranged neatly, in an orderly manner, so that if needed they could be used again.

All the nails used for the frames for concreting had to be straightened, counted and used again. Hundreds of nails were required everyday. The store was maintained with scrupulous care, where "every nail was counted" as observed by Antonin Raymond.

They also supervised the repeated sieving and washing of the sand used for the construction. This was very rigorously checked so as to maintain a uniform grade and cleanliness of the sand. The pebbles used for concreting were sorted carefully. Lighter pebbles would be rejected and then, all the pebbles were similarly cleaned. This work was done in the Golconde premises itself.

[Poornananda] needed no assistant and kept no stock-book. He had it all in his head. Any item moved or removed at once caught his eyes—or was it some other sense that was teased?... He often claimed, referring to the construction of Golconde, that no other work had been done with the same spirit since then in the Ashram. (*Mother India*, 1998, pp. 98-99)

Poornananda recounted that when the steel for the Golconde construction was brought in the carts to the site, the bars would be stacked in the open space which is now the Harpagon Workshop. The Mother had issued instructions saying:

"put them in such a way that not a bit of noise comes." The steel rods were really heavy and big, they were difficult to handle. Even then, the job was done so as not to disturb Sri Aurobindo. "So it was done. Tons of steel bars, not just a dozen or so—brought down from the carts without noise! How they did it I

cannot envisage. I can only lose myself in admiration.”

Noren Singh, a young man of nineteen became an ashramite in 1939. He was working as a Supervisor, looking after the rod bending work for the steel structure for the concrete foundation. He had to choose the correct diameter of the rods, get them cut and bent as per the plan. He joined the workers himself from time to time in bending the rods. He also assisted in the concreting work when needed. He remembers, “The work would go on systematically, a routine was fixed. Floor by floor was taken up and done, one room, two rooms together. We were doing the concreting. As soon as the layout and structural work would be over, concreting would start. We would put concrete blocks in between the rods and the wooden casings. It went on smoothly. After completion of the concreting job, the Mother used to send us special drinks which came from France. There was a separate room in the Golconde premises where we sat to enjoy the wonderful taste!”

Girdharilal, a mathematician, also worked here. The steel rods were stored according to their dimension and length. Girdharilal helped Noren Singh to choose the right length of rods required for his work from the main stock so that there would be minimum wastage of steel rods.

Shanti Doshi and Nagin Doshi, at that time young boys, were given work by the Mother for Golconde. We reproduce here the Mother’s letter to Shanti Doshi published in *Mother India* in 1990:

February 1, 1938

I wanted to ask you something. You know that we want to put up a new building, using the most modern methods. A great many workers are needed to supervise the work. I thought the time had come for you to take an active part in the overall work. Of course this will imply regularity, steadiness and a great sincerity. You would have to work eight hours a day *regularly* except Sundays. The architect, who will arrive from Japan in a few days, will give you all the instructions required for the work. Tell me what you think of it, and whether I can put your name on the list of workers.

The Mother

The work given to Shanti Doshi was to supervise the preparation of the wooden frames for concreting of the pillars and the floor.

Abhay Singh worked with Pavitra-da in his Ashram workshop. Here he worked with the vibrator which belonged to Pavitra-da’s workshop, during the concreting work.

Arun Ganguli and Bikash Mukherjee, two young boys working in Pavitra-da’s workshop also participated in concreting work with the vibrator. They helped in concreting the partition walls and also pillars.

Udar was closely connected with Golconde work from the very beginning. The main concreting work of Golconde was over sometime towards the end of 1945. Still a lot of work for completing the building such as fixing of the louvre blades, the doors, the other fittings, finishing the floor etc. was to be done. This work was taken up by Udar and his team of workers.

In the original design, the louvres of the building were to be made in imported zinc sheets. But it was considered not to be practical in the climatic conditions here. Udar wrote "... so, as suggested by the Mother, asbestos cement louvres were ordered specially to our design." These were supplied by the Asbestos Cement Factory at Coimbatore. Udar continued:

Later came the question of fitting up the louvres, and for that a large number of brass fittings had to be made and thousands of brass bolts, nuts, etc. We needed a foundry, as the blade handles, etc. had to be cast to the special shape designed by the architects.... All had to be made, [as per specification] ... She gave me the Harpagon place to set up my workshop for this. There was nothing there but a tumble-down country-tile-roofed shed... there I was at Harpagon to make all the brass fittings for Golconde. These had to be cast in brass, so we first had to set up a foundry. I had been given some workmen, very good ones indeed, with a traditional competence, who turned their hands well to modern machine parts. The Mother gave me a large heap of old brass vessels which had to be broken down and melted and cast in the foundry and then machined. [Pavitra could spare a hand drill.] That was the only machine I started with. But Pavitra was indeed most helpful as he did all the machining work very, very well indeed in his Atelier in the Ashram Main Building....

Then about the brass bolts and nuts... There were pretty drawings which conformed to no standards at all. All this I explained to the Mother and told her that I could choose something very close to the drawings for manufacture. But the Mother was adamant. "Not even a fraction of a millimetre must be changed. If taps and dies are not available for these drawing sizes, then make your own!" And this I did—very largely by hand and helped a great deal by Pavitra who had a lathe in his Atelier. I worked around 18 hours a day and did so much work with small files—without handles—that there grew a small hole in the palm of my right hand which is still there. It is my "glorious scar" of the Divine's battle.

Millie, Udar's younger sister helped him in the Harpagon Workshop with his works of nuts and bolts for Golconde.

Abhay Singh, as already mentioned before, worked in concreting and also in Pavitra-da's workshop making the brass fittings for the louvres of the building.

Arun Ganguli and Bikash Mukherjee did the same work.

In the rooms and on the east and west walls on the outside a special plaster was

laid prepared from river shell lime and white marble powder ground very fine on a traditional grinding stone. Then in the plaster some jaggery was mixed. It is the traditional plaster which was used in many places in India. Here it is known as Chettinad plaster. It has to be applied by those who have special training for it. It gives a quality far superior to what we find today.

For the floor of Golconde, slabs of Cuddapah stones were used. Vitthal-bhai, better known in the Ashram as Tulsi, worked in the Ashram Building Service. He went to Proddatur in Andhra Pradesh and brought different types of samples of Cuddapah stones. Mother chose the type that was to be used for Golconde work. Tulsi went back again, and got the consignment of the required stones. He received a lot of help from Dr. Narasimhaiyya. After the Doctor and his wife passed away, his place became the first centre in Andhra Pradesh.

Udar wrote:

It (the Cuddapah stone), has been used for ages—but not as we have done in Golconde: highly polished, and with the sides cut by machine to a very straight edge. As the machines to do this were not available here at that time, I had to design and make our own machine at as low a cost as possible.

Pavitra-da had designed and constructed a machine for polishing these stone-slabs. The shining stones resemble marble. This machine was also kept in a shed in the Harpagon Workshop. From Pavitra-da's workshop Arun Ganguli used to go there and do this job. Stones were kept in the Golconde compound and the required number of slabs for a particular work would be brought to Harpagon and were polished.

Madan Poddar, one of Udar's helpers, reports that all the big stones for making the floor were first stocked in the Coco-Garden—an area belonging to the Ashram which was developed into Precast Concrete Works later. The required number of stones for any particular work would be brought to a workshop facing the Golconde building, cut to size, and sent to Harpagon for polishing. Then they were taken to Golconde in consignments for laying the floor. Madan Poddar fitted the Cuddapah tiles on the passages and the staircase only. All the rooms were by that time already fitted with these tiles.

Bula and his team of Electric and Water Service workers laid down the electric lines and fixtures for Golconde. Plumbing and water connection was also his responsibility. Kalyan, already mentioned in connection with concreting work, used to work with Bula. He was also there during the whole work. Chandu-bhai was also part of this team.

The electrical pipings were concealed in the concrete, ending in boxes made with extraordinary perfection, especially for check nuts and wooden bush and earthing. The boxes were lined inside with mica foils for insulation. One light and two plugs were provided for each room. Special imported switches were used so that there would

be no noise at night. Optimum economy was achieved in the use of electricity by studying the exact requirement of light in the room. Thus a 40 watt bulb was fixed at the centre of the room and a specially designed table lamp, also fitted with a 40 watt bulb, was the source for additional lighting. The construction of the building is such that no fan is required. For plumbing the best fittings and fixtures available (imported ones) were used.

Chandu-bhai was given a room to stay in Golconde and was in charge of the maintenance of electrical and plumbing connections. Later Chandrakant helped Chandu-bhai in the maintenance of the pumps.

Vithal-bhai used to be on gate duty.

When the building construction was over, Jagadish-bhai of the Ashram Sanitary Service, did all the drainage and sewage connections.

Visitors

Some visitors to the Ashram used to give their service during their stay, by working in Golconde. Here are the names of a few who have done such work:

Uday Singh Nahar, on his long visits, would work in the concreting section. Later on he stayed here permanently and continued to do the same work.

Satyabrata Sen, a medical student, worked during his visits with the carpenters for Golconde work.

Robi Ganguli visiting the Ashram in 1941 as a young boy, did some work with Mrityunjoy to run the vibrator for concreting work.

(To be concluded)

CHITRA SEN

Whatever you do, always remember the Divine.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother I, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 10)

LALLUBHAI PATEL

(12 September 1918 – 11 July 2007)

I BETTER tell this before it is too late, before the passage of time blunts my memory and we relegate another good old sadhak to the silent records of Ashram history. It took quite some time for me to convince Lallubhai to share his memories of his life at the Ashram. He, like so many dedicated, totally unintellectual, physical workers of the Ashram, immediately said, “Why don’t you ask Amal Kiran?” For him, Amal Kiran was the present repository of all information and there was nothing left to be said by anybody else.

“But we would like to know your experience of Ashram life.” I persisted.

“I have nothing to tell, I have done only physical work.”

“But that is what we would like to know.”

Finally, he did come out with a few details of his life. But I won’t go into them right now except for the broad outlines. Lallubhai arrived in Pondicherry on 20 February 1938, a day before the Darshan. He already knew Pujalal in Gujarat and was a product of the Akhada movement. So he had a well-built sturdy physique and could cover the full length of the Playground in handstand position. In work, he was mostly associated with the cleaning of the rooms and furniture of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. That is how he later became involved with the conducting of meditations in Sri Aurobindo’s room at 9.30 a.m. He recounted to us with great glee the various ways in which he and Pujalal meticulously cleaned the furniture in the rooms upstairs. Pujalal had been taught by the Mother herself the various intricacies of what we dismiss as the simple operation of cleaning. Among the many instruments they used was a wooden poker with a protective cloth to tackle the crevices and cracks of the ornate pieces of furniture and the rare artefacts kept there. I gaped stupidly at him realising my enormous ignorance of this part of the work. One day he took us to the staircase of the Meditation Hall and showed us exactly where the Mother stood on the staircase to meet the sadhaks and sadhikas of the Ashram in the early years. There was such a remarkable clarity in the physical memory that my esteem for him doubled several times. Earlier, I had dismissed him as that old-fashioned sadhak who went about dressed like a monk in a white cassock—he used to wear a half-sleeved long robe which dropped from his shoulders all the way down to his feet, which made him look like an Ashram version of Friar Tuck. When, with great temerity, I asked him why he wore that robe, he laughed and said, “It is because of the mosquitoes.” It was thus only a simple ruse to escape from the mosquitoes and there was never any “old yoga” associated with it, as so many of us would have concluded without ever bothering to confirm it. Now I come to the story which he kept secret for so many years and divulged to me one evening in front of the Ashram gate.

The incident goes back to December 1950, during the last days of Sri Aurobindo.

Lallubhai was not in the team of attendants serving Sri Aurobindo, though he was doing his daily rounds of cleaning the furniture in the rooms upstairs. He was often working in the very next room, that is, the central passage room between Sri Aurobindo's room and the Meditation Hall upstairs. But he was not supposed to look at what was going on in Sri Aurobindo's room, *even if the door was open*. What a punishment for Lallubhai! Champaklal, to whom he was quite close, sometimes kept the door ajar, so that Lallubhai could have the Darshan of the Lord. I suppose Lallubhai transgressed the law in those rare moments with some concession from the Mother. Then, one day he got the chance of his lifetime, that of serving the Lord personally. Sri Aurobindo was not well; he needed to be supported while Champaklal attended to the divine patient. Generally, there was a second attendant to help Champaklal, but at that moment there was none. Champaklal beckoned Lallubhai, who was in the next room and had already sensed the crisis. In a trice, Lallubhai jumped on to the battlefield and supported the Lord from behind. And do you know how he did it? He supported Sri Aurobindo's back squarely and firmly with his back.

This is how Lallubhai describe it in his note:

On the last day before Mahaprabhu Sri Aurobindo gathered up His divine [*aihi* *parthiva*] terrestrial Lila, He fulfilled my life's aspiration and prayer.

From the time this earth was created Mahapurushas have taken birth in the human form to sustain it, and after Their divine Lila was over, returned to Their own plane....

In those days, when I was going upstairs for my service to the Divine, my prayer was: "O Lord, if even once in my life, I receive a touch of Thy divine Body, I would consider it my greatest fortune."

The day before Sri Aurobindo withdrew, His body seemed restless: now wanting to lie down, now to sit up.... But in order to support Him while He was sitting up, the late Champakbhai told me, "Sit on the cot behind Sri Aurobindo." Then he placed a big thick pillow between Sri Aurobindo's back and mine. I don't have words to describe the ananda I felt when in that position. When Sri Aurobindo was lying down and asked to be made to sit up, Champakbhai would stand on His right side and I on His left, and supporting Him with our hands on His back, we would help Him to sit up. Sri Aurobindo's body was so soft and smooth that one would think it impossible to hold it, as if it was bound to slip out!

That same night, at twenty minutes past one o'clock Sri Aurobindo gathered up His divine earthly Lila.

...it was an experience I shall never forget.

RAMAN REDDY

KANNAN, MY DISCIPLE

A FREE RENDERING OF A TAMIL POEM OF SUBRAMANYA BHARATI

(In this poem Sri Krishna comes to the poet as his disciple and plays his usual tricks.)

He who is the one and the many,
Who is the Lord of all existence,
Incarnate as the boy dark and resplendent,
The elusive enchanter of human hearts,
The peerless Player of pranks enthralling,
KANNAN, the master-trickster,
As if inferior to me in wisdom,
As if with my help, through my grace,
Keeping my company, hearing my words,
He wished to elevate himself,
As if he very much admired, worshipped
My great wisdom, marvellous poetry,
Kannan, the mischief-master came to me
As disciple.
Oh God, how I was caught in that net,
How much I suffered day and night,
How sorely vexed in heart and mind,
All that to recount, oh, heavens,
Is a long, long tale,—a Mahabharata.
Fool that I was
Not changing my heart
To change others' thought;
Not conquering my ego
I sought to fix my friends firmly in God,
Bliss everlasting ever eluding my clasp,
The thousand and one sorrows of mankind to wipe off I fought!
This great folly of mine,
Him it attracted; to teach
A good lesson he wanted;
He came to me of his own accord
And showered praises on me:
My wisdom, my character,
My genius, my poetry he admired,
“None like unto thee in all the world.
Fain would I become thy disciple,

None other can I call my guide," he said.

So goes the familiar adage,
 "You pat a man on his back,
 His head swells instantly."
 So my swollen head getting more swollen
 Greedily grasped the good chance.
 To put him on the path of virtue,
 To make him tread the way of the Vedas,
 To help him climb to the summit of glory,
 To make of him a human god
 I poured on him advice profuse and in plenty.
 Tread this path only and not that,
 Do this only and not that,
 With such people only mix, avoid the others,
 Such books alone read, shun the others,
 Desire not the forbidden fruit,
 Strive only for wisdom and truth
 And so on and so forth.
 Endlessly I laboured, on him,
 Quoting Shastras profound, dharmas sacred,
 Exhorted him,
 Struggled with him, bored him through and through;
 Preaching all my stock of book-knowledge,
 Preconceived notions, mental ideas, moral precepts.
 Well you know
 That old story,
 Where the wife always did
 The exact opposite of what the husband said.
 Such a one was this disciple mine
 Who preferred the path easy and serpentine,
 And went along merrily in his line,
 Whilst the pathetic guru could only look and sigh in vain.
 This petty self of mine,
 For which name, fame, status,
 Position, respect, dignity among men,
 Were of importance supreme,
 Seeing my Kannan, my own dear disciple,
 From first to last, disobedient to me,
 Not merely so,
 But going to ruin down the paths

Forbidden by all men wise and pure,
 And bringing on himself and on my inflated head
 Infamy, hate, insult, wrath and ridicule of all men,
 Felt sorely hurt and in mournful mood
 Passed day and night in sorrowful plight,
 But he went worse and worse.
 And reached that stage when
 All elders of the place, good men forsooth,
 And ladies respectable, virtuous no doubt,
 Looked down on him with contempt and revulsion
 And said, "A madcap he has become now, no doubt."
 Such anguish and sorrow never have I felt before or after—
 Torment of mind, pain of heart, misery of soul.
 That the one disciple dear to my heart
 For whom day and night I had toiled and wrought
 Should become unworthy in all men's thought,
 Cut me deep, like a sword,
 Now as a last resort,
 I gathered up my wits at last,
 Exhorted him to turn a new leaf;
 With Shastras, Puranas, Scriptures old and new,
 With sweet words, cajolery, wise words, threats,
 To save him I exhausted all my breath,
 Hoping that even if to the divine life he did not rise
 He might not from the human state
 Down the depths of degradation
 To perdition go. So with him I pleaded,
 Harangued, argued, begged to my uttermost,
 In so many words, in so many ways.
 Alas, alas, all in vain.
 Uncontrollable, savage, mad,
 Naughty, no attachment, no interest in anything,
 Careless of all consequences, of people's opinion,
 Like a monkey, like a bear, like a ghost on the tree-top,
 An altogether strange being he stood
 My Kannan.
 All my Himalayan efforts gone to waste,
 My words of wisdom thrown to the winds,
 With ego and self-respect deeply wounded
 I took a formidable vow: Change this fellow I must,
 Anyhow, by any means, at any cost.

Once should I fix him to a single spot,
 Make him stick fast to a single job,
 Then will he walk straight with a single mind,
 Success then shall be mine, I thought
 And waited for my time to come at last.
 One day, in my house, I caught him—
 “Great is thy love for me, my son,
 My entire trust I place on that precious love of thine,
 And from thee ask a boon which thou shalt not refuse,
 But promise to give it for love of me.
 Thou knowest well, my son,
 That much depends on the company a man keeps
 For all the good that he attains
 And his onward progress on earth.
 Oh how I wish I could spend all my time
 (Except that much needed for earning bread)
 In the good company of wise men,
 Learned in logic, versed in Scriptures,
 Steeped in poetry, preoccupied with Truth.
 Such a one I know not any here
 Who can spend the whole time with me,
 But only thou. Therefore I pray,
 Refuse not but stay
 With me for a few days at least.
 Now, without delay, give thy assent,
 And set my heart at peace and rest.”
 So I said and he replied,
 “So be it, I agree,
 But thou knowest well,
 To remain idle the whole time
 I loathe of all things most,
 Stay with thee I shall, if only thou showest
 Some work here for me to do.”
 “Well then,” I said, well knowing him
 And his talent and his skill,
 “Take all these my innumerable scribblings,
 Hastily done and disorderly kept.
 I know that thou hast the capacity and the gift
 To make of them good poetry and write them well.
 This work thou shalt do day after day for me,
 Who shuns sloth in earnest,

And thou shalt have a work to do.”
 “Good,” he said and waited for a trice,
 Then up he rose and spoke, “Now! I’m going.”
 Sharp was the pain I felt in my bosom, Oh the anguish!
 The anger raging hot in my veins like fire
 I curbed and snatched some old writings of mine and
 threw them into his hands,
 And shouted, “Do it now!” He took them
 As if very willing and very amenable, and waited
 For a minute more only and said again,
 “I’m going.”
 Wrath in my blood rushing to my head
 Made me roar like a wounded lion:
 “What a fellow art thou,
 This conduct of thine to say the least is despicable,
 Of going back on thy promised sacred word.
 True then, it is, what people say of thee,
 Indeed thou art a madcap and even worse.”
 “Tomorrow I shall do it,” he said.
 “Here and now art thou going to do it or not?
 Speak one word and no more.”
 Sudden was the reply and curt:
 “No.”
 Fierce was the ire that rushed through my veins,
 Blood-red became my eyes and my lips trembled.
 Fire was in my speech and I blurted,
 “Out, out, thou ghost; away from my sight.
 Never more shalt thou show that fiendish face of thine.
 God forbid I ever meet thee
 Again in this world. Go, go, go.”
 Mild like a lamb he got up and moved through the door softly,
 Tears were in my eyes, a silence
 Strange filled my breast.
 Deep in my heart a tender voice addressed him:
 “Go, my son, live thou long
 And be happy, anywhere. May the gods
 Protect thee always. All I could, I did
 For thee, to change thee, to set thee
 On the narrow path of virtue
 But failed utterly.
 Go thou and be blessed!”

Kannan went, but came back in a twinkling
 With a good pen in his skilful hand
 And in a minute finished the work given by me
 And the work was the work not of one ordinary,
 But of a poet divine, a born genius, an artist.
 “Sir, give up all thy worry; I shall
 From now on obey thee always,
 Carry out all thy wishes in full.
 Never again shalt thou come to grief through me.”
 Such sweet words he uttered and with a sweet laugh disappeared
 Only to reappear in my heart the very next moment,
 With the self-same laughter, and that sweet voice spoke to me once again,
 “Son, to create, to change, to undo a thing
 All these are not in thine hands
 Know this truth: and when thou sayst
 That thou hast failed utterly,
 Thou hast won already.
 Do thou all thine works in the world,
 But give up all thine desire, attachments and anger of old.
 So shalt thou never become unhappy
 And my best wishes with thee forever.”
 And those words even now I hear.

P. V. SITARAMAN

We have love for a boy who is dark and resplendent,

...

We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning:

He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;

He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,

Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.

Sri Aurobindo

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 40)

THE PARTITION OF INDIA AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

(Continued from the issue of October 2007)

Part 2

In the second part of the article, we continue with our study of Pakistan and cast a brief glance on the other nations of the subcontinent. Pakistan today seems to be going through critical times and all the recent events in Pakistan,—the Lal Masjid incident, the Supreme Court decision on the Chief Justice, the civil war in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier Province, the apparent rethinking by the United States regarding its policy towards Pakistan,—are likely to have a tremendous impact on the country. Consequently, many political commentators and political analysts are wondering and speculating about the future of Pakistan. Is it heading towards becoming a failed State and an ultimate disintegration?

In this part of the article, we shall try to show that all these events were inevitable, that they are symptoms of a deep malady and also that what is happening today is only the tip of the iceberg: much more will follow. And all these events are happening precisely for one reason: Pakistan is an artificially manufactured State, based on false concepts and furthered by fraudulent and violent methods.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

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

(Autobiographical Notes, p. 500)

For Pakistan is not a nation in the true sense of the word and therefore will not and cannot last. It will disintegrate and get dissolved by the sheer law of political forces. Nature will see to it that Pakistan as a political unit will disappear. The only thing that has to be taken into account is the speed with which it will occur. It is here that the human agency comes in, more specifically, the attitudes of the governments of India, Pakistan and the Western nations, and particularly the United States.

It must also be clearly understood that this is not to suggest that there is any falsity in the religion of Islam nor even in the people of Pakistan, but that the events will simply be the natural consequence of certain fundamental political principles. We explain this in some detail now.

Political and real units

It is well known to all students of political science that the mere creation of a political

State, having a central government is not enough to ensure its permanence and durability. A political unit, in order to be viable and durable, must be a real unit—that is to say, it must be a unit with a deep psychological, cultural, spiritual unity and not merely an agglomerate held together by a centralised authority. A centralised power can hold together the different parts and components of a nation for some time but it cannot necessarily ensure durability. To ensure durability it must convert itself into the psychological centre and become the representative of the whole nation.

In the formation of a nation, there are many factors that play an important role; these are geography, race, language, religion, economic interests and interdependence, a common aspiration, common dangers and suffering and even sometimes a common enemy. Depending on the situation, one factor or another could be prominent. In certain cases, race would count and enter in as an element, but only as a subordinate element. In others, the race factor might predominate and be decisive; in still others it could be a historic and national sentiment overriding differences of language and race, partly by economic and other relations created by local contact or geographical oneness. Cultural unity would also count and play an important role, but need not, in all cases, prevail: even the united force of race and culture might not be sufficiently strong so as to be decisive. Religion could be an important factor as in the case of Pakistan. We thus see that there are many powerful factors that play important roles in varying degrees in the formation of a nation and that the nation is a complex amalgam of forces. All these factors have their importance, *but the ultimate cementing factor is not any of these but a dominant subtle and psychological element. This deeper psychological element is not easily definable but is definitely perceptible and is often referred to as the inner psyche or the soul of the nation. It is this subtler force that really holds a nation together despite all the differences and centrifugal pulls. All other elements, however restless they may be, must succumb to this force; however much they may seek for free particularistic expression and self-possession within a larger unity, they must subordinate themselves to this more powerful attraction.*

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Thus the nation is a persistent psychological unit which Nature has been busy developing throughout the world in the most various forms and educating into physical and political unity. Political unity is not the essential factor; it may not yet be realised and yet the nation persists and moves inevitably towards its realisation; it may be destroyed and yet the nation persists and travails and suffers but refuses to be annihilated.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 309-10)

This is evident in the history of India. Here is a nation which has survived for more than two millenniums keeping intact its ancient cultural roots. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

But the most striking example in history is the evolution of India. Nowhere else have the centrifugal forces been so strong, numerous, complex, obstinate. The mere time taken by the evolution has been prodigious; the disastrous vicissitudes through which it has had to work itself out have been appalling. And yet through it all the inevitable tendency has worked constantly, pertinaciously, with the dull, obscure, indomitable, relentless obstinacy of Nature when she is opposed in her instinctive purposes by man, and finally, after a struggle enduring through millenniums, has triumphed... The political history of India is the story of a succession of empires, indigenous and foreign, each of them destroyed by centrifugal forces, but each bringing the centripetal tendency nearer to its triumphant emergence. And it is a significant circumstance that the more foreign the rule, the greater has been its force for the unification of the subject people. This is always a sure sign that the essential nation-unit is already there and that there is an indissoluble national vitality necessitating the inevitable emergence of the organised nation. In this instance, we see that the conversion of the psychological unity on which nationhood is based into the external organised unity by which it is perfectly realised, has taken a period of more than two thousand years and is not yet complete. And yet, since the essentiality of the thing was there, not even the most formidable difficulties and delays, not even the most persistent incapacity for union in the people, not even the most disintegrating shocks from outside have prevailed against the obstinate subconscious necessity. And this is only the extreme illustration of a general law.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 307-08)

Even after 1947, when India attained its independence from British rule and was divided on the basis of the two-nation theory, there have been innumerable forecasts of doom stating that India would disintegrate. Political commentators have been churning out regularly the prediction of the dismal fate that awaits India. And yet today India stands out as a stable and progressive nation destined to play an important role in the future of the world.

Pakistan—an artificial unit

Let us now look at the history of Pakistan. The so-called nation of Pakistan, which was created in 1947, claimed to be a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. The Muslims were supposed to be a different nation with the religion of Islam as the psychological binding factor. All proponents of Pakistan have claimed that Pakistan is bound by Islam and was in fact created to bring the Muslims of the subcontinent together into a strong and viable Islamic group; in other words, the claim is that Islam was the cementing factor of Pakistan. As a matter of fact, Islam has not been the cementing factor; indeed there does not seem to be any cementing factor at all in Pakistan.

We reproduce here an extract from an article written by Aryn Baker in *Time* magazine dated August 02, 2007:

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Saville Row-suited lawyer who midwifed Pakistan into existence on August 14, 1947, as leader of the Muslim League, was notoriously ambiguous about how he envisioned the country once it became an independent state. Both he and Iqbal, who were friends until the poet's death in 1938, had repeatedly stated their dream for a "modern, moderate and very enlightened Pakistan," says Sharifuddin Pirzada, Jinnah's personal secretary from 1941 to 1944. But mindful of the fragile and fractious consortium of supporters for the new nation, whose plans for independence from both India and Britain were only finalized on July 18, 1947, Jinnah rarely elaborated on his religious views. "He was a very liberal-minded Muslim," says Pirzada. "He rejected the idea that Pakistan would be ruled according to the righteous caliphs of Islam; he did not want a theocracy. At the same time he was very careful not to make a commitment one way or the other so that Muslims would not be alienated."

Both religious conservatives and secular liberals have appropriated Jinnah's words, actions and manners to prove their claims on Pakistan's identity. Clerics that once dismissed him as an infidel for his secular leanings before partition now embrace him for his borrowings from the Koran in his talks. Liberal newspaper editorials quote fragmented speeches to bolster claims that he was an avowed secularist. Jinnah's own wish was that the Pakistani people, as members of a new, modern and democratic nation, would decide the country's direction. "There is no contradiction," says Pirzada, who has watched the debate rage for 60 years. "An Islamic state can be a fully modern state, unless you say it should be ruled by a theocracy. Jinnah was against theocracy. That is what matters."

But rarely in Pakistan's history have its people lived Jinnah's vision. The nation was barely a decade old when President Iskander Ali Mirza declared martial law in an attempt to save his presidency from growing unpopularity. "That was the blackest day in our history," says Senator Khurshid Ahmad, the deputy chief of Pakistan's largest Islamist party. "Even our elected rulers became despots." Pakistan has been cursed ever since. Only twice in its 60-year history has Pakistan seen a peaceful, democratic transition of power. Pakistan considers itself a democracy, but its governments have rarely had a mandate from the people. With four disparate provinces, over a dozen languages and dialects, and powerful neighbours, leaders—be they Presidents, Prime Ministers or army chiefs—have been forced to knit the nation together with the only thing Pakistanis have in common: religion.

It is our contention that Pakistan is an artificially manufactured political unit, a unit

manufactured and carved out partly by the accident of circumstances and deliberate planning by a section of the Muslim leadership, the British Government and the shortsightedness of the Congress leaders.

We thus see that Pakistan is not a real and viable unit; it has no life from within and owes its continuance to two factors. These two factors are:

1. A force imposed on its constituent elements from inside, by the Army.
2. The political convenience felt by the world outside, namely the United States of America.

The history of Pakistan shows that it has not been able to evolve a stable democratic system and that for the greater part of its history it has been under military rule. It is being held together by the Army.

Secondly, the Western world and the United States of America in particular need to keep Pakistan going in their own self-interest and to further their own geo-political strategies, despite the patent fact that it has hardly ever been a democratic State. Pakistan is needed for the convenience of America.

As soon as the constituent elements of Pakistan reject Army rule and are drawn more powerfully by a centrifugal force, and if at the same time, the world outside—in this case the United States of America—no longer needs or favours the existence of Pakistan, then force alone will remain as the one agent of an artificial unity. It is difficult to see what this force could be.

History of Pakistan

When Pakistan was formed in 1947, it is said that Jinnah wanted to make it a secular state, although in the run-up to the formation of Pakistan the most violent methods were used. This is what he said just before the formation of Pakistan on 11 August 1947.

If we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor... you are free—you are free to go to your temples, mosques or any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the state... in due course of time Hindus will cease to be Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Muslims—not in a religious sense, for that is the personal faith of an individual—but in a political sense as citizens of one state.

However, Pakistan never became a secular State as Jinnah wished; it is quite probable that if he had lived longer the history of Pakistan might have been different. The reality however is that Pakistan became an Islamic State and has remained so right through its history; neither has it been able to evolve a sound democratic polity. For

the major part of its history, it has been under military rule. Whether the military intervened in the affairs of the State to save Pakistan from anarchy as is claimed by them or whether they have a vested interest in seizing power is often debated by political commentators: but that is not the point that we are discussing now. The fact remains that for more than 40 years of its history, Pakistan has been under Army rule without any democracy.

The second point to be noted is that the principle of jihad has been used as an important component of its foreign policy by the Government of Pakistan right from its inception.

Here is an extract from a book written by B. V. Raman, a senior intelligence officer in Research and Analysis Wing, regarding the use of jihad. This is what he writes:

The use of jihad as a weapon against non-Muslims was... the brainchild of the religious leaders and military officers of Pakistan ever since the day Pakistan became independent on August 14, 1947. Pakistan's jihad against India did not start in 1989. It started in 1947.

Even Jawaharlal Nehru—despite his strong secular credentials—had repeatedly been drawing attention to the jihad based on hatred for India being waged by Pakistan since 1947.

Between 1947 and the 1980s, Pakistan was waging this jihad mainly with the help of its nationals infiltrated into India. It could not find many supporters in the Indian Muslim community. From the 1980s onwards, it started getting the support of some Muslim youth in J&K.

Some Messages from the Mother

It will be quite appropriate to see some of the messages given by the Mother in regard to Pakistan.

In 1965, a war was fought between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. During the war, Mother sent this message to the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri. This is what She wrote:

*It is for the sake and
the triumph of Truth
that India is fighting and
must fight until India
and Pakistan have once
more become One because
that is the truth of their
being.*

16.9.65.



It is for the sake and the triumph of Truth that India is fighting and must fight until India and Pakistan have once more become *One* because that is the truth of their being.

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 366)

It should be evident that this message does not demand any appropriation of land or assets for their own sake, but simply states that the two nations have one soul and therefore they should be united.

Similarly, in June 1971, Mother had written in a letter to a disciple:

*La disparition du Pakistan
est inévitable ; elle aurait pu
déjà se produire. mais l'ignorance
humaine l'a retardée.*

La disparition du Pakistan est inévitable; elle aurait pu déjà se produire, mais l'ignorance humaine l'a retardée.

The English translation is as follows:

The disappearance of Pakistan is inevitable; it could have already happened, but human ignorance has delayed it.

It is this ignorance that is the cause of the delay in the process of unification and also the root cause of the problems, both in Pakistan and India.

However, there is today a realisation that the creation of Pakistan was a mistake. We are giving some extracts from some well-known writers below.

Pakistan—an idea that has failed

Here are some extracts from an article by K. P. S. Gill in *The Pioneer*. He writes:

Pakistan is an idea that has failed—abysmally and comprehensively...

This failure was evident in the very first years after the birth of the country out of the falsehood of the 'two nation theory' and the bloody slaughters of Partition.

Within six years of Independence, the poet Faiz Ahmed 'Faiz' wrote, in

his poignant and evocative *Subh-e-Azadi* (The Dawn of Freedom):

This tainted light, this gloom-smothered dawn

This is not the dawn we had hoped for...

The despondent night still lies heavy upon us

The moment of deliverance from bondage is yet to come...

Faiz spent years in Pakistani jails and in exile, reviled, excluded and marginalised by successive regimes, till his death in 1984. The tragic destiny of one of the greatest lights of modern Urdu literature is symbolic of all the good that may have survived the catastrophic creation of Pakistan in the crucible of communal hatred....

The Pakistani identity is based on irreducible opposites, an adversarial ideology that initially saw the Hindu as the enemy, but that has thereafter added a multiplicity of 'hostile others'—Ahmedias, Shias, internal regional minorities, the West—in its expanding circle of strife. Much of the violence in the South Asian region—and indeed, a large proportion of Islamist terrorism across the world—finds its roots in this psyche, rather than in any concrete and coherent strategic objectives or interests. Unless the institutional basis of this ideology, the power structure and sections of society that have historically profited from it, are dismantled, Pakistan's pathologies will continue to compound themselves, only occasionally tempered by objective external circumstances and a loss of capacities.

The attack on the United States and the Western world

The attack on the United States that took place on 11 September 2001 was the natural and logical consequence of this policy not only in Pakistan but in the Islamic world. As a consequence of this attack, Pakistan came under tremendous international pressure to act on the Islamic fundamentalists within Pakistan. Facing intense pressure from the United States, the Pakistan Government took the position of becoming a leading ally of the United States in combating terrorism. However, even after 6 years, terrorism thrives in Pakistan itself and all indications seem to point to the conclusion that terrorism is indeed emanating from that country to different parts of the world.

Today, the Pakistan Government is facing severe criticism and even threats of being attacked by the United States for its policy of non-engagement with militant groups in the tribal areas which is now considered a complete failure. Washington is demanding that the Pakistan Government do more to rein in terrorists, extremists and religious fundamentalists.

But if the administration of Pakistan decides to take a firm line against the religious fundamentalists, it is likely to face an internal revolt from within the Army. Here is an extract from a report of an interview by Hamid Gul, former head of the Inter Service Intelligence.

In an interview, Hamid Gul, former head of ISI, has warned that if Musharraf does take both gloves off in tribal areas, it would just increase the likelihood of a split in the army. “The officer cadres are liberal, secular, they come from the elite classes. But the rank and file of the army were never secular, they were always religious,” Gul said. “If there is a face-off between the army and people, the leadership may lose control of the army. The army does not feel happy. They are from the same streets, the same villages, the same bazaars of the lower and middle classes, and they want the same thing (Islamic law) for their country.”

Recent reports say that serious thinking seems to be taking place in the higher administrative circles and in the various think tanks in the United States regarding Pakistan. As a matter of fact, a bill has been put forward in the Congress. Here are some points of the bill:

The bill enumerates the “problems” that have cropped up in US relations with Pakistan. (1) Curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology; (2) Combating poverty and corruption; (3) Building effective government institutions, especially secular public schools; (4) Promoting democracy and the rule of law, particularly at the national level; (5) Addressing the continued presence of Taliban and other violent extremist forces throughout the country; (6) Maintaining the authority of the Government of Pakistan in all parts of its national territory; (7) Securing the borders of Pakistan to prevent the movement of militants and terrorists into other countries and territories; and (8) Effectively dealing with Islamic extremism.

These steps are supported by many think tanks in the United States which have been advocating a very strict policy towards Pakistan. Here is a summary of the ideas from one of the think tanks in the United States:

In a report on Pakistan by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a clear case has been made for a distinct change in policy by the United States towards Pakistan. This report makes the case that the Pakistani State bears responsibility for the worsening security situation in Afghanistan, the resurgence of the Taliban, terrorism in Kashmir, and the growth of jihadi ideology and capabilities internationally. At the core of the problem is the Pakistani military, which has dominated Pakistan’s politics since 1958 and has developed over the years nationalism based more on its own delusions of grandeur rather than on any rational analysis of the country’s national interest. Inheriting a highly divided polity, the Pakistan Army has tried to muster solidarity by stoking religiosity, sectarianism, and the promotion of jihad outside its borders, particularly in Afghanistan and Kashmir....

This report shows that... Pakistani priorities reflect the specific institutional interests of the military and therefore cannot be fundamentally changed unless the army gradually cedes its political role to representative civilian leaders and

limits itself to defending borders....

The report concludes:

Many analysts concur that Pakistan's situation is not sustainable. Islamabad will not be able to play double games eternally without creating at some point a major problem for itself, the region and the world. Even if it is accepted that Pakistan plays an indispensable role in the war on terror, it can be seen that policies toward Islamabad have consisted of a mix of bribery in the form of financial, military, and technical assistance and pressure at the margin. Islamabad's preference that its local activities be kept separate from its effect on global security has been accepted by most countries.

This report proposes a middle way.

It addresses some of the challenges that the Pakistani military regime's regional policies create for the international community, arguing that none can be resolved in isolation from the others. Arguing that the nature of the regime is the main source of trouble for the region, it urges a return to a civilian government according to Pakistan's own constitution.

The Government of Pakistan is thus caught on the horns of a dilemma. Should it give up the policy of terrorism and jihad to toe the line demanded by the US administration or should it continue the policy of jihad which has been the backbone of its existence? Either way, it is a catch-22 situation. If they support the American plan, the resistance to this will come not only from within Pakistan itself—from the fundamentalists, and also from sections of the Pakistan Army—but also from many parts of the Islamic world. On the other hand, if they continue the policy of jihad and terrorism, the United States will come down heavily on Pakistan. The question that arises: What is the way out?

We have quoted all these extracts from different sources, only to show that Pakistan as a State is not viable. It is also evident that Pakistan is facing a serious crisis, a crisis of its very existence. The root of the problem lies as one might put it, "in the original sin", that is to say in the two-nation theory and the violent methods used for that purpose. This is the ignorance that Mother referred to in her message of 1971.

Unfortunately, it is the same mentality and psychology and ignorance that is driving Pakistan to this day. Also it is the same ignorance that is blinding many other governments in the world and thus making them incapable of seeing the real truth.

All the problems of Pakistan whether it be poverty, terrorism, the absence of democracy or civil war, are due to this original cause. The direction needs to be reversed

and the sooner it is done, the better will it be for Pakistan, the subcontinent and the world. The question is whether Pakistan will do it of its own accord or whether circumstances and external intervention will be needed. It is our sincere hope that Pakistan will take the right steps on its own, for otherwise there will be huge problems not only for Pakistan but for the whole subcontinent and even the world.

In 1971, immediately after the war in Bangladesh, on 18 December, the Mother said:

Again it won't be for this time.

It won't be done that way. I've seen how. It won't be done through a battle: 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's how it will be done.

And She added:

One of the things in the offing is the conversion of America, the United States, but it will take time.

...So, the things in the offing are a federation of all the states of India, and another one in the offing is the conversion of the United States. A federation of the states of India along the lines of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, as conceived and explained by Sri Aurobindo.

Later, on 1 January 1972, She said:

We are plainly heading for the disintegration of Pakistan.

Pakistan's Existence: A need or a burden?

Syed Jamaluddin is from Pakistan and is now living in Europe. He has written a book *Divide Pakistan to Eliminate Terrorism* dealing with his personal views on the subject of Pakistan. He was asked, "What made you write the book?" We reproduce here some passages from his response. These illustrate the thought process that is now taking place.

Regardless of the fact that the advocates of the two-nation theory have finally realised after half a century that the division of United India was not a good idea for international peace, there is a need to correct mistakes. India's democratic strength for the last 59 years has proved that its existence was fully justified. On the contrary, Pakistan emerged as a failed state for one single reason—that a country which was founded by assembling almost eight different nations in the

name of Islam was unable to justify its existence. Since its formation, Pakistan has been a country full of conspiracies, discrepancies, controversies and corruption. Pakistan could not prove its worth as a state and remained just a piece of land occupied by certain opportunists who turned the entire country into their personal property....

Today's Pakistan has turned into a typical Fascist regime without any ideology....

The whole world has become vulnerable to terrorism. The question is who is masterminding such terrorism? Who is providing all possible support to terrorism? Who is creating terrorist minds? Who is a threat to international peace? The answer is very simple:... Pakistan.

...A country which is possessed by forces which are not answerable to any one and which is beyond any legal system is indeed a great threat to the entire world. Pakistan has, therefore, become a burden. This burden needs to be off-loaded by way of its disintegration. Pakistan should be divided into 5 parts or more to crush the terrorist network which has gained its deep roots in present geographic form of Pakistan. My book titled *Divide Pakistan to Eliminate Terrorism* advocates the necessity of Pakistan's disintegration. An Independent Pakhtoonistan, Baluchistan, Sindhudesh, Jinnahpur and Punjabistan will prevent the current nourishment and spread of terrorism from the soil of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Let Pakistan give up this double game that it is playing and befriend India.

It will get a tremendous response of good will.

That is the ultimate solution. Give up the two-nation theory and work with the Indian people in the subcontinent.

We paraphrase here a passage taken from an article written by M. V. Kamath in *Samachar*. This will give a clue to the possible solution to the problems of Pakistan and the subcontinent.

He says:

An Indo-Pakistani confederation is the only answer to Pakistan's present woes. It is pleasant to hear that a three-member team of archaeological experts from Pakistan had come to India in search of Hindu idols to be restored in temples in Pakistan, that Islamabad has budgeted Rs.100 million to complete the Kataraj Temple Project and that last November Musharraf had even visited a Shiva Temple in Karachi and declared that "historical places of all religions including that of Hinduism are an integral part of Pakistan's cultural and geographic history".

All that is in the right spirit. India and Pakistan must undo partition, not

territory wise but emotion wise.... Learn from India's past history. Together India and Pakistan can make South Asia great.

The Subcontinent

As a consequence of the partition of India, the nations in the Indian subcontinent are also facing serious problems. We shall briefly touch upon some of the problems facing these States—Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka—in the subcontinent.

We have already seen in the first part of this article that all these States rank high in the list of Failed States. All are facing demographic, social, economic and political problems in varying proportions.

In Bangladesh, in addition to the problem of poverty, unemployment, recurring floods, Islamic fundamentalism, and a poor human rights record, the democratic system has collapsed and military rule has been imposed.

In Sri Lanka, there has been a civil war going on for the last two decades and there seems to be no solution in sight. This has created refugee problems for India and also in some other nations as well as great tension in the country.

In Nepal, the monarchy has been overthrown and there is great disorder with the government not having full control over the different parts. In addition, there is acute poverty, unemployment and a serious threat from the Maoists.

Inevitably, all these problems in the neighbouring States of India are affecting her in different ways. India will have to face up to these challenges.

However, it is our firm belief that if India and Pakistan come together, the problems of the subcontinent too will get solved. We can then move gradually towards creating a confederation of South Asia.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance.

(Autobiographical Notes, p. 476)

In the next article, we shall discuss the physical and psychological conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to create an atmosphere of peace and concord in the subcontinent leading ultimately to the formation of a confederation of South Asia.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

(As envisaged by Sri Aurobindo)

EDUCATION is as old as time and as new as the marvel of the rising sun. According to Rabindranath Tagore, the implications contained in the words like 'love', 'religion', 'patriotism', and 'friendship' surpass all definitions. Even the most deep, learned and revealing explanations about them leave room for more things to be expressed. This is true for the word 'education' as well. An attempt to give a precise and distinct definition of it is somewhat like trying to fathom the mystery of the sea by a diver's plunge.

The pioneers of human progress throughout the world and in all branches of thought have contributed their views on the subject and its secret meaning and tried to realise it in themselves. To profess or propagate it they have also taken recourse to press, platforms, friendly talks, revealing advice etc. Still it appears that all has not been expressed about the matter or whatever has been stated in the past needs to be restated over and over again, since the highest or central part of their teaching has yet to be materialised.

The modern age is more or less the age of utility. As a result more importance is given nowadays, in all affairs, to the objective side of utility and less to the subjective or inner aspect. But to judge everything by the standard of material prosperity and neglect the subjective side is a gross error. Especially with regard to education such an error carries immense repercussions to the communal life. This has been more so on account of the idea of the State having coloured the mind and action of the world at large. The existence of the State is indispensable in the present phase of communal life. But the State idea and the State do not mean the same thing.

The point will be clear if we consider the motives on which the State idea takes its support. First it is the State which assures and safeguards the economic and other basic interests of the individual and the community. Next, it is the good of the collectivity for which the individual should live, not for his separate egoistic interest. Lastly, the good working of the State will bring about the necessary progress and perfection of the individual and society. These notions are partially true but taken in totality, are a mixture of truth and falsehood and should not be pursued to the end unexamined by an enlightened vision and thought. Particularly in India whose culture is profound and varied and where the people still consciously feel the living spiritual breath of their ancient forefathers, the State idea as stated should be studied critically.

The life of a developing community may be compared with a growing garden of various fruits, plants and flowers, each having a different colour, smell and taste and the guard of the garden with the State or any other administrative head. The sight of a garden creates the impression mainly of beauty, fragrance, greenery and the sense of a living growth, whereas the image of the guard brings before us things like bow

and arrow, stick and sword, rifle and bullet, a heavy face with beard and a big turban.

The presence and active help of the guard are essential for the garden. It is he who will look after its unhampered growth, prevent theft and plunder and will be useful in diverse ways. But there is a limit to the scope of his usefulness. He has very little to do with the actual growth and development of the trees, plants and flowers of the garden. This work automatically goes to some other agencies.

The free gifts of nature, earth, rain, air and sun are the main sources from which they will derive help according to their needs. But at times some additional help is also required for the proper fullness of the plants' life. Such help can be given only by those who are adepts in the line, those who have knowledge of the plants' life and nature, the external requirements and the inner demands, those who are tender and can care for the plants, who have a subtle perception. The task in relation to the growth and development of the human community comes under the jurisdiction of education. Naturally such a task is beyond the capacity of a mere guard since he lacks the requisite knowledge, subtlety, skill and adaptability. So when the question of conducting and controlling education by any administrative authority comes up, the above factors are to be taken into due consideration.

The supporters of the State idea will, no doubt, deny such an analogy. In the first place they will perhaps say that it is a mistake to see the State as separate from the community. For it is the community itself which is the elector of the organisers of the State, whereas the garden is inert and cannot have any say regarding the appointment of the guard. Secondly, it is not proper to compare the qualified and efficient organisers of the State with a mere uneducated guard. Quite true. A little more intimate observation will perhaps provide us with something truer. Sri Aurobindo's view on the matter will clarify the obscurity:

The organised State is neither the best mind of the nation nor is it even the sum of the communal energies. It leaves out of its organised action and suppresses or unduly depresses the working force and thinking mind of important minorities, often of those which represent that which is best in the present and that which is developing for the future.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 298)

Why it is so? It is because, with the means employed nowadays towards the formation of a State, such an attempt is not possible. But it is certain that under the present condition of the formation of a State the individual and the community are bound to suffer the imposition of some collective aims that are thought out by a small or larger number of the persons in charge and these may not be in accord with the true spirit and nature of individual and communal development. That is why Sri Aurobindo says:

The State is a convenience, and a rather clumsy convenience, for our common development; it ought never to be made an end in itself.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 300)

The importance and scope of action of the State are great and manifold. Even in the field of education it is and can be of immense help but only in certain matters. Thus in removing illiteracy on a large scale, the State, with the resources and powers entrusted to it, is the only efficient authority. It can also diminish the economic difficulties that stand in the way of betterment of the existing systems of education and the introduction of new ones. But it is unable to handle the central and actual aspect of education in the way it should be done. In educating the individuals according to their inborn taste and bent of nature and in conformity with the truth and aspiration of their being, State-control is more often an obstacle rather than a help.

To quote Sri Aurobindo:

...the State is not an organism; it is a machinery, and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manufacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 301)

Again:

The State tends always to uniformity, because uniformity is easy to it and natural variation is impossible to its essentially mechanical nature; but uniformity is death, not life.

(*ibid.*)

From the above observations we catch a glimpse of the essential qualities necessary for organising an educational system and the drawbacks in its way and also the fact that its real function is only to help the individuals grow and unfold their latent powers and possibilities, which finally will account for the real progress of the community.

Man is not only a mind, life and body. He is mainly and essentially a soul and the mind, life and body are the soul's instruments. Expression of the soul's qualities through the perfected instrumentality of mind, life and body is the opportunity offered to him by his birth in this world. Therefore a perfect educational organ will always take cognisance of all these strata of human personality and arrange for their training in such a way that none of them are overemphasised nor any of them neglected. But this is not all, an ideal system will also give due attention to the aspect of each one's relationship with his own people, nation and humanity at large.

India's vision of the secret meaning of the world and existence is congenial for the purpose. What is demanded of her now is the revitalisation of the past and the

shaping of the future in the light of the material knowledge and practical efficiency of the present. Perhaps it will not be out of place here to touch, with the help of Sri Aurobindo's writings, upon the views held by India about the individual, the collectivity and humanity.

India has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit. ...similarly India has not understood by the nation or people an organised State or an armed and efficient community well prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the national ego ...but a great communal soul and life that has appeared in the whole and has manifested a nature of its own and a law of that nature, a Swabhava and Swadharma, and embodied it in its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, dynamic, social and political forms and culture. And equally then our cultural conception of humanity must be in accordance with her ancient vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a high ultimate spiritual aim...

(CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 426-27)

This then is the ideal of education and culture in India. To achieve it her Spirit, perceptively or imperceptibly, is always at work. So the children born in India must from the beginning of their education be made fully conscious of their great cultural inheritance. We shall conclude by mentioning another quotation from Sri Aurobindo's *A System of National Education*:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself....

(CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 384)

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of October 2007)

The Pranam

Having bowed before Thee, to my worldly chores I go.

I AM standing on the staircase. One after the other people are coming down with a flower-blessing from the Mother. I keep looking at their faces. A mere instant's contact with the Mother and how changed everyone is! A divine glow has lit up their faces. Everyone looks so beautiful!

I had gone to the Mother at the end, after everybody had met Her, in order to enjoy watching this sight. Who dares say that we human beings will not be transformed? The change brought about by a moment's touch of the Mother in each one was truly incredible! And it just goes to prove that one day man will surely be transformed.

Everyone had his own way of doing the pranam. And the Mother accepted each one's pranam with exceeding love. A soft mysterious smile lingered on the Mother's face.

It was a girl's birthday. She went in to see the Mother just before me. As soon as the Mother's eye fell on the girl She joyously exclaimed *Bonne Fête!* and gave her many flowers and various books. She poured Her affection on her and kept repeating *Bonne Fête! Bonne Fête!* As I listened to the Mother's melodious voice, I was deeply moved. The girl went down shyly with all those flowers and books. Now I entered the Mother's room. I found Her standing, looking somewhat displeased. "What has happened to the Mother?" I thought to myself. As soon as the Mother saw me She said:

"Just see, she left without doing the pranam and today is her birthday."

I at once tried to explain it away:

"You gave her an armful of flowers and books. The poor girl probably didn't want to put your gifts on the floor. That's why she was unable to do the pranam. You will see, when she comes back, she will bow down before You. Everybody wants to offer their pranam to You, especially those who wait in intense expectation for the whole year just for this one birthday pranam, this most sacred auspicious moment."

The Mother was filled with joy like a little child, as if the Mother were Ashutosh or Mahadev, so easily pleased with so little.

After doing my pranam I immediately went out looking for the girl and found her in the Ashram main building itself. I told her:

"Next time when you go to the Mother, do not forget to do the pranam."

I told her what the Mother had said and the girl naturally was a little embarrassed.

From time immemorial men have unknowingly worshipped out of fear trees, mountains, the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, wind, whatever they felt had the presence of some strange, great, mysterious Power. Why, they have felt that same mysterious Power even in our earth. In the course of time that era gave way to the age of rishis and sages. They, by the light of their strong intelligence, consciously felt that there was indeed a great mystery behind the creation of the sun, moon, stars, fire, wind, etc. Through their meditations they discovered and experienced the great, exalted Purusha who is at the heart of this mysterious creation. They also experienced the presence of different gods. It was during this period that the Vedas and the Upanishads came to be composed. It was also during this time that man learnt consciously to worship and bow before God or the Supreme Purusha. Man learnt spontaneously to offer his obeisance to the Lord and the Divine Mother.

The touching of the elders' feet in our country is part of this same mystery. When we bow to somebody, we are bowing to the One who abides in him. Of course, we don't always do this consciously. The human person is but a channel. This bowing to God from time immemorial was born in man quite spontaneously. Isn't it incredible? Who taught him to bow in reverence? Bowing or emptying one's body, mind and heart in order to fill them with devotion is an extraordinarily astonishing event of our creation. How many rishis and sages have composed verses to such a pantheon of gods and goddesses! They have composed verses, eulogies, invocations, performed yagnas. They have all bowed with the greatest devotion. And all these experiences have been compiled in the Vedas and the Upanishads.

And these pranams of man have not gone in vain. It is because he called out from his deepest being by emptying his body, mind and heart and filling himself with love and devotion in order to offer his pranam that the Supreme Purusha and the Divine Mother have themselves come down on to the lap of Mother earth.

The Mother prostrated Herself before Sri Aurobindo when She first saw Him. Very spontaneously She laid Her physical being at His Feet by offering all of Herself, mind, body and life. With this gesture, the Mother taught us that day how humanity should offer itself at the feet of the Divine.

The Mother told Nirod-da a lot of things about the pranam. Nirod-da and two other teachers from our School often went to see the Mother. The 'Free Progress' system had just been initiated in the School. The teachers were facing all kinds of problems and difficulties and the Mother would try and explain each problem to them and give Her view. If they had overstayed their time then both the teachers and Nirod-da would hasten to leave after taking the flower-blessings from the Mother's hand. Once Nirod-da was the last to leave. As he was leaving after taking the flower-blessing from Her hand, the Mother called him back and asked:

“You haven't offered your pranam today?”

Nirod-da was terribly embarrassed and tried to wriggle out of it.

“Oh, I didn't want to trouble You.”

“Trouble me?” asked the Mother rather surprised, as if She were saying, “What a strange idea indeed! Is it a lot of trouble for me to lay my hand on your head!”

Nirod-da suddenly found the answer. He said:

“Sometimes, You seem to be in a hurry. We try and take our leave quickly so that you are not further delayed for dinner. This is why.”

The Mother was finally satisfied.

“In that case I have nothing to say,” She added.

The following day Nirod-da went to the Mother alone. He was to read out to Her one of his writings. Hardly had he sat down that the Mother remarked:

“Let me first finish yesterday’s discussion. Indians believe (or at least that is their experience) that the Divine resides in man. The Westerners don’t believe this. They feel the Divine resides somewhere high above. Only Jesus Christ has come down once. That’s why they do not bow to any human being. But if someone bows to a man in whom one can say with unmistakable confidence that there has been a descent of the Divine consciousness, then this person can spread or inspire that same consciousness and experience more easily among others.”

A few days later the Mother explained the significance of the pranam in French to the Western teacher who normally did not do the pranam. The Mother said:

“When this pranam is done with true faith, then it becomes symbolic of a self-offering to the Divine present in the whole creation. It is the Divine who is its principal inspiration and it expresses one’s acceptance and surrender to that Divine present in the creation.”

Not even one in a thousand might do the pranam with this consciousness but that is its real significance.

This deeper meaning of the pranam is truly wondrous. And the Divine Mother Herself revealed its inner significance to us!

We human beings have received this golden privilege to offer our pranam to the Lord and the Divine Mother immanent in creation. Indeed, how very fortunate we are!

In the midst of this world I bow to Thee!

I bow to Thee in life’s activity!

The Name-Mantra

The Mother, on hearing the name of Sri Aurobindo in a chant, entered a state of samadhi-like trance.

It is said that the divine name is divine power.

Sri Ram Thakur [a well-known yogi of Bengal] always told his followers:

“Repeat the name, just go on repeating the name. There is nothing more you need to do in life.”

One day when he wanted to give us, the little ones, a name-mantra, I told him: “No, I don’t want to accept a name-mantra. I won’t be able to close my eyes every morning and evening, and meditate like father and mother. If you can so arrange that I am able to do this anytime I want, then I will accept a name-mantra from you.”

All those who were sitting in the room started laughing. Oh, how old must I have been at the time? Nine or ten at the most.

Sri Ram Thakur, however, did not laugh but replied:

“That’s fine. You can repeat the name whenever you feel like. You can do it while playing, you can do it while eating, even while studying, if you wish.”

After he had spoken, I felt it was all so simple. One needn’t sit down to do this. There was no need to do a proper japa. So he gave to all of us girls a different mantra each. And we never revealed our mantra to anyone. I adored repeating the name.

One Name there is, hid deep within.

A number of festivals were celebrated in Feni. For three or four days continuously through the nights people would do the name-kirtan. During those days when I looked at the people’s faces, I felt a great purity in their expression.

When I came here that name-mantra of childhood blended with the names of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. When I showed the Mother a photograph of Sri Ram Thakur, She looked at it for a long time and then remarked:

“He is with me always.”

The Mother Herself used to tell us:

“Keep calling ‘Mother’. You will see all obstacles vanish.”

Such is the divine power in a name.

* * *

Minnie-di, Smriti and Manoj’s sweet voices waft in...

Sri Aravindah sharanam mama.

Om namo bhagavate Sri Aravindaya.

Om namo namah Sri Mirambikayai.

In the Playground the Ashramites are listening to this chanting. Everybody is sitting still, silent.

Whenever I read poetry at college the following lines would set me thinking:

Friend, who has whispered the name of Shyam?

Through the ear into my inmost heart?

With fervour my life now overflows!

I always doubted if this was possible. Somehow Sri Radha's love and self-offering at Sri Krishna's feet would fill us with sadness. We did not know then that like Sri Radha, the Mother too would fall into a samadhi-like trance on hearing the name of Sri Aurobindo. And what is more, we would get a darshan of the Mother in this state. It was in this very Playground that we were witness to this unimaginable happening.

Minnie-di, Smriti and Manoj's sweet voices are wafting in the air....

Sri Aravindah sharanam mama.

Om namo bhagavate Sri Aravindaya.

Om namo namah Sri Mirambikayai.

What an enthralling hush reigns in the Playground as those assembled there listen to this chant of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's names.

With fervour my life now overflows!

That day the deeper significance of this line entered our hearts with such simplicity as we sat around the Mother and watched this change come over Her. This same fervour of self-offering began to rise within us too.

I suddenly remembered how Sahana-di had told me about the Mother teaching her Radha's dance. Sahana-di even showed us a little of this dance. The Mother kept showing Sahana-di how to express this kind of self-offering in a dance movement. It was actually for this dance that the Mother had written *Radha's Prayer*.

My God! All this happened so long ago.

In this context let me tell you something that happened in my life.

I had settled down here for good. One day very hesitatingly I asked the Mother: "Mother, how does one surrender?"

The Mother laughed and said:

"When you offer flowers to me, it is, I suppose, with devotion and love. You offer yourself completely, exactly in that same way. Physically offer yourself completely to me, every part and limb. That is how you surrender."

Taking the flowers from me in Her hands the Mother raised them high in a gesture of offering. Her eyes had an extraordinary look. It is impossible to describe that gesture of the Mother's self-offering. She had lifted Her body high above, very high above while I just kept staring at Her.

I remembered two lines from a poem:

This body of mine, uplift, O Lord,

In thy temple to be a lamp of God.

At that moment I felt offering oneself was so very simple! I felt I had understood everything.

The Mother continued:

“Every cell, every atom of your body, every worry and feeling of your heart, offer them all to me in this way.”

Seeing the Mother in the Playground in that state of self-offering awakened that same longing for this self-offering within us. Every heart in the ground that day was steeped in that longing.

Sri Aravindah sharanam mama.

Om namo bhagavate Sri Aravindaya.

Om namo namah Sri Mirambikayai.

This mantra kept echoing in me.

The Mother was sitting still, upright, listening to that chant of Sri Aurobindo. Every cell, every atom of Her body was thrilled with the name of Sri Aurobindo. That is how we all felt. Never had I dreamed that I would get to see such a sight.

Everyone in the ground kept staring at the Mother with tear-filled eyes even as they quietly listened to the names of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo:

Sri Aravindah sharanam mama.

Om namo bhagavate Sri Aravindaya.

Om namo namah Sri Mirambikayai.

The Darshan

*For Thee O Lord, my eyes sleep not,
But where art thou, O where?
They pine for thee, O still uncaught,
So sweet this pining, ah, blessed is my lot!*

How we longed for even a moment's darshan of the Mother, to get from Her divine hands a flower-blessing. Day after day, hour after hour we would wait in silence on Her path. In the evening we sat on the staircase that the Mother used to go to Her room. And we would keep sitting there waiting for Her arrival. It was almost ten o'clock. All of a sudden the door would open and to each one of us She would give a flower-blessing on Her way down. People were waiting for Her down at the Meditation Hall.

And thus years went by. Sometimes the Mother did not open Her door because She had gone into a trance. So everybody would quietly go back home. Such a joy we

got, simply waiting for the Mother! But wasn't it a little painful too?

*But where art thou, O where?
They pine for thee, O still uncaught,
So sweet this pining, ah, blessed is my lot!*

And thus the years flowed on. Who could have imagined that all this would one day come to an end?

*Sitting in the dust by thy door,
This beggar-heart doth thee implore
Compassion-alms of thy Grace outpour.*

The Mother was talking to us in the Playground one day about different things. She told us:

"I used to go almost every evening for a drive some distance away. Pavitra would drive and when we reached the chosen place he would stop the car, open the door of the car and go out to walk by himself. On one such occasion I was sitting in the car. The air was very peaceful and I could see many beautiful scenes from the car. Suddenly from somewhere a huge cobra got into the car. He came straight towards me and swaying his large hood stood near my lap. I watched him for some time. Then I told him:

'All right, now you can go.'

At once the cobra lowered his hood and slithered out."

I did not like the Mother's playing with the snake in this way. I blurted out:

"You really should not have encouraged that snake like that. You should have killed it straight away."

The Mother was taken aback and said:

"No, that can't be. How can I kill? I am the Mother."

The way the Mother said "I am the Mother", I could not say anything more. I just sat there speechless. "I am the Mother" kept echoing in the universe. Isn't it amazing how from a little incident I got to hear from the Mother's own lips this tremendously significant utterance "I am the Mother".

Let me tell you about another incident. The Mother had come to the Playground after finishing Her game of tennis. Mota-kaka, Charuchandra Bhattacharya (Pranab's uncle), walked into the Playground with a group of miserable looking boys. They were students of a primary school and looked extremely poor. They all wore dirty shorts and torn shirts. Their hair was unwashed and dishevelled. God knows how long they hadn't applied oil to it. Mota-kaka accompanied this group of children to the Mother. I was standing near the Mother. The Mother lovingly gave to each one of the boys a toffee. Suddenly Mota-kaka exclaimed:

“Mother, I think Priti is feeling a little disgusted seeing these poorly-dressed children.”

The Mother threw a glance at me. I felt slightly ill at ease. I had no feeling of disgust at all for these poor children but Mota-kaka enjoyed embarrassing me in this way. After She had finished distributing the toffees to the children the Mother got up and started walking towards Her room. I followed Her. The Mother walked a few steps and stopped. Turning towards me She said:

“Never forget that they too are my children. I am their Mother too.”

From the Mother’s heart an inexhaustible infinite love poured out for each and every child of hers. “I am their Mother too”, hearing these words from the Mother Herself I became speechless. Quite enchanted.

I suddenly remembered what Sri Aurobindo had written in *The Mother*:

In her vision they are all her children, an integral part of her.

But what an unforeseen joy to have heard this divine declaration “*I am the Mother*” from the Mother’s own lips. These words uttered with so much tenderness often return to me and oh, how unbelievably enchanting She looked at that moment!

Bearing the burden of universal love,
A wonderful mother of unnumbered souls.

(*Savitri*)

(*To be continued*)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

Whatever name is called the Power that answers is the Mother. Each name indicates a certain aspect of the Divine and is limited by that aspect; the Mother’s Power is universal.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 747*)

RADHA'S DANCE

ON 24th April, 1932, we arranged a musical soirée, very probably to celebrate the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry on that day twelve years earlier. The next day, she sent this written message-*cum*-blessing:

To all those who took part in today's singing and music:

Sri Aurobindo and myself have felt that there was a great progress this time. It was not only from the exterior point of view of execution, but in the greater aim of the concentration behind it and in the inner attitude.

May the day bring its benediction to all. (24.4.32)

I was cherishing a hope to show my dancing to the Mother, but as I did not know dancing very well, there was some hesitation lest I should waste her time. At last I expressed my desire. She consented to see my dance. When I came to the Ashram, I had thought I would have to give up all art for the sake of sadhana, but such sacrifice was not needed. Sri Aurobindo's yoga includes all. He wrote afterwards:

The development of capacities is not only permissible but right when it can be made part of Yoga; one can give not only one's soul, but all one's powers to the Divine. (29.6.31)

I was preparing joyfully the dance I wanted to show to the Mother. Dancing and music had been my passions from childhood. But since dancing was taboo in respectable families, I had to suppress my liking for it. As I grew up and became independent, I did what I could in my own way. I had not seen dancing of any kind anywhere except on the Bengali stage. Still, I felt a magnetic pull towards it.

I started preparing a dance tuned to Rabindranath Tagore's song, "Along with the rhythm of the dancing". The Mother saw it in the Meditation Hall upstairs. This was the first time she saw my performance. It was in 1931.

After it, she drew up a plan for us to compose the song-part of the dance. While my part was to dance, her plan had four parts expressing four moods:

1. A measureless void in Radha's mind and body. She is groping in the dark.

2. She is seeking all around, but does not find him whom she seeks. Unbearable is the anguish. At times, she hears as it were the almost forgotten anklet bells come floating from afar. She becomes impatient—a restless mood. Then all of a sudden she hears the sound of the flute. Depression vanishes. The sound comes nearer and Radha experiences ecstasy.

3. Krishna appears.

4. Radha's surrender at his feet.

These are the four moods. Dilip composed wonderful dance-music for them. Its rich artistry of tune and striking variety of rhythm appealed very much to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. I practised my dances in a large hall at Dilip's place. When previously I had wanted to practise my dance to the tune of Rabindranath's song in the same room, Sri Aurobindo had replied (referring to a sadhak who lived just under that hall downstairs):

“He is too serious to be danced over.”

Now, Sri Aurobindo gave permission. I was puzzled and asked him:

“You wrote differently before, and now this change?”

He replied:

“Perhaps before long he will cease to be too serious.”

I could not contain my laughter. In everything there was his touch of humour. I began my practice but the dance fell short of the expected height. I worked hard. Meanwhile something happened. Dilip composed another beautiful piece of music—for a Dawn-dance. I tried both the dances in my own house. This Dawn-dance came off very easily and I made a discovery from it about which I wrote to the Mother:

I perceived, as I was dancing, something in a new way. Please tell me if there is any truth in it. When I started the Radha's dance, my purpose was to execute the mood of the song in the poses of the dance. As Radha's feelings are usually very intense to the Indians, especially to the Bengalis, there was nothing very new in this mood. Whatever mood the song expressed, I tried to feel it first and then give it a form. But when I started the Dawn-dance, no clear form of the mood had emerged beforehand. What appeared was the feeling of the vibration of the mood in the singing before I had understood how the language or the feeling of the song was expressed. Following that vibration the movements and various poses began to be formed. I did not remember the words of the song, only followed its inner movements. Thus, it was felt to be a new experience, having a truth in it. All things seem to have a vibration. These are, however, big words for me. What I want to say is that the 'Radha's song' was much easier than the Dawn-dance song even with regard to composition. We were not so familiar with the mood and form of the Dawn-dance; the composition too was difficult. In these respects it was a new creation. So I said that I did not try to get at any definite form at first; nevertheless everything came down very easily and naturally and I understood the inner movements. Am I right in my analysis? Is there any truth here?

Sri Aurobindo replied:

To feel the vibration and develop from it the rhythm of the dance is the right way to create something true; the other way, to understand with the mind and work out with the mind only or mainly is the mental way; it is laborious and difficult and has not got the same spontaneous inspiration. (29.4.32)

I was working upon the Radha's dance but the result was not satisfactory; the true thing eluded me, though I felt at times as if I was on the verge of it when the dancing took different turns giving me a feeling of contentment. I wondered then how a person who knew very little of dance could do it. It did not take long to realise that it was not due to my power. But whenever I tried to do it by my own power, I failed. It was understood that I was following the second method mentioned by Sri Aurobindo—my mind was working, so it could not open itself. There was more labour in consequence and more time. At times I went to the Mother to show her my dance; she encouraged me a lot and expressed sympathy. One day she said, "You have to bring in more variety in your dance. See, how rich is Dilip's song in variety of movement."

In this manner I proceeded somehow to the stage of Krishna's appearance and was thinking of beginning Radha's surrender when the Mother called and told me many things. To her nothing has an end, she has an inexhaustible store from which she can fill up our scanty hoarding. What happened next day was a big surprise—her trust in one who could do nothing, and her encouraging words to a novice were beyond imagination. She wrote:

Sahana,

To complete what I told you yesterday about Radha's dance I have noted down as an indication of the thought and feeling Radha must have within her when she stands at the end in front of Krishna—"Every thought of my mind, each emotion of my heart, every movement of my being, every sensation, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood, all is yours, yours absolutely, yours without reserve. You can decide my life or my death, my happiness or my sorrow, my pleasure or my pain, whatever you do with me, whatever comes to me from you will lead me to Divine Rapture."

What can I say about my inner feeling when I received from her this supreme boon! What did she reveal to me through this prayer of Radha, what tone of complete surrender did she make me hear? This was my constant thought. Her every word was aglow with the signature of heavenly love. What was she teaching me through this dance as a pretext, where was she leading me and to follow which rhythm in life? My whole being was hushed to fullness and tears began to flow. I could clearly understand what was meant by accepting everything as a part of yoga.

Clear it was that the Radha-dance was the sadhana of a complete surrender to the Divine and we had come to do that sadhana. We can well understand from this letter of the Mother the way in which she and Sri Aurobindo want always to lift us to what they hold up before our consciousness.

SAHANA

(Extract from *At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo* by Sahana, translated from Bengali by Nirodbaran, 1985, pp. 37-41)

STAGES OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

WITH the exception of those born with a spiritual bent of mind brought about by the unfinished momentum of spiritual practices carried out in previous lives, the vast majority of people do not take to any sadhana, because they do not feel the need for it. They are satisfied with their worldly life and except for spending a few minutes a day going through the motions of offering flowers and incense at the picture of the family deity or an occasional visit to the temple, they do not think of seriously taking up any spiritual practice or sadhana. When, however, a crisis is to be faced or a calamity befalls, the mind starts turning to the Divine for succour. As saint Kabir has said,

*Dukh me sumiran sab kare;
sukh me kare na koi.*

(In times of distress everyone remembers the Divine,
Not so when the going is good.)

When such a turning of the mind towards God occurs or the aspiration to seek him is kindled, it often marks a watershed in the life of the person because from then on he begins serious spiritual practice. He starts reading spiritual literature, spends time in contemplation, seeks the company of realised souls and even looks for a Guru for spiritual initiation. Thus begins the person's journey on the spiritual path.

But the journey is long and arduous, and the progress on the path slow and unsteady, and at times discouraging. Although it is not easy to categorise the stages of spiritual progress, in general, four stages are recognised. The first stage is one of self-purification in which all unhelpful attitudes and negative qualities are steadily expunged from one's being; the second is the experiencing of a progressively deep quietude within oneself; the third is the liberation of oneself from all sense of bondage; and finally, the fourth is when one becomes capable of helping others to achieve similar liberation.

There is a Sanskrit prayer for universal well-being consisting of six couplets, starting with

sarveṣāṃ svastir bhavatu
(May all be well with everybody)

and ending with

lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu
(May the entire universe be full of felicity).

The fourth of these couplets practically summarises these four stages of spiritual progress. To quote it:

*durjanaḥ sajjano bhūyat, sajjanaḥ śāntimāpnuyāt;
śānto mucyeta bandhebhyo, muktascānyān vimocayet.*

It literally means, “May the wicked become good and benevolent, may the good attain peace; may the peaceful get liberated from all bondage, may the liberated one help others to achieve liberation.” The word ‘wicked’ is here to be taken as a description of one whose qualities, attitudes and reactions to situations are not conducive to peace of mind. In effect, in this couplet, the four stages of spiritual progress mentioned are implied.

Sri Aurobindo’s classification of the stages of inner growth or spiritual progress is slightly different. They are *śuddhi* (purification), *mukti* (liberation), *siddhi* (perfection) and *bhukti* (enjoyment or a state of bliss resulting from constant abidance in one’s Self) [SABCL 21: 613]. He does not include the descent of peace as a distinct stage, because it is a natural corollary to and occurs side by side with progressive inner purification. He does not also consider liberation as being sufficient in itself, but insists on attainment of perfection as the stage next to liberation from bondage. Nor does he deem it necessary to specifically mention the help the perfected one can render to others to attain liberation. After all, the gathering of seekers around a perfected spiritual personality and the help they derive from him are as natural as bees swarming around a flower as soon as it blooms, to collect honey. The flower does not need to advertise itself.

For practical purposes, the classification of the stages of progress is not so critical for the majority of us once the firm resolve has been made to tread the spiritual path and the process of inner cleansing has begun. Depending on the intensity of our aspiration and our sincerity of purpose, the descent of peace and other blessings are sure to follow. In fact, a stage may be reached in which one has the feeling that no self-effort is involved in one’s sadhana. That is the stage in which one begins to experience the truth of the Taoist aphorism: “Do nothing, everything is done.”

B. G. PATTEGAR

He who knows this Self who is the eater of the honey of existence and the lord of what is and shall be, has thenceforward no shrinking.

Katha Upanishad (II. 1. 5.)

(Epigraph in *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 218)

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of October 2007)

18. The Superb Epic Poet

A MILLENNIUM ago, the dialects (from the Sanskrit or Dravidian parent) spoken in various parts of India attained full maturity. Towards achieving this, poets and scholars retold the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as long narratives. At this time, Tamil had a full-blown literature of its own with a sumptuous treasure of sacred and secular writing that had been piled up, perhaps, during fifteen hundred years. The epic was a genre well-used by Jains and Buddhists in the Tamil country. Sekkizhar (12th century) produced *Peria Puranam* which immediately gained scriptural currency among the followers of Shaivism and it comes as no surprise that Kamban wrote *Ramavataram* about the same time. This was a period when Rama's story was being retold all over India. Assessing the many Ramayanas, Sri Aurobindo wrote nearly ninety years ago:

Only two however of these later poets arrived at a vividly living recreation of the ancient story and succeeded in producing a supreme masterpiece, Kamban, the Tamil poet who makes of his subject a great original epic, and Tulsidas whose famed Hindi *Ramayana* combines with a singular mastery lyric intensity, romantic richness and the sublimity of the epic imagination and is at once a story of the divine Avatar and a long chant of religious devotion.¹

What was it that inspired Kamban, a Shaivite, to take up Rama's story? Perhaps his elder contemporary Sekkizhar's *Peria Puranam* which had become very popular was the reason. With Sekkizhar's work, the followers of Shiva had a scriptural epic to study not merely for its religious content but also for its storylines and poetic flights of fancy. Kamban may have been prompted to prepare such a creative work to sustain and spread Vaishnavism. He chose the story of Rama for there had been no attempt to retell Valmiki's epic in the Tamil language despite it being a very old language. Another reason could have been his immersion in the hymns of the Alvars.

The celebrated Kamban scholar, Sri S. K. Ramarajan has pointed out that throughout Kamban's epic, the inspiration of the Alvars was palpable, whether it was in telling the story or using Tamil phrases. As for the choice of the theme, it was no doubt Kulasekara Alvar's *Ramayana* that decided Kamban's subject matter. Kulasekara's was the first cogent recital of Rama's story beginning with his birth, the killing of Tataka, the breaking of Shiva's bow and marrying Sita, Rama's going to the forest, receiving Guha's help and giving his sandals to Bharata as the insignia to

1. *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953), p. 363.

rule Ayodhya, the slicing away of Surpanakha's nose, the destruction of the golden deer, the abduction of Sita, the killing of Vali, the defeat of Ravana and crowning of Rama, the birth of children, and the final withdrawal from Ayodhya back to Vaikuntha:

Sekkizhar found in the decad "Tillaivazh Andanar" by the Nayanar Sundarar a basis for writing the *Peria Puranam*. In the same manner, Kulasekara gifted this decad on Rama's story to Kamban who wished to write the *Ramayana*.²

Kamban's life has been a favourite with myth-spinners in the Tamil land. Though some would place him in the ninth century, the twelfth century seems a better option, to go by the arguments put forward by scholars on the subject. He was born in Tiruvazhundur, one of the 108 holy centres for Vaishnavites. The temple to Lord Devadiraja and Goddess Senkamalavalli also contains the images of Kamban and his wife. Living in this ambience where the hymns of the Alvars were recited with joy and devotion, Kamban grew familiar with the intricate movements within the tale of Rama. The temple contains a famous shrine to Prahlada. The temple legend says that when young Prahlada felt bewildered by the terrifying image of Narasimha, the Lord calmed him down by appearing in the soul-enthraling form of Krishna as the cowherd. Hence the presiding deity is also known as Gosakan (Friend of Cows). Apparently Kamban was enamoured of the Narasimha myth because of the shrine where special worship is performed for Prahlada. This is how he came to write the famous "Iraniyan Vadhai Padalam" (Canto of the Killing of Hiranya) in the Yuddha Kanda of his *Ramayana*.

He had shown great promise and was helped to further his education by a farmer, Sadayappar of Tiruvennainallur. Though Kamban rose to a status when he could move at ease among the Chera, Chola and Pandya royalty, he remained simple and preferred Sadayappar's friendship. Having written the *Ramayana*, he went to Srirangam for releasing the work. This formal launch was a must in those days, and always a group of scholars and poets would attend the ceremony and pronounce their opinion. Kamban came to the temple at Srirangam and asked the Sthalattaar³ for permission to recite the poem in the open space in front of the shrine of Ranganayaki Thayar, adjacent to the temple of Narasimha which was built at an elevated height. Even as he stood waiting for the permission, a voice came through: *Nam Satakopana Padiniyo?* "Have you written about Satakopa (Nammalwar)?" Kamban realised that he had not used a prefatory prayer to Nammalwar, the great devotional hymnologist. For, though they were divided by several centuries, it was Nammalwar's handling of the Tamil language that gave it a totally new spirit which in turn helped Kamban write his epic. So Kamban wrote a garland of one hundred verses in praise of Nammalwar titled *Satakopar Antadi*.

2. S. K. Ramarajan, *Alwarkalum Kambanum* (2006 edition), p. 29. For reference to Sekkizhar's drawing upon Sundarar's poem see the essay on Sekkizhar titled 'Biographer of Saints' in this series, October 2007.

3. The group of servitors who were in charge of the temple administration.

While each verse of this paean to Nammalwar has honeyed phrases, the ninth verse explains how Nammalwar's work *Tiruvaimoli* is an introduction to the Tamil language, a model for Tamil poesy, mother of sublime literature, a lamp that illumines all the eight directions. Above all, this Tamil scripture (Nammalwar's *Tiruvaimoli*) has successfully controlled the commotion in our mind created by different religions and taught it to remain focussed on Narayana (verse 76). Like Tondaradippodi Alwar, Kamban also rejects the pleasures of heaven and would prefer to remain on earth listening to the sweet accents of *Tiruvaimoli* (verse 23).

Should the immortals invite me
 To their heavens, and I could gain
 The residence of the Lord who subdued
 The seven bulls, I would yet prefer
 The life of drinking the sweet honey
 Of Tiruvaimoli gifted
 By Nammalwar of lovely Kurukur.

This passionate attachment to the hymns of the Alvars percolated into the poesy of Kamban and shaped the epic into a treasure trove of bhakti. Kamban has also written shorter works like *Er Ezhhupathu* (on farming), *Silai Ezhupathu*, *Tirukkaiavzhakkam* and *Saraswati Antadi*.

With the offering of a sublime Antadi to Nammalwar, the stage was set for the recital of Kamban's epic in the Srirangam Temple. The *Ramayana* received uniform praise and was immediately adopted as a favourite treasury by the commentators on the hymns of the Alvars as well as lay persons. The epic had sent such deep roots into the Tamil psyche that E. V. Ramasami Naicker's anti-religion movement half a century ago could not disturb its position. He had his followers burn copies of the epic in public places. The unexpected reaction was the rise of innumerable Kamban Kazhagams (Kamban Groups) throughout Tamil Nadu and the twentieth century succeeded in taking the poem to dizzying heights of popularity.

Kamban wrote only up to the crowning of Rama after the destruction of Ravana. Apparently he was not interested in the *Uttara Kanda*. One reason could be that Kulasekara Alwar's decad on the *Ramayana* stops with the *pattabhisheka*. In fact, none of the Alvars mentions the fire-ordeal. This is in tune with the very ancient (probably older than Valmiki) 'Rama Upakhyana' recounted in the *Mahabharata*. Since for the Vaishnavas the *Ramayana* is the "*pramana grantha*" (the witness scripture), Kamban's Tamil version became a great help when commenting upon the hymns of the Alvars to audiences that could not understand Sanskrit. The Manipravala commentators were very much tuned to Kamban and quote him occasionally which proves that the epic had gained wide currency within a century of its creation. Even the changes in the Valmiki version instituted by Kamban were taken in their stride by

the orthodox Vaishnavites.

Ramavataram follows the plan of Valmiki and has Six Kandams (Books): Bala, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundara and Yuddha Kandams have between them around ten thousand verses. There have been more too in some editions but many of these verses have been disenfranchised from the epic as latter-day insertions. A team of Kamban scholars have sat together and at last given an “authorised” volume under the aegis of the Kamban Kazhagam, Chennai in 1976. A contemporary of Kamban, Ottakoothar, has written the Uttara Kandam too. Naturally it comes nowhere near the poetic grace, architectonic precision and character study one finds in Kamban’s writing, and not many evince interest in studying the work.

Devotional poetry in Tamil does not satisfy one’s longings when read in an English translation. With Kamban, the problem becomes acute for the entire epic is bound with invisible threads of character studies that get snapped in an English version. V.V.S. Aiyar wisely chose the Miltonic blank-verse-paragraph for this task, and hence the few chunks from Kamban we read in his work do satisfy us a good deal. V.V.S. Aiyar was a good friend of Sri Aurobindo during 1910-1920. They must have discussed Kamban too, for Aiyar loved the epic to distraction. In his enthusiasm, he ranked Kamban as superior even to Valmiki!

I spoke of Valmiki’s work as the original of Kamban’s *Ramayana*. But Kamban has not translated Valmiki. He has merely taken the story immortalised by the Aryan sage and, though he has followed it closely enough in all its details, has written an entirely original poem...He has not merely taken his theme from the greatest of Samskrit epics but has followed it in almost every detail step by step. He has himself challenged comparison, though in all humility, with the first of Samskrit poets, and yet not one of the critics who have compared his work with that of Valmiki has ever denied him place among the greatest poets of the world.⁴

Kamban himself admits that he is retelling Valmiki:

Three poets told this story in the language
Of the gods. I have followed the first of them
And sought to retell his narrative
In Tamil verse.⁵

There is a detailed description of the rich water sources and luscious fields of the Kosala country, followed by an account of Ayodhya’s features that are said to rival the endowments of Indra’s heaven. Kamban draws from the Sangam aesthetics to describe the land, the seasons, the flora and fauna. From the beginning it is made

4. *Kamba Ramayana: A Study* (1965 edition), pp. 1-4.

5. “Payiram”, verse 10. Three poets: Valmiki, Vasishtha, Bodhayana. Language of the gods: Sanskrit.

clear that Kamban's Rama is an incarnation. The title itself is *Ramavataram* (The Incarnation of Rama). Dasaratha has ruled for sixty thousand years and is issueless. Even as Dasaratha speaks to Vasishtha about his longing for children, Kamban takes us to the thoughts that flash through in the sage's mind about how the Supreme had promised the devas to rid the world of the incubus, Ravana. Vishnu had promised to take birth as Dasaratha's son and had commanded Adishesha, the conch and the discus to come as his younger brothers. So when Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna are born, we automatically look at them as divine beings and do not care to associate them with human failings. The magic of Kamban's approach and Tamil poesy coalesce to produce verses and scenes with which we feel fine-tuned to self-forgetful devotion. But we never forget the incarnation-idea.

Kamban points out at each step that the aim of Rama's incarnation is the destruction of Ravana. Even Kaikeyi's change of heart is attributed to this pre-laid plan divine:

Because the promise must be fulfilled now
That Vishnu to the gods had made, because
The gods did work their *maya*, and the saints
Had earned the fruit of their virtuous deeds, and cup
Of Rakshas' sins was full,—her heart was hardened.
For if the world to-day the ambrosial strains
Of Rama's praise doth drink, doth not it owe
The joy to Kaikeyi's cruelty?⁶

But the power of Rama's story is such that we get into the human mode with ease and experience all the emotions of joy, sorrow, anger, frustration and the rest along with the host of characters. Among the major changes that Kamban has made in the story of Valmiki is the meeting of Sita and Rama prior to their wedding, and falling in love. It is typical of ancient Sangam aesthetics which had been put to fine use by the Alvars as bridal mysticism. Vishwamitra enters Mithila with Rama and Lakshmana. The city is very beautiful and as they walk in front of the palace, Rama happens to glance up and sees Sita in the women's storey. The same moment she looks down and their eyes are locked with each other; according to Kamban they exchanged their hearts! It is an intensely romantic moment, but Kamban is firm in his storyline for he reminds us that Rama and Sita silently looked at each other, since the couple who had separated from their union in the ocean had now come together again, of what use was speech to them?

Kamban's Rama teaches the reader all the virtues needed for leading an ideal life amid the ups and downs of earthly subsistence where the vital need is co-existence.

6. "Mandarai Soozchi Padalam", verses 85-6. All translations from Kamban quoted in this essay are by V.V.S. Aiyar.

It is true we are never allowed to forget that Rama is an incarnation, but the human touches in the epic are too numerous to be ignored. After all, Kamban wrote his epic not only as a document of bhakti yoga but also as an instrument to apply correctives to the body politic. If Kamban's Rama is shown as the ideal son when he follows Kaikeyi's dictat and goes to the forest, he also upholds male chastity by remaining true to Sita in togetherness and separation. He also underlines the need for human unity when he accepts Sugriva, Guha and Vibhishana, not merely as friends but his own brothers. Vanara, boatman, rakshasa: brothers all! Crowning Vibhishana as the king of Lanka, Kamban's Rama says:

When Guha joined us on Ganga's banks,
I counted myself blessed with brothers four:
Sugriv to me a fifth did add; and now
With thee are become sev'n loving brothers
Blest verily is father Dasharath;
One son he banished to the forests wild,
But sons on sons do grow on him, and bless
His royal name.⁷

There is then the episode of the killing of Vali, a subject hotly debated for centuries. Was it right on the part of Rama to have ambushed Vali and destroyed him by stealth? Kamban expends all his poetic powers to describe the battle of Vali and Sugriva and Vali drawing out the arrow that had mortally pierced his heart. The name 'Rama' inscribed on the arrow shocks him by surprise for he never expected the Prince of Ayodhya to kill a total stranger like him. Certainly not by hiding himself in a cowardly manner. Vali's immediate reaction shows how much he had revered the renowned name of Rama from a distance:

He saw the name which is the Word, the seed
From which sprang all the worlds; the glory which gives
Its own self as the highest meed to those
Who meditate thereon: the healing drug
To the ills incurable called earthly life;
He saw with his eyes the sacred *mantra* Ram—
Sweet to the eyes to see and ears to hear
Carved on the dreadful dart. He saw and laughed
And blushed as thus he spoke; "By birth of Ram
Who has disgraced the name of soldier and
His bow, great Surya's race, alas, has lost

7. "Veedanan Adaikkala Padalam", verse 143.

Its name for Dharm which ever was known to be
 Its shield! Is it for this he left his home
 And took like saint or sage to forest life.”⁸

When Rama appears before him, Vali uses the choicest words to heap contumely on Rama for his cowardly act. Immediately Rama sets up a longish defence but he does not really convince us. After all, Vali was no less a hero and his monkey race was not subject to the social mores of the humans. So Kamban gets Lakshmana to say a few words which give a further twist to the specious defence:

When first thy brother refuge sought with us
 From thy unrighteous rage, my brother swore
 That he would send thee to the halls of Yam.
 He feared that thou too, should he show his face
 To them might haply wish to save thyself
 And fall a suppliant at his feet; and so
 It is that he concealed himself to aim
 His dart at thee.⁹

With his inborn generosity which is a sign of true valour, Vali brings the curtain down by requesting Rama to look after Sugriva, Angada and Hanuman, a beautiful gesture from a brave heart.

While there are changes and extensions of Valmiki’s narrative, Kamban’s *Ramavataram* posits a major input in the narrative on Hiranyakashipu’s destruction inserted in the Yuddha Kanda. Rama’s forces had made themselves visible at Lanka and war was imminent. Ravana’s War Council is in session. Ravana would not heed Kumbakarna’s opposition to war. Verily as a fond, purblind father he remains pleased with the noise made by Indrajit and votes in favour of war. Vibhishana prays to Ravana in vain. Still, he is persistent and takes the opportunity to narrate the legend of Hiranyakashipu’s fall. While the *Ramavataram* is the darling of devotees for its numerable prayers to Rama addressed by people like Hanuman, Kabandha and Viradha, the “Iraniyan Vadhai Padalam” marks the glorious crown of all the prayers long and short in the epic.

The legend is retold in a leisurely, dramatic manner. Hiranyakashipu’s strength is described in superhuman proportions, as “the combined force of all the five elements in creation.” When his son Prahlada was in the womb of the queen, she had listened to Narada expatiate on the greatness of the name, Narayana. When Prahlada grew up, his natural inclination veered towards devotion to the Supreme as Narayana. His teacher’s admonition that Prahlada should offer worship to Hiranyakashipu and not

8. “Vali Vadhai Padalam”, verses 79-80.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Narayana was not heeded. Each and every one of the verses by Prahlada in this canto is held precious by Vaishnavites. For them he exemplifies perfect devotion. Again and again the teacher's words were brushed aside by the little devotee:

I'll honour nought, my master, but the name
Of the Lord Supreme. He has illumed my mind
And ta'en possession of my heart; when He
The Infinite One thus dwells in me, can aught
Be hid from me? If such there be, I'll learn.
From thee, so it is not opposed to truth.
Who else is worthy of worship but the One
Whose praises fill the Brahman's Ved, whose name
The knowing ones and sages, even gods
Repeat t'escape the bonds of birth?¹⁰

When the boy repeats the same to Hiranyakashipu, the latter is incensed and tries to change the boy's mind in many ways. But even dire punishment finds Prahlada cool and meditating upon Narayana. As Hiranyakashipu rages against the Supreme, he points to a pillar near him and asks Prahlada whether his god was in the pillar: "Show him to me!" Prahlada says calmly:

"What of this column, father," said Prahlad:
"Thou'lt find Him in a span of space: divide
An atom int' an hundred parts, and thou
Wilt find my God in every one of them:
He is in Meru hill; thy very words,
I say, are filled with Him: and thou wilt find
'Fore long my every word a solemn truth."¹¹

Kamban's portrait of the Man-lion bursting out of the pillar blazes with a terrible beauty:

He struck, and lo the heavens opened wide,
The universal globe asunder burst,
And rumbling came the laugh of the Man-Lion fierce,
Tremendous, ominous!¹²

It is firmly believed that even as this verse was read out for the first time when the epic was being inaugurated within the Srirangam Temple, there was a rumbling noise

10. "Iraniyan Vadhai Padalam", verses 28-29.

11. *Ibid.*, verse 124.

12. *Ibid.*, verse 127.

followed by roaring laughter which lasted for a while. And that the roar was that of Narasimha in the sanctum of the Mettu Azhakiya Singar Sannidhi. The legend goes to prove how deeply Kamban's epic has entrenched itself in the psyche of the student of Tamil literature as well as become a favourite with the devotees of Rama.

There are many harrowing episodes in the *Ramavataram* which are treated in Kamban's own way. When the war is on and Kumbhakarna enters the battlefield, Vibhishana comes to him wishing to win him over to Rama's side. Kumbhakarna misunderstands Vibhishana's coming. Thinking that his brother wants to join him and fight against Rama, Kumbhakarna asks him not to do so.

He lifted up his brother that clasped his feet,
And folding him unto his breast, he thus
Addressed him; "I was glad to learn, my brother,
That thou hadst left our doomed camp and ta'en
Refuge with Ram. Why leav'st thou now his side,
Thou innocent, and come to us that rush
Headlong into the jaws of death? Wilt thou
Exchange thy nectar for our poison black?"¹³

Kumbhakarna, like Indrajit and many others, is a tragic figure. Ravana is cast in what appears to be seemingly indestructible bronze, an image of intense pride, passionate ferocity. One who was a scholar, a hero and an artist, yet Ravana became a plaything in the hands of fate. Losing his loved ones one after another, he stands his ground till the last, and the Rama-Ravana encounter is truly memorable with Kamban's Tamil rising to sublime heights.

The twang of Ravan's bow was like the roar
Of all the oceans seven heard at once;
While twang of Kodanda was like the chant
Of Ved Eternal on the Final Day.¹⁴

The arrows released by Rama and Ravana veiled the sky. Rama frustrated each move of Ravana. And yet for a while it seemed as if Ravana was winning, such was his juggernaut movement. While Rama was countering the missiles sent by Ravana, the Maya astra appeared invincible. Fortunately the divine charioteer Matali asked Rama to pronounce his own name before sending the next astra. This done, Ravana's missile was broken to smithereens. Undeterred, Ravana sent a trisul-astra which came with terrifying force but was smashed by the mere 'hum' uttered by Rama. Ravana

13. "Kumbakarunan Vadhai Padalam", verses 130-131.

14. "Iraivanan Vadhai Padalam", verse 35.

was taken aback:

Who can this Rama be? He is not Shiva,
Nor Vishnu, nor the Four-faced One divine.
As for austerities, he looks not strong
Enough to mortify his flesh. Is he,
Perchance, the Universal Cause, of whom
The Vedas speak?¹⁵

The battle continued with tremendous ferocity. The heads of Ravana get sliced away but new ones grow in their place. With his patience at an end, Rama releases the Brahmastra to which is added the fiery force of the Discus as well.

The holy dart of Raghava did drink
His three crore years of mortal life, and all
The strength of his austerities; it quenched
The blessing Brahma had bestowed on him
That none should have the power to conquer him;
It did the might extinguish which had brought
The universe beneath his awful sway;
And piercing clean his chest, it drank the blood
And straightaway flashed through th' air with lightning speed.¹⁶

Kamban's epic has been annotated and critically analysed by innumerable scholars and lovers of literature. For all, Kamban's Sita is the Goddess Pure, Lakshmi herself. Kamban's own pen gains a spiritual glow when writing about Sita. Beautiful, selfless, steadfast in her love for Rama, brave in rejecting the temptations of Ravana, she exists in a higher plane of consciousness than even the hero. Kamban is obviously following the Vaishnava approach to the *Ramayana*. According to the famous Vaishnava teacher, Pillai Lokacharya (12th century), Valmiki, "speaks of the greatness of the imprisoned lady" (*sirai irundhaval etram solluhiradhu*). Her greatness includes the presence of an intensely human being in her. She never accepts anything as her right and if Hanuman has brought her the signet ring, her words of gratitude flow with an electrical ease:

O thou that brought'st me the message from Rama and gavest me life—a father thou to me and mother, and a fount of loving mercy besides—thou hast earned glory for this life and for all time to come. O hero of the mountain chest! O thou who hast lifted a heavy burden off my heart! If I be one who knows not ill, if my

15. *Ibid.*, verse 134.

16. *Ibid.*, verse 196.

heart be pure and conduct right, may my blessing never fail, may eternity be to thee like unto a day, and live thou for ever and ever!¹⁷

There is tremendous dignity in the critical moment when Rama, victory-crowned, rejects her on the battleground with harsh words. He even says that she should have committed suicide rather than remained alive in the rakshasa kingdom. She simply says that it is not possible for anyone, not even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to recognise her faultless tapasya. On her simple command Lakshmana raises a fire and she enters it, announcing to the world that if she had been stained by thought or word, fire could consume her. The very moment she entered the rising flames, they were quenched by the fire of her chastity, says Kamban. Such is Sita of great tapasya, “the stern austerity of Austerity itself”.

Kamban’s epic defies the confines of a short article. Indeed, it is inexhaustible. On the one hand, it gives the devotional poet significant passages on the nature of the Supreme and how to draw the Supreme’s help to our neighbourhood and transform life here into a life divine. On the other hand, one could dwell on the various characters in *Ramavataram* in a meditative mood and gain unerring guidelines to format one’s own life. India’s yesterdays have been moulded by the tale and even today the epic characters are eminently contemporaneous. There is no village in India that is not associated with Sita or Rama or other characters from the *Ramayana*. Kamban sensed the need of the hour when a Tamil version would be of immense help in propagating the ethical and spiritual facts of life to wider audiences, and he was right. Today Kamban reigns supreme.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

17. “Urukattu Padalam”, 71-72.

Mangesh V. Nadkarni passed away on Sunday
23 September 2007 at Pondicherry.

NAVANIT STORIES

“YOU WANT SWARAJ?”

“You want Swaraj, right? Of course you need Swaraj, and why not? You have the enthusiasm to get it; you have the right to obtain it; it is your birthright; you definitely want Swaraj,” at a political meeting in Anand a huge man appearing to be from Kathiawad but actually from Kutch spoke out. As if shaken up, the audience sat up and paid attention. “We want Swaraj. We cannot do without Swaraj. But Swaraj is not served up on a plate just for the asking. It has to be achieved, and that cannot be done without manhood, without courage; without fearlessness it will never be ours. Swaraj is for the brave, not for cowards and terrified animals.”

Maddhada’s Shivjibhai was in his Kutchi element:

“Listen to me. At Surat station an Indian gentleman purchased a Second Class ticket. Holding it securely in his pocket he went to that carriage. He looked inside and saw a white man sprawled in a place meant to seat three passengers. The moment he touched the door to open it, that beast growled, ‘Who are you?’ Our passenger’s hand slipped from the door-handle and with a fluttering heart he ran away, like a rabbit from a lion’s roar, and sneaked into the Third Class compartment with his precious Second Class ticket hidden in his pocket.

“The train left the station. It reached Navsari. Another passenger with a Second Class ticket went to that compartment. That white skin was still sprawled on the bench and as soon as our man went to open the door, he bawled, ‘Who are you?’

“‘Your father!’ our passenger coolly replied.

“‘Yes, yes, please come in, by all means...’ and the lolling lion jumped up and shook hands. The newcomer now lolled on the seat and the former sat down meekly beside him.

“My brothers, while those two had only Second Class tickets, you have not Second but First Class tickets for the train of Swaraj. But if you allow yourself to be brow-beaten and give up your rights, not only the Third even the Fourth Class will not be accessible to you. You will have to gather the strength to shout back, ‘Push off!’ to these raiders of your ancestral lands....

“To the fearless, why only Swaraj, even the lordship of Swarga itself is within reach!”

PUJALAL

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

[Editorial note: Readers may wish to look at pp. 890-893 of this issue.]

*Be grateful for all ordeals, they are the
shortest way to the Divine.*

The Mother

(Words of the Mother II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 242)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

*To will what God wills—that is the supreme
secret.*

The Mother

(Words of the Mother II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 115)

With Compliments from B.