

MOTHER INDIA

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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LIGHT

Light, endless Light! darkness has room no more,
Life's ignorant gulfs give up their secrecy:
The huge unconscious depths unplumbed before
Lie glimmering in vast expectancy.

Light, timeless Light immutable and apart!
The holy sealed mysterious doors unclose.
Light, burning Light from the Infinite's diamond heart
Quivers in my heart where blooms the deathless rose.

Light in its rapture leaping through the nerves!
Light, brooding Light! each smitten passionate cell
In a mute blaze of ecstasy preserves
A living sense of the Imperishable.

I move in an ocean of stupendous Light
Joining my depths to His eternal height.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 150)

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE INCONSCIENT

Inconscience

1

WORLD and life can be looked at from one of two opposite vision-bases—observed in the light of the knowledge that looks below and sees as the foundation of things the Inconscient from which our physical birth took its rise or experienced in the light of the knowledge that looks above and draws the radiations it throws upon all around it from the Superconscient which is our soul's source. These two conflicting light-streams—which yet at their extreme points seem almost to meet or at least touch the same mystery—yet shed at first opposite values on the phenomenon of conscious life in matter and illumine in contrary senses the destiny of man and his place in world-existence; for in the light from above it assumes a supreme significance, in the light from below a supreme insignificance.

For if we look from one side, consciousness appears as a circumstance, a thing secondary or even accidental, a little flickering temporary uncertain light in a vast darkness of inconscient world-systems; if we look from the other it is the slowly delivered but not yet perfectly released blaze of that which supported all along this seemingly inconscient creation, subtly concealed in its very cells, molecules, atoms, electrons or whatever still more infinitesimal whorls of motional force-substance have been made its base. Either then consciousness is a perishable jet of flame shooting up out of the slime of this obscure teeming morass we call Matter, a strange inexplicable temporary freak sprung from gas and plasm, chromosome and gene, gland and hormone—we know not well how even when we have found the process, and know not at all why and can never know and hardly need to know, since the whole thing is a meaningless and eventually purposeless miracle of incalculable Chance or blind Necessity,—or if it is not this, then it is the very Flame which, dynamic and hidden, has shaped all these things and now, overt and revealed, can work openly on them and on itself to use, to uplift, to subtilise, to refine, to liberate, to transfigure.

If the first view is right, the view so long pressed on us by physical Science, then this very universe itself is but a queer paradoxical movement of mindless eyeless Force or of a brute substance emanating purposeless energy, which yet works as if it had a purpose; for it produces by some inconscient compulsion on itself a steady succession of evolutionary forms that carry themselves as if they had an aim and a meaning, although in the nature of things they can really have none. The whole is a mechanism which automatically turns out what it must with a certain inevitability but has no comprehending Intelligence, no intuitive Power behind it to determine its use. Universal Nature is a Chance that works as if it were a Necessity or else perhaps a

Necessity that works like a self-regulating Chance. What seems to be consciousness has come out of this machine just like everything else in this singular freak-universe, constituted somehow, miraculously, impossibly, as the plant and the flower came out of the seed, somehow constituted, or as different chemical atoms are mysteriously constituted out of variant numbers of identical electrons, or as water leaps inexplicably into birth by a combination in exact measure of two gases. We have discovered that by just this process it came,—consciousness, the flower, the atom, water,—but how it could come into being by such a process is an unsolved riddle and how it took this form out of such a mother or could be the result of such ingredients and what each of these things in itself is remains unknowable. It is or has so become (or perhaps is not, but only so seems to our senses)—but that is all, for more than this science limited by its methods cannot tell and speculative philosophy itself with all its range and licence can hardly conjecture. And it does not much matter; for after all this consciousness which emerged obscurely in Time will in a later Time disappear with its living vessels and be as if it had never been leaving behind the Inconscient still busy with its perpetual and empty labour. And perhaps indeed this consciousness is not really consciousness at all but only a sort of strange vibrant typewriting of conventional signs by which the Inconscient records to itself its own mechanical values; for things are not what they seem, colour is not colour but only a fictitious sign, all things perhaps are mere signs of bundled vibrations and consciousness itself nothing else. However we look at it, it would seem very much as if this universal Energy which creates these strange, inexplicable, impossible things or semblances that yet in a way are, were only a sort of Maya, like that of the Illusionists, *aghatana-ghatana-patiyasi*, very skilful to make happen things that cannot happen, a huge senseless well organised paradox, a sequently arranged mass of inevitable inconsequences, a defiance to reason of which reason is the last brilliant but bewildered outcome. And of all these phenomenal appearances, the uprising of consciousness is perhaps the most paradoxical, the least inevitable,—Nature's most accidental, most startling inconsequence.

And again in this reading of the universe, more baffling than any unbelievable belief—*credo quia incredibile*,—with which ever dogmatic theology or mystic philosophy has challenged us, man loses all his cosmic value. An infinitesimal little creature on a tiny speck of matter lost amidst a whirling multitude of stupendous universes most or all of them perhaps vacant of life and thought and made for no other end but simply to whirl, he is (justifying Scripture) even as the worm is—only an edition de luxe, with copious developments and commentaries, of the same laborious but useless text, the same minute, careful, well-arranged, painstaking but insignificant script that we see already in the ant and the termite. Individual man lasts for a few years which are in the aimless vastness of the universe of no more matter than the few days or weeks or months of the insect. The race indeed has endured for millions of years and may endure for some centuries, some thousands, myriads or millions of years longer; but what are these millions in the incalculable aeons of the cosmos? The

termite perhaps was before man and may be there when he has disappeared, perhaps massacring his kind out of existence or destroyed by his own science; it has like man done against adverse conditions extraordinary miracles of intelligence (having yet, it seems, no intelligence with which to do them), built immense fortified cities, cultivated earth, organised remarkable societies, adapted means to end and overcome a step-motherly Nature. Each has an equal value for itself which arrives after all only to the passion Nature has put in each species for survival, for exploitation of its life; for each other their only significance is to come annoyingly and destructively in each other's way; for the universe—at least the universe as Science has described it—both have an equal non-value, for to it neither can matter, since they will disappear and the world go on interminably as it did without them. Vanity of vanities, Science teaches us even as did the world's Scriptures; out of nothingness we came and into nothingness we shall sink hereafter. All that we are and think and create [and] do, however wonderful to our own eyes, or even if really wonderful in the mind's values, is but a bubble, a vibration, a plasmic pullulation on the surface of Matter.

This is one side of the picture; but there is another.

2

If there is a consciousness in Matter, however secret and involved, there must be a consciousness secret and involved in the Inconscient.

But the question then arises whether such a thing can be any more than there can be a square circle [or] cold fire. "Not even a hundred declarations of the Veda," says Shankara, "could prove the coldness of fire." There are psychologists who deny that there is or can be any such thing as the subconscious, for it is a flat self-contradiction to speak of a consciousness which is below the level of consciousness. To be conscious is to be aware of self and things or at least of things, with whatever limitation, as a man's or an animal's waking mind is aware.

To a certain thought it might seem that only the surface of things is knowable, the rest either does not or cannot exist or must be left in the shadow of an inevitable agnosticism. There are no depths [or they] are, as Bertrand Russell would have us believe, an uninhabited emptiness; there is no inner sky except the sky of thought or an abstract void crossed by the wandering wings of the Idea; if there is a sky behind the sky, it is such a Void, a void of unattainable superconscience. But this too is an imagination, a nonexistence. There can be no consciousness in the Inconscient, no Conscious in unconscious things, no superconscience.

If that were so, it would be impossible to have any true or whole knowledge. For our mind is an Ignorance searching for knowledge and arriving at representations or figures of it, it can never be except by a miraculous transformation something that knows, still less knows truly and knows all. But knowledge exists somewhere, knowledge is possible and a seeking ignorance is not our first and last fate. Our

boundaries are lost [. . .], the depths teem [or] are no longer vacant, the sky above mind is peopled with winged realities. The subconscious is disburdened of its strange contents, the superconscious becomes the top [of] consciousness, the peak of knowledge, there is a Conscient in unconscious things. Let us look then with the eye of the Ignorance first but also with the eye of this greater knowledge at the subconscious, at Inconscience, at the superconscious top of things. An immediate change will take place in our conception of self and our outlook on the universe.

3

The subconscious is a fact of our mentality. It is not the fact that our whole being, even our whole mentality, is on the surface. There are concealed heights, there are hidden gulfs, there are crowded spaces behind the front wall, below the threshold, in the unseen mental environment. There is a vast inconscient below us, an infinite superconscience above us. All these are part of a secret consciousness in the world, but also part of our own hidden being of which we are not aware or only intermittently and ignorantly or only, in our ultimate evolution, eventually aware.

Even in our ordinary experience there are moments in which one or other of these things becomes apparent, acts in our daily actions or peers out above the surface and replaces our absent and inattentive mind. We start writing and finish the writing without knowing what we have written. We are walking with our mind aware and guiding our course,—the [?outer] mind,—but we continue to walk and find ourselves after a time farther on the intended way or beyond the intended goal or turn and have to retrace our steps. In an unconscious or half conscious moment words pour from our lips which we would never have spoken if we had used our fully awake mind and will. What is it that thus takes up the writing, the walk, the speech and completes our intention or betrays us? It must be either something of the mind behind or below its active surface movement or something of a driving life-force or action of the body.

But in the first explanation there must be a part of the mind, not our conscious thought and will that is capable of continuing automatically a course once habitual or previously fixed or pursuing of itself the direction accustomed or repetitive. It is capable not only of execution but of a radical direction, even a misdirection. This means a consciousness at conscious work, however vague or latently automatic, and can only be described as a subconscious or at least partly subconscious or subjacent, an underlying something else akin to consciousness. This is the first sign of a subconscious mind or of a secret consciousness which may even underlie not only our own surface being, but the whole cosmic operation and its apparently inconscient functioning and driven interactions, its purposeless purpose.

If it is a life-force that goes on with the works of the life when the mind is not attending to them, then only this must be a subconscious action and where it continues an action initiated by the conscious mind, then some sort of mechanical consciousness

must be attributed to it. If it is the body that takes up the action, it must equally be credited with a subconsciousness that can do under certain circumstances the work of consciousness.

I have written a letter and proceed to put the name and address on the envelope, but my mind gets absorbed in something else and I find that I have written another habitual name and address, not the one I intended. Memory evidently has done this uncalled for work, but not a conscious memory with the mind aware of what it was doing. A subconscious layer of memory must have come to the surface mistaking the call, or there must have been a double action of memory one deliberate, the other automatic, the temporary suspension of the first giving room to an inadvertent action of the subliminal working.

On the other hand I may complete a sentence with a phrase I had not intended or thought of; where did it come from if not from the subconscious mind? It may even be a phrase having no connection with the conscious thought or in itself incoherent or have the form of words but be unintelligible. What is it that has dictated these things?

4

As consciousness descends from the supreme and the higher to the lower levels, it loses progressively its force and intensity till it reaches the nadir of inconscience.

5

The figure of Inconscience is the mask of an all-conscious Creator; the Inconscient creates with an unerring art, adaptation of means to end, ingenious originality, spontaneity and [. . .] of device. The conscious creator man cannot even come near the inconscient Creator, God. But [the] Inconscient is only a mask on a mobile face; its blank rigidity hides from us the expression of the face of the Omnipresent.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 290-96)

‘THOU ART...’

January 6, 1914

THOU art the one and only goal of my life and the centre of my aspiration, the pivot of my thought, the key of the synthesis of my being. And as Thou art beyond all sensation, all feeling and all thought, Thou art the living but ineffable experience, the Reality lived in the depths of the being but untranslatable in our poor words; and it is because human intelligence is powerless to reduce Thee to a formula that some, a little disdainfully, label “sentiment” the knowledge that it is possible to have of Thee, but it is surely as far from sentiment as it is from thought. So long as one has not attained this supreme Knowledge, one has no solid basis or lasting centre for one’s mental and emotional synthesis, and all other intellectual constructions can only be arbitrary, artificial and vain.

Thou art eternal silence and perfect peace in what we are able to perceive of Thee.

Thou art all the perfection we must acquire, all the marvels to be realised, all the splendour to be manifested.

And all our words are but children’s babblings when we venture to speak of Thee.

In silence is the greatest reverence.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 48)

A LEADER

It was in January 1907, shortly after the sanguinary crushing of the revolutionary movement in Russia.

A few friends and I had assembled in a small group for philosophical studies, when we were informed of the presence of a mysterious visitor asking to be admitted.

We went out to meet him, and in the anteroom we saw a man whose clean but very worn clothes, arms held close to his sides, pale face steadfastly turned towards the ground and half-concealed by a black felt hat, made him look like a hunted animal.

At our approach he removed his hat and looked up to cast us a brief, frank glance.

In the half-light of the hall one could scarcely distinguish the features of his waxen face; only its sorrowful expression was clearly visible. The silence had become embarrassing, and to break it, I asked, "Can I help you, Sir?"

"I have just come from Kiev to see you." His voice was tired, deep, a little hollow, with a slight Slavonic accent.

From Kiev to see us! This was something indeed. We were surprised. He thought our silence indicated doubt, and after some hesitation he added in a lower tone, "Yes, in Kiev there is a group of students who are deeply interested in great philosophical ideas. Your books have fallen into our hands, and we were happy to find at last a synthetical teaching which does not limit itself to theory, but encourages action. So my comrades, my friends, told me, 'Go and seek their advice on what is preoccupying us.' And I have come."

It was clearly expressed, in correct if not elegant language, and we immediately knew that if, perhaps out of caution, he was withholding something from us, what he was telling us at least was the truth.

Once we had brought him in and made him sit down in the drawing-room, we saw him in full light. Oh, the poor face pallid with long vigil or seclusion far from air and sun, ravaged by suffering, lined by anxiety, and yet all shining with a fine intellectual light which haloed his brow and lit his eyes, sad, wan eyes reddened by overwork or perhaps by tears....

Perturbed, we remained silent. But after a while, to find out what he expected of us, we asked him what his occupations were in his own country. He seemed to concentrate, to take some resolve, then slowly said:

"I work for the revolution."

The reply sounded like a knell amid the luxury of this bourgeois apartment.

However, without betraying our emotion, with great admiration for the courage of his sincerity, we replied:

"Would you tell us how we could be of service to you?"

The fact that our attitude towards him had not changed gave him confidence and he began his story:

"You have heard about recent events in Russia, so I will not say anything about

that. But perhaps you do not know that at the centre of the revolutionary activity there is a small group of men who call themselves students, to which I belong. Occasionally we meet to take decisions together, but more often we are scattered, firstly so as not to attract attention to ourselves, and secondly to be able to direct the action personally at close quarters. I am their connecting link; when they want to consult together, they meet at my home.

“For a long time we fought openly, violently, hoping to conquer by terror. All means seemed justified to us in our intense and ardent desire to see the cause of Justice, Liberty and Love triumph. You might have seen me, I who feel in my soul a wealth of tenderness and pity that seeks to relieve the miseries of mankind, I who became a doctor with the sole aim of fighting its ills and alleviating its sufferings, being forced by painful circumstances to take the bloodiest decisions. It’s surprising, isn’t it? Nobody could have believed that I was suffering because of that; nevertheless, it is a fact. But the others pushed me, overwhelmed me with good reasons and sometimes succeeded in convincing me.

“However, even in the heat of action, I was aware that there was something better to do, that our methods were not the best ones, that we were wasting our finest energies in vain, and that in spite of the almost fanatical enthusiasm which urged us on, we might well be defeated.

“The collapse came, mowing us down like corn in a field; and misfortune compelled us to regain possession of ourselves, to think carefully. The best of us are lost. The most intelligent, those who were most able to guide and direct us paid for their courageous self-sacrifice with exile or death. Consternation reigned in our ranks; at last I was able to make the others listen to what I thought, to what I felt.

“We are not strong enough to fight by force, for we are not united enough, not organised enough. We must develop our intelligence to understand better the deeper laws of Nature, and to learn better how to act in an orderly way, to co-ordinate our efforts. We must teach the people around us, we must train them to think for themselves and to reflect so that they can become aware of the precise aim we want to attain and thus become an effective help to us, instead of being the hindrance they most often are at the moment.

“I have told them that for a nation to win its freedom, it must first of all deserve it, make itself worthy of it, prepare itself to be able to enjoy it. This is not the case in Russia, and we shall have much to do to educate the masses and pull them out of their torpor; but the sooner we set to the task, the sooner we shall be ready for renewed action.

“I have been able to make my friends understand these things; they trusted me and we began to study. That is how we came to read your books. And now I have come to ask your help in adapting your ideas to our present situation and with them to draw up a plan of action, and also to write a small pamphlet which will become our new weapon and which we shall use to spread these beautiful thoughts of solidarity,

harmony, freedom and justice among the people.”

He remained thoughtful a moment, then continued in a lower tone:

“And yet I sometimes wonder if my philosophical dream is only a utopia, whether I am wrong to lead my brothers along this path, whether it is only cowardice, in brief, if we would not do better to oppose violence to violence, destruction to destruction, bloodshed to bloodshed, to the very end.”

“Violence is never a good way to bring victory to a cause such as yours. How can you hope to win justice with injustice, harmony with hatred?”

“I know. This opinion is shared by nearly all of us. As for me, I have a very particular aversion to bloody actions; they horrify me. Each time we immolated a new victim, I felt a pang of regret, as if by that very act we were moving away from our goal.

“But what are we to do when we are driven by events and when we are faced with adversaries who will not shrink even from mass slaughter in the hope of overcoming us? But that they can never do. Though we may perish to the last man, we shall not falter in the sacred task that has fallen to us, we shall not betray the holy cause which we have sworn in our heart of hearts to serve to the last breath.”

These few words had been spoken with sombre determination, while the face of this obscure hero was marked with such noble mysticism that I would not have been astonished to see the martyr’s crown of thorns encircling his brow.

“But as you were telling us in the beginning,” I replied, “since you have yourselves been forced to recognise that this open struggle, this struggle of desperate men, although certainly not without an intrepid greatness, is at the same time vain and foolish in its recklessness, you should renounce it for a time, fade into the shadows, prepare yourselves in silence, gather your strength, form yourselves into groups, become more and more united, so as to conquer on the auspicious day, helped by the organising intelligence, the all-powerful lever which, unlike violence, can never be defeated.

“Put no more weapons in the hands of your adversaries, be irreproachable before them, set them an example of courageous patience, of uprightness and justice; then your triumph will be near at hand, for right will be on your side, integral right, in the means as in the goal.”

He had been listening to me carefully, occasionally nodding in agreement. After a silence full of thoughts, in which we could feel brooding around him all the painful hopes, all the burning aspirations of his companions in strife:

“I am happy, Madame,” he said, turning towards me, “to see a woman concerned with such matters. Women can do so much to hasten the coming of better days! There, in Russia, their services have been invaluable to us. Without them we would never have had so much courage, energy and endurance. They move about among us, going from town to town, from group to group, uniting us to one another, comforting the disheartened, cheering the downcast, nursing the sick and everywhere bringing with them, in them, a hope, a confidence, an enthusiasm that never tire.

“So it was that a woman came to assist me in my work, when my eyes were

overstrained by my long vigils spent writing by candle-light. For during the day I had to have some kind of occupation so as not to attract attention. It was only at night that I could prepare our plans, compose our propaganda leaflets and make numerous copies of them, draw up lists and do other work of the same kind. Little by little my eyes were burnt up. Now I can hardly see. So a young woman, out of devotion for the cause, became my secretary and writes to my dictation, as long as I wish, without ever showing the slightest trace of fatigue or boredom.” And his expression softened and grew tender at the thought of this humble devotion, this proof of self-abnegation.

“She came with me to Paris and we work together every evening. It is thanks to her that I shall be able to write the pamphlet we have spoken of. You know, it is courageous to link one’s destiny with a man whose life is as precarious as mine. To retain my freedom, everywhere, I must hide as if I were an outlaw.”

“At least you are safe in Paris?”

“Yes and no. They are scared of us, I don’t know why. They take us for dangerous anarchists, and we are watched, we are spied on almost as much as in our own country. Yet how can anyone imagine that men whose aim is to make justice triumph, even at the cost of their own blood, could fail to be grateful towards a country such as France, which has always protected the weak and upheld equity? And why should they disturb the peace of a city which is their refuge in the darkest days?”

“So you intend to remain here for some time?”

“Yes, as long as I can, as long as I am not useful to my brothers there, and can be of service to them here by bringing together all the elements we need to take up the struggle again; but this time the struggle will be as peaceful and intellectual as lies within our power.”

“So you will come and see us again, won’t you? Bring us your projects and the plans for your pamphlet. We shall talk about all that again in more detail.”

“Yes, I shall come back, as soon as I have started my work, as soon as possible. I shall be so happy to see you again and to continue our conversation.”

His kind, sad eyes looked at us full of confidence and hope, while he clasped our hands firmly in his.

And as we accompanied him to the door he turned and once more warmly shook our hands, saying in his grave voice:

“It is good to meet people one can trust, people who have the same ideal of justice as we have and do not look upon us as criminals or lunatics because we want to realise it. Good-bye....”

He never returned.

He excused himself in a hastily written note. Too closely watched, under suspicion, tracked down after he had changed his lodgings many times, this gentle, just man had to return to his own country, a terrible country where perhaps a tragic end awaited him....

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 13-19)

MESSAGE OF “THE LIGHT OF ASIA”

[Nearly one hundred years after their first publication in English—and numerous different editions—Sir Edwin Arnold’s two poems “The Light of Asia” and “The Indian Song of Songs” were brought out in 1949 by Jaico Publishing House for the first time in a one-volume edition.

Part of the publishers’ note reads:

By way of an explanatory introduction to the philosophy of Buddhism as expounded by its founder, we have included in the opening pages of this volume a learned essay by Mr. K. D. Sethna, an ardent disciple of Sri Aurobindo, and a poet and writer of great merit. Mr. Sethna’s essay is a complementary adjunct to the study of Arnold’s “The Light of Asia” in as much as the one is a philosophic approach to Buddhism and its immortal teacher while the other is a predominantly poetic approach.

A reader of Mother India has now drawn our attention to this long-lost essay. How its inclusion in Sir Edwin Arnold’s book came about is not known.

However, while working as freelance journalist, K. D. Sethna had written letters on “Vedantic Brahman and Buddhist Nirvana—A comparison in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s observations” (1942) and “Buddhism and the Creation of World-Values” (1942). The Sri Aurobindo Circle published these two letters in 1982 and 1983 respectively.

In the second half of the 1940’s K. D. Sethna wrote “True Buddhism—and Beyond It”, a long review-letter of The Message of Buddha by A. S. Wadia, a gifted writer and fellow Parsi. While reviewing the book, K. D. Sethna pointed out that he was an Aurobindonian and not a Buddhist; his purpose was to see Buddhism in its true form and appreciate its value without his becoming a wholehearted partisan. (The Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual published the review-letter in 1947.) Later on, some parts of this review-letter have been incorporated by K. D. Sethna in his essay “Message of ‘The Light of Asia’”.]

“REGARD the world as an empty trifle,” says Buddha, the Light of Asia, “experience the great Nirvana and then alone will you find the world unantagonistic to happiness: with the ineffable freedom and wideness that is the Nirvanic experience you will be able to live and act blissfully in all circumstances, undisturbed and undetected by life’s vicissitudes. And thus live and act you must, for personal salvation is not everything: others are caught in the world’s futilities and you must help to liberate them. The liberation can be quick for some and I offer a special discipline to these people; it must be a long drawn-out process for many and for them I prescribe not immediate effort towards Nirvana but a general preparatory code of Virtue which

shall spread peace and harmony in the world as much as peace and harmony are possible in a world so impermanent and imperfect."

Surely, this kind of attitude is not essentially anti-life. Buddhism may lead to anti-life results for certain temperaments and under the pressure of a stark intellectual logic which takes terms at their face value; but as its historical origin we have the spiritual figure of Buddha himself who is known for his unflagging energy, his pity for all beings, his service to all creatures, his plastic wisdom making various types of men develop variously according to their nature and capacity—Buddha about whom it is said: "his mere presence brought peace to souls in anguish and that those who touched his hands or garments momentarily forgot their pain; evil passions fled at his approach and men whose dull unimaginative lives had been a mode of death arose, as it were, from their living graves when he passed by." As an instance of a figure that is not Nirvanically spiritual but truly Buddhist in a general moral way, we have that magnificent peak of civilisation—Asoka. The genuine Buddhist must be another Gautama if he can; if he cannot, another Asoka should be his *beau idéal*.

In both cases, Nirvana is the grand goal towards which the human soul must move. A Gautama sweeps to it in one single life, an Asoka prepares for it through many lives. But it is only because Nirvana is deemed eminently desirable that even an Asoka lives as he does.

Buddha felt that what he was after was something the whole world was after in its heart of hearts. Everywhere and always the cry is for utter cessation of dukkha, the perpetual end of unhappiness and the perpetual continuation of joy. No matter what hard facts may hedge us in, we cannot deny that urge. Life with its constant sense of incompleteness and imperfection is ever seeking a state of Being that is immune to Time's ravages, a Knowledge that is basic and gives us the key to the world-mystery, a Bliss that shall not fade. Our search for lasting happiness and conquest of all pain is an agelong one, and perhaps the most dominant strain in our general hunger for Perfection and Permanence. But nowhere in the world do we find a perpetual end of unhappiness, for nowhere in the world is there any Permanence and Perfection. All our so-called happiness arises from brief satisfactions, from small attainments and soon it is succeeded by sorrow. It cannot fill the heart of man and is therefore a gilded form of unhappiness itself. Not this but another experience that is ceaselessly radiant and does not hang for its radiancy on passing occasions and objects can alone be the magnet to our quest. The lack of it is what Buddha calls dukkha, a term which denotes not only the series of sorrows we endure but the whole of life and the whole chain of rebirths, since the play of impermanent pleasure must always leave unappeased the heart's cry for an endless cessation of sorrow. It is because sorrow cannot come to an everlasting stop, it is because sorrow comes recurring and never permits joy to last without end, it is because no joy resulting from impermanent things can ever be genuine and abiding, that Buddha looks on all living as a frustration of what life aims at, openly or in secret. That frustration is dukkha. Buddha is not, as some imagine, a fool

irrationally refusing to acknowledge temporary joy!

To get rid of the frustration spread out over innumerable births Buddha proposed a method. We live, he says, in a state of consciousness wherein a force called *tanha* has play. *Tanha*, psychologically, is thirst with attachment to a transitory object of thirst, making that object seem desirable; *tanha* is thirst in which the transitory object acquires “glamour” and produces in us subjection to its spell. In the widest connotation, *tanha* is the inner conscious support we eagerly give to life and its changes and its tendency towards rebirth, believing that life will make us feel happy and fulfilled. Life really fails to give us fulfilment. Remove the clinging beglamoured consciousness, replace it by another which stands apart from temporary things, seek no *sukkha* through them, take no pleasure in them and so escape the passing of pleasure and the recurrence of *dukkha*. Both *sukkha* and *dukkha* arising from transiencies will stop affecting our consciousness and an ever satisfying Permanent will gradually be experienced. We shall not be inwardly swayed by brief opposites—success and failure, health and illness, living and dying. Changes will take place, but we shall know a changeless and beatific Poise confronting them all and radiantly free from the *tanha* that binds the consciousness to their ups and downs. That Poise is Nirvana.

At this point, I must say that stoic indifference and moral self-restraint are not what Buddha considers the putting away of *tanha*. These two means are necessary but they are not the Nirvanic experience itself. They are neutral negatives, while Nirvana is a Positive beyond them or, if you like, a Negative that is an absence of all known things but the presence of some plenary Unknown. Nirvana is a mystical and spiritual realisation.

Buddha affirms that the liberated man is he who has turned away from all sensations and impressions, from all thoughts and from the whole mind-consciousness. Just ask yourself what remains when one moves away from the whole mind-consciousness with its ego-experience, when it is left altogether. Divested completely of it, in what state does one remain? One answer is: total unconsciousness. But, according to Buddha, he who has divested himself of all mind-consciousness as well as from every other mode of normal experience is “aware that he is freed and he knows that Becoming is exhausted, that he has lived the pure life, that he has done what it behoved him to do, and that he has put off mortality for ever.” These words have a thrill and a glow and an assertion of some tremendous awareness of a state which is more than mortal; here is no description, however sweet and soothing, of unconsciousness. What then is this state? Does Nirvana imply that craving based on a crude egoism ceases and a noble cosmic attitude takes its place? We must be careful to observe that the cessation of egoistic *tanha* involves in Buddha’s realisation a going beyond the whole mental consciousness no matter how ethically refined and cosmically attuned. What Buddha means by Nirvana is something other than even the mind at its most moral, its most exalted and comprehensive; he means something divested of the whole mental consciousness. He means something that is not small like the separative ego but is

limitless, not composed of moods and changes like mind and sense but is immutable, not subject to transiences like everything in Nature but is permanent and eternal—a positive Fact that is not the mere suppression or sublimation of separative egoism and craving in a morally purified and altruistically elevated mind but a consciousness different from ego and mind and sense, a vast awareness free from morality and dukkha and tanha and all that Buddha considers inherent in sense and mind and ego.

As such, it is a Presence that, transcending the ego, widens infinitely in a concrete and actual way impossible to the conceptive, reflective and merely sympathetic mind-awareness. This widening has two aspects: a co-extension, as it were, with the universe and an exceeding of the universe by a sort of standing apart from or behind and beyond it. I dare say our mind reels at this kind of experience and can scarcely envisage it, but that is to be expected since the experience is a consciousness other than the mental. And it is a consciousness that is always there—unborn, undying, tanhaless, dukkhaless. It does not arise when it is realised by a being caught in tanha and dukkha, it is not caused by such a realisation, it is eternal and ever-present and ever-free, and we realise it as ours when we have become extremely detached from sense and mind and ego. In Buddha’s view, we can realise that we are Nirvana because it is the final and basic truth of us; the final and basic truth is not the small and limited psychological and physical experience we ordinarily believe to be ourself nor even the Freudian Subconscious with our waking being the phosphorescent fringe of it. If we were this alone, we could never be dukkhaless and tanhaless, however hard we might try to get rid of these things. According to Buddha, Nirvana is what we truly are—yes, already are, a state which is eternally there, to be experienced by us as our own truth that is obscured by phenomenal appearances. As soon as we purify ourselves more and more and acquire equanimity, the Nirvanic consciousness is felt by us in increasing largeness; stage by stage our detachment, both waking and in samadhi, deepens towards it until a point comes when Nirvana envelopes us; it is then that the last vestige of tanha and ego drops. As a heavenly body moving nearer and nearer a star of greater size enters the gravitational field of that star and is pulled into that star’s substance, so also the aspiring consciousness, having Nirvana for its goal, reaches a point when its own effort ceases and it is sucked into Nirvana. Because Nirvana, though deep-hidden, is already a Fact of us, we are able to know ourselves as something that is forever beyond dukkha and tanha. Our normal constitution, psychological and physical, is in this view of Nirvana no insurmountable barrier, for we are more than that constitution. Nor need that constitution prevent a dichotomy of ourselves in the waking state as at the same time Nirvana and a composite of purified mind, life-energy and body.

Thus seen, Nirvana is not different in essence from the *summum bonum* of the Vedanta. In the Vedanta too there is a supreme and infinite consciousness beyond mind—an immense all-pervading Presence as well as a superb transcendence of even the cosmic formula and phenomenon. The Vedanta names it, from the ontological standpoint, Brahman; from the psychological, Atman or the impersonal Self one in

all behind the phenomenal egos. Buddha says that it is what we know we are when divested of all that we ordinarily regard as our self. The two realisations seem in essence the same; only, the Vedanta postulates an entity through which the transition from the phenomenal to the noumenal is made. If the phenomenal personality remains in appearance, while the Atman is present in our waking state, what is it that has realised the Atman by divesting itself of attachment to or identification with that personality even though it may hold it as a pragmatic instrument while holding simultaneously the realisation of the supreme Self? Buddha skips this link of the intermediary Soul and for a reason I shall try to explain. But his realisation remains Vedantic—all the chief Upanishads speak of liberation from rebirth to be attained here and now and at all moments of life. It is not surprising that the two realisations should be identical in essence, for, the exact double psychological process which the Vedanta prescribes is prescribed by Buddha—the breaking of attachment to things so that we may not be caught in and limited by things that are finite and changing and impermanent, the constant inner practice of affirming and feeling that we are not the egos of our bodies, our life-energies, our mind-consciousness but something else standing apart from all these, at first in samadhi and later even while normally awake, a Fact impersonal, eternal, infinite. How can identical processes lead to dissimilar results? The Gita, recognising this, freely combines the term Nirvana with the term Brahman to denote the Vedantic *ne plus ultra*. The difference of Buddhism from the Vedanta of its day was determined by a practical end. Buddha wanted to strike at the roots of egoism and he felt that to acknowledge a subtle individual Soul behind the outer and phenomenal ego was still to encourage self-centred activity. The Vedanta, while acknowledging a Soul passing from birth to birth, had denied the permanence of the outer self of mental consciousness living in a physical body. It was the same superficial ego that Buddha denied when he put his foot down on the belief of an eternal personality composed of mental consciousness; and he put his foot down on all talk of individual persistence because the Vedantic intuition of the true psyche that is not mere mind, life-force or body but a secret spark hidden within or behind them was popularly taken to be the superficial ego which the Vedanta has called Ahankara and declared to be a pragmatic fiction or illusion created by evolving Nature for the purpose of strengthening and holding together a phenomenon like a separate living and thinking body. Buddha saw that the tendency even among the spiritual seekers of his time was to stress self and its liberation in Brahman; such a stress struck him as a refined and attenuated yet basically real form of egoism, an attachment to limit and desire, and, in the long run, to birth-tendency. It was for a similar anti-ego reason that he refused to let Nirvana be a synonym for the impersonal Selfhood the Vedantins saw as the highest realisation beyond both ego and psyche: the Vedantic ideas of self were unacceptable to him and not easily compatible with his outlook on the world; he concentrated on speaking of Nirvana as void of all that we ordinarily identify ourselves with and get attached to. The acknowledging of a personal God, lord of the universe, seemed also

to him an encouragement of selfish desire in the form of prayers for boons no less than an encouragement of a tendency to birth in the universe as an individual having relations with a personal God. Hence his "noble silence" about everything that stood in the way of a perfect liberation from all limits and desires and egoisms into the immense impersonal Nirvana. As he actually declared that he was no revolutionary in matters of inner realisation but had come in corrupt times to restore the pristine Aryan wisdom, we need not feel we are going astray in seeing Buddhism as a reformulation of the Vedantic vision from a special angle suited to a particular purpose.

To leave so profound a stamp on his own age and on thousands of years that followed could not be possible to one who brought merely a negative message, a cessation of all impulses of ordinary life with no grander impulse and more abundant reality to make up for that cessation. Keep always in mind that Buddha was a spiritual figure and not just a philosopher or a moralist. A philosophy of life as dukkha, a morality insisting on rejection of tanha may sickly life over with their pale cast of pessimism and ascetic inertia; and in fact earth-existence did get sicklied over when Buddhism survived as a philosophy and a morality, with the true spiritual inwardness gone. When, however, the spiritual light is there, its effect—unless the transcendental aspect is overstressed or the vital being is very feeble—is intensely creative. Buddha did not remain in forest seclusion, absorbed in saving his own soul, lost in his own immensity of inner realisation. He was driven by that very immensity out of the limits of personal salvation to embrace the world and uplift it. By his enlightenment a vast monkhood was set aglow and mystics went forth everywhere. Whatever served as a hint, a glimmer, a symbolic suggestion of the Nirvanic bliss was taken hold of and creatively used, dynamically manipulated. Beauty, wisdom, service rushed out like a life-giving river. A civilisation packed with a splendid abundance of noble vitality took birth, a civilisation whose art still remains as a reminder of how Buddhism took hold of the founts of creative activity. Buddhist art was created by men on whom the spiritual light had laid its hand, even if it had not in all instances gripped them wholly. The colourful enthusiasm and beautiful optimism which one sees in the Ajanta frescoes—considered by many as the uttermost of art-expression—are not, as one may psychoanalytically explain, long repressed life-instincts exploding into artistic ecstasy by a kind of natural revulsion from the Buddhist negation of the world. They are the natural outflow of the ecstasy which was the core of Buddha's life—they catch in rainbow-hues and symbolic shapes the richness and the rapture dwelling in true Buddhism, they are a prismatic representation of the sunlight that lay for ever, according to all testimonies, on Buddha's face, a visionary loosening forth of the unquenchable beatitude that everyone felt in the presence of Buddha's body. He who stirred and illumined "the dull unimaginative" routine of his contemporaries—surely it was he who through the imagination of artist-monks kindled up and animated the caves of Ajanta!

Nirvana is not a barren vacuity. The Nirvanic consciousness did not incapacitate

Buddha and his followers from functioning in the world and improving its condition, both physically and spiritually. Quite the opposite: it equipped them with a super-efficiency facing with happy detachment what they had to bear or do, it was an inspiring glory and beatitude of being which cannot be ours so long as *tanha* entangles us through nervous excitements, personal bias and our lack of a consciousness greater than mind.

Buddhism posited a division of experience into two parts that are irreconcilable—the perfect and ever-free and eternal consciousness within and the imperfect, limited, mortal being in Nature, from which we must effect a transition into Nirvana, but whose own constitution, however purified, can never itself become superhuman and invulnerable. In Buddhist philosophy, no number of births can ever lead to a divine bodily existence on earth. Nirvana is a liberation from the chain of births and their supposed destiny of being always full of defects and weaknesses: it does not by its aloof impersonality give a *rationale* to that chain, a magnificent climax and crowning in superhuman terrestrial life, free from the despotism of disease, decrepitude, decay and death. The earth-scene, without a perfection of mental and vital energies combined with such a bodily supermanhood, can never arrive at a total justification. To the sense of frustration which haunts us among multitudinous transiencies Nirvana gives quietus by opening up for us and within us a limitless Permanent, a changeless Eternal which nothing can vex or terminate. But between mind, life-force and body on one side and Nirvana on the other there is a gulf, admitting of powerful responses by the lower to the higher but no hope for a key to be found whereby the lower itself may be radically transformed and divinised. Buddha, therefore, cannot be the supreme figure of spiritual history. He put at a discount the individual entity, the existence of a Soul that is a spark of some divine Super-Person: in his urge towards the Impersonal and Transcendental he bypassed by the God of the universe and the particle of Godhead in the microcosm of man, through which the human may hope to embody the divine. Of course, to acknowledge God and the individual Soul does not necessarily render possible the transformation I speak of. Hence neither Christ nor Mohammed, Zoroaster nor Moses is the sheer Mount Everest of the Spirit. They look forward to a future heaven after a saintly passage here. They could not exceed the saint's or the prophet's status.

Buddhism, ignoring the individual Soul and the Personal God presiding over the evolutionary process, dissatisfies those Nature-parts and seems to give even Western vitalism a stick to beat it with. But it has in Nirvana an indispensable experience which counterbalances the claims of the religions that lack it; even more it counterbalances the mere vitalism of the West, rising head and shoulders above any such way of life by reason of the simple fact that it can lift our consciousness to a state which is superhuman and divine and not a cessation of all reality but a transcendence of our limitation by earth-life and its fragmentary forces and impermanent sensations. A far greater reality becomes ours and the result is bound to be of deeper evolutionary value than any produced by Western vitalism. Evolution is to be measured in terms of

consciousness. Hence a greater consciousness must mean higher evolution, however indirect its translation into earth-activity.

Without Nirvana as a basis there can be no truly divine tanhaless dukkhaless pouring forth of activity; nor is Nirvana by itself conducive to a mysticism stagnant and sterile. Indeed, terms like "stagnant" and "sterile" are inappropriate in any case because of their perjorative suggestion. An infinite and eternal illumination cannot be compared to a weed-choked foul-watered lake unvisited by freshening breezes or to a dry parching and gritty desert. But even inactivity and uncreativity with reference to the world is not an inevitable concomitant of Nirvana. To be absorbed for good in the supra-cosmic abysses of the illimitable Permanent is only one issue; there is the issue also of movement and dynamism within the cosmos side by side with the undifferentiated unconfined Calm. We must certainly go beyond the cosmos and know the One and the Alone to be spiritually liberated; but having done so we need not be off from world-work by that liberation. This is natural, for there is in us an ineradicable and irrepressible creative force making for world-activities and world-values. It is set going by any vision of Light, any profound Realisation, any sublime Cause. Men of poor constitution or "adhar" wish to escape the pressure of the creative instinct in them. Truly great men lend themselves to its *élan*. The greater the man the more intense this force, and in men like Buddha it reaches the acme consonant with the type of Light they compass. They act so creatively in the world that by the work of one lifetime thousands of years grow beautiful and luminous. They act because they must—human psychology, when healthy and "rounded," flowers into world-values as soon as the Spirit's sun shines on it, no matter if the Spirit is sought for and attained under the aspect of a status of tranquillity apart from the cosmos. World-values would then be created not directly for the sake of glorifying the world: they would be created to open the world's eyes to the glory of the Beyond. But they cannot help being created when the Spirit's lustre has been intensely felt by healthy and "rounded" natures. Nirvana, no doubt, is a luminous Vast of Peace in which the infinite bliss is held contained—it does not throw itself out for complete transformation or divinisation of mind, vitality and body; yet when the mind is stilled and freed from thought-turmoil, the emotions and passions quieted and drawn away from egoistic attachment, the body eased and checked from fretfulness of nerves, then all of them serve as clear calm mirrors of a steady infinite light. But if the instruments have been purified and reflect deeply the divine Poise, if even in the waking hours Nirvana is felt to be a boundless impersonal reality standing behind or beyond the universe, the mind and life-force and body reflecting it with their full capacity are inspired to all sorts of noble, beautiful, creative work—expressive of that Wideness, that Freedom, that Ecstasy. Nirvana can release in the nature of him who has attained it a wonderful power such as is arrested in the quotation I have already made about the effect of Buddha's presence. The all-enfolding tenderness, the universal compassion which feels every creature as part of oneself, the resolve never up to the last breath to cease

work for the liberation of creatures from dukkha—these famous things of Buddha’s life are also the fruit of the tremendous enlightenment coming to both heart and head when they live in the aura of the Nirvanic sun. The activity caused by this enlightenment in human nature is involved in the true state of Buddhahood as exemplified by Gautama. To be a Buddha, therefore, is not to be anything that lacks dynamics or creative force; on the contrary, with that Light and Bliss and Vastness which are above the feeble transiences of ordinary sukkha and dukkha and the selfish pulls and nerve shocks of tanha, a Buddha can command what we term “a sturdier and robuster disposition” than common vitality at its highest, and face better and more triumphantly “the many misfortunes, constant buffetings and disheartening limitations of earthly existence” and “the Eternal Challenge of Life” calling mankind towards “greater activity and more determined effort to rise superior to those misfortunes, buffetings and limitations and extract whatever of peace and joy, courage and wisdom is to be had out of its immediate surroundings.” The Buddhist pilgrims who crossed the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean to spread the news of the Great Illumination were no cowards and weaklings and sluggards. Nor can we stamp as “dope” the enthusiastic spirits who painted the caves of Ajanta after winning victories of excavation in the basalt cliffs. Nor again was Asoka impotent and anaemic, with his imperial constructive energy, his zeal to harmonise his far-flung kingdom and send the light of Asia to all the continents.

Buddhism got degraded and failed as a world-saving creed not because deliverance from dukkha and tanha has in itself less potency than Western vitalism but because every creed or way of life must get degraded in the long run, and fail if its emphasis falls, as mostly it does, on one side of life’s truth: the world is too complicated for trenchant exclusive solutions and they lead to a lopsided growth resulting in weakness in the sides neglected in our nature. India has suffered this kind of weakness both through a Buddhist exaggeration and a Vedantic; but the basic sustaining power that is in her religions and her Yogas of spiritual Poise, whether Buddhist or Vedantic, is far greater than the superficial dynamics of the West, the run after mere Becomings with no Permanence realised behind them. That sustaining power has made the ancient races of India survive in soul and inner culture while Greece and Rome are but legends and it will make India outlast the materialistic giantism of Stalin’s Russia and the expansive efficiency of machine-minded America and even the pomp and resource of empire-holding Britain.

To survive and outlast other countries is surely not enough; but India is no bare fossil. The ancient peace, the ancient energy founded on the peace, are still there—thrust into the background for a while, yet waiting to come forth. It was a sense of this alert waiting that led Vivekananda to explain: “I feel that India is young!” Young indeed she is because of her psychological basis in the Eternal, the Nirvanic, that ages not. And the awakening of her perennial youth has already begun. Vivekananda was himself one of the outstanding awakeners. And now in a new era the future points not

only to a springing to life again of Buddha’s realisation, but to a play of light more complex and comprehensive and creative than Buddha’s, so that the divinity whose aspect of illimitable Poise Buddha found in the depths of his being can now emerge with all its aspects and touch to perfection the outermost ends of earth-existence.

K. D. SETHNA

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What Buddha very certainly taught was that the world is not-Self and that the individual has no true existence since what does exist in the world is a stream of impermanent consciousness from moment to moment and the individual person is fictitiously constituted by a bundle of saṃskaras and can be dissolved by dissolving the bundle. This is in conformity with the Vedantic Monistic view that there is no true separate individual. As to the other Vedantic view of the one Self, impersonal and universal and transcendent, it does not seem that Buddha made any distinct and unmistakable pronouncement on abstract and metaphysical questions; but if the world or all in the world is not-Self, anātman, there can be no more room for a universal Self, only at most for a transcendent Real Being. His conception of Nirvana was of something transcendent of the universe, but he did not define what it was because he was not concerned with any abstract metaphysical speculations about the Reality; he must have thought them unnecessary and irrelevant and any indulgence in them likely to divert from the true object. His explanation of things was psychological and not metaphysical and his methods were all psychological,—the breaking up of the false associations of consciousness which cause the continuance of desire and suffering, so getting rid of the stream of birth and death in a purely phenomenal (not unreal) world; the method of life by which this liberation could be effected was also a psychological method, the eightfold path developing right understanding and right action.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 60)

THE INNER SIGNIFICANCE OF BECOMING AN ASHRAMITE AND RECEIVING THE ASHRAM “PROSPERITY”

WHAT is the meaning of being an Ashramite? When the Mother takes charge of our material maintenance—what we usually call receiving the “Prosperity”—what does that signify? It does not mean on her part the taking up of any gross economic obligation or responsibility, nor on our part any claims or rights. “Prosperity” is not equated with receiving a bar of soap, a sari, or a box of matches, or things like that. That is something absolutely external, having no value for the Mother. In reality, “Prosperity” symbolises something else.

Commonly people ask for “Prosperity” for two different reasons.

1. Because one has not adequate financial resources to support oneself;
2. Because of the seeking after some prestige and position in the Ashram. To be able to assert that one is an Ashramite and a ‘*sadhaka*’, is considered a matter of pride and gives satisfaction to one’s vanity. That is the second reason for seeking “Prosperity”.

But from the Mother’s side, “Prosperity” has a quite different meaning. When she says, “I grant you the ‘Prosperity’,” she means that she accepts you. And, from your side, when you ask for the “Prosperity”, that should connote: “I place myself entirely in Your hands: I offer my total submission to Your Will.”

Thus the significance of “Prosperity” is not very simple; it is rather very profound, bearing deep implications.

The Mother ‘accepting’ you signifies that you enter the Power-centre of the Mother, a centre sanctified by a Mantra. Within the boundaries of this Mantra-circle, a special Power of the Mother is always active. As soon as you enter this circle, that Power starts working in you also, and its objective is to do what is good for you: good not according to your ordinary human ideas and expectations but the fulfilment of your inner soul’s needs and aspirations. Once you plunge into the Mother’s sphere of action—and becoming an Ashramite means nothing but that—, your only aim in life should be the fulfilment of your soul’s needs and that is also the objective behind the Action, behind the Mother’s *Shakti*.

But for that what is first needed is the entire purification of your being, your *adhara*. And this purification requires that all that is dark and dirty, defective and imperfect, in your consciousness and nature should first be made manifest and exposed to the action of the Light. The sign of this exposure of the inner darkness is that you happen to find darkness everywhere outside. Of course, it takes time to be cognisant of the fact that the source of this darkness is really within you, and so long as you do not acquire that awareness, you will continue to be visited by many types of dangers and difficulties, woes and sufferings even by what is ordinarily called ‘disasters’. The

only purpose behind these unhappy visitations is to make you conscious of their real source, which is always within you, so that you may reject these darkneses from your *adhara* and make it pure and clear. If you can adopt the right attitude and give your full cooperation to the action of the purifying Power, these difficulties and obstacles will soon disappear. Otherwise, they will continue to plague you till you become inwardly ready and prepared.

Such is the nature of the activity of this purifying Power, such is its Law of Action. It is not that the Mother willingly hurts you: it is the needs of your soul which invite these mishaps. For, all your tests and ordeals are the results of the action of the Force that is operative here in the Ashram. This Force has emerged from the Mother and is what is known as her 'emanation'.

At times the Mother reveals: "the Power of Kali came out and wanted to destroy this or that, but I prevented her from doing so." But this prevention is a difficult job; for, this is Kali's appointed task: to make you pure and prepared is her self-law (*svadharma*). She will accomplish that at all costs, whatever may be the apparent forms of the circumstances or the ways to be followed.

Now, the intensity of the blows should be in proportion to the measure of the unconsciousness of the person concerned, in order to break down its stark materiality and dense inertia. It is not easy to bear the impact of these blows or the harsh pressure for the preparation. Merely to receive blessings from the Mother is not sufficient: it has its own inescapable demands and conditions. It is for this reason that the Mother hesitates sometimes. This hesitation on her part is also an act of special grace of the Mother. For, she observes that so much pressure may not be right for the person: he may not have been ready for that.

How many amongst those who receive the Ashram "Prosperity" are conscious of the great responsibility that it bestows upon them? But it is only because one is not conscious that one has to suffer from so much misfortune, so much sorrow, and so many struggles.

But the power that is in operation here [in the Ashram] will not stop working for that reason. It will continue to do its work irrespective of whether you willingly accept it or not, and it is because of this Action that so much darkness becomes manifest in people here. If they would have lived outside, it is quite possible that many of these faults and defects would have remained suppressed and underneath and not manifested at all. Here, on the contrary, a searchlight, as it were, flashes upon them and exposes them to a distinctly clear view.

A question is often asked: "Ours is an Ashram: why are there so many bad people here?" The reason is twofold.

Firstly, we aim at a change of the consciousness of mankind and not of one or two men or even of a particular group. Therefore, all human elements and all sorts of

samples need to be here.

Secondly, the very term 'bad' is wrongly employed. The contrasting sense of "good" and "bad" comes from the ethical consciousness. This ethical consciousness is the product of mind; it has its source there. And, as a result, all its judgement is relative and quite often there is no truth behind it. It is only the spiritual consciousness which can judge rightly.

In the spiritual consciousness there is nothing that is intrinsically "good" or "bad"; its vision is fixed on something beyond any ethical norm and its evaluation is impersonal.

Yes, it is true that some changes are needed in the rhythm of the movement of the present cosmic Nature. The right things are not in the right places; and there have come about some mixtures and deformations. All these necessitate some changes and reformations. But in the spiritual consciousness there is no question of any attachment or repugnance *vis-à-vis* these things. For, any repugnance has behind it some form of attachment somewhere and all attachment signifies *avidya*, Ignorance.

Ethical consciousness is a modern creation, a contribution of the European mentality and has arisen out of the teachings of Christianity. The very sense of the dualities of "good and bad", "just and unjust" is a symptom of an impure and imperfect consciousness. Your attempt at an ethical evaluation shows that there is something unethical in yourself and you are trying to disown it: therefrom rises your sense of ethics. It comes to this: what is "good"? Well, what is not "bad". That is to say, the sense of "bad" has already come to you.

There was no such 'moral' sense in ancient Indian consciousness. Whether in the field of Art or in Literature of those days, there was a bold expression of the so-called 'immoral' subject matters. These were given shape in an ungarbed way without any dishonest dissimulation, with the purity and simplicity of a childlike consciousness. And such was then the case because, behind the creation of those days there acted a consciousness pure and transparent, and a vision unattached and impersonal. The ancients noted the simple and natural urges and actions of Nature and accepted them: there was in that acceptance no sense of doing anything wrong and sinful.

But when the modern consciousness seeks to express the same things, there intervenes an impurity and deformation. For, the consciousness of the moderns is tainted with this polluted sense:

"This is bad, and because it is bad, I hanker after it and am attached to it."

This is the perversity of mind and mental consciousness.

But does it mean, then, that we should not judge and discriminate between what is good and what is bad? No, not so. How many people possess the spiritual consciousness? Those who do not, what about them?

They should indeed judge and discriminate. They have to use their ethical mind to decide what is good and what is bad, but, at the same time, they have to bring about

a fundamental change in their attitude.

First of all, they have to develop a mood of humility, a sense and conviction that:

“My ethical judgement is not the last word in the matter: there are other standards of judgement in conformity with wider truths and a higher discrimination.”

Along with this, one has to learn to see, not what is “good” or “bad”, but what is “right” or “wrong”. That is to say, one has to reject all emotional liking and disliking and judge in a dispassionate way and keep always in mind that all these manifestations of good and bad are the play of a larger impersonal Force, whether in yourself or in others.

The desire on your part that there should come about a change and purification in the rhythm of this play, is all right and should rest at that. But if your reaction is more intense than that, that would be a wrong reaction.

We have been dealing, as it were, with a cosmic malady which has taken shape in different individuals, including yourself. If you identify yourself with your own flaws and imperfections, you will fall a prey to depression and doubt and sorrows and sufferings. And when it is a question of imperfections in others, your self-identification there will lead to reactions of repugnance and hatred.

Therefore, the very first thing you have to do is to become totally non-attached. You may, in the beginning, try to acquire this non-attachment with the help of your mind. For, even that will bring you much benefit.

This attitude of non-attachment is essential in all fields including that of your personal relationships. But no outer separation or any forced imposition from outside can bring about this *nirasakti* (non-attachment). One has first to become non-attached in one’s consciousness and subjective experience. One has to learn to feel:

“I am ‘free’, I have no attachment whatsoever nor is there any bondage for me. There is none whom I can especially call my own; everybody is the same to me. There is no difference at all between all those whom I have so far thought to be my ‘own’ and those whom I have considered to be ‘outsiders’. They are all equal to me in my consciousness.”

Yes, if you come to feel like that, you will be always “free” wherever you may stay and with whomsoever you may live. Any forced attempt on your part to break the relationship from outside will mean that attachment is still very strong in you.

The same rule applies in the case of your experiences and emotions. In your life, whatever you encounter, whatever makes an impact on your consciousness, that is to say, whatever provokes a strong reaction in you and you judge it to be very bad, you may immediately infer that that thing is already settled in you—settled rather strongly—and it is because of that that you seek so much to disown it outside.

Many people coming to the Ashram are surprised at the free mixing of the boys and the girls here: they immensely dislike it. And the reason for that is the same. When anything provokes in you a strong reaction of dislike and irritation, that means

that the thing is already in yourself. And if you can remove the inner cause from within, you will find that your outer environment too is in the process of a change.

And that is the task set before you here. Every Ashramite has that for his duty, responsibility and obligation.

In other words, the condition for receiving the blessings of the Mother—

(Incomplete)

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(This is an English translation of what Nolini-da spoke in Bengali and as it was noted down by Anima.)

The sense of sin was necessary in order that man might become disgusted with his own imperfections. It was God's corrective for egoism. But man's egoism meets God's device by being very dully alive to its own sins and very keenly alive to the sins of others.

Sin & virtue are a game of resistance we play with God in His efforts to draw us towards perfection. The sense of virtue helps us to cherish our sins in secret.

Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others.

Sri Aurobindo

(Thoughts and Aphorisms, nos. 68, 69, 70 from *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 430-31)

“SRI” IN THE NAME “SRI AUROBINDO”

A LETTER

[*This letter of Nolini Kanta Gupta deals with a point which is frequently misunderstood, a point with a deeper significance than mere linguistic usage.*

Although its opening (Soeurette: Little Sister) and part of its closing (grand frère: big brother) are in French, the letter itself was written in English.]

Soeurette,

30 November 1961

Mother has shown me the letter you wrote to her about the problem of “Sri” that is troubling you. She wishes me to communicate to you my view of the matter. Well, I shall be frank and forthright. It is an error to think that Sri is only an honorific prefix to Aurobindo which is the real name. It is not so. Sri here does not mean Mr. or Monsieur or Sir, etc. It is part of the name. Sri Aurobindo forms one indivisible word. That is the final form Sri Aurobindo himself gave to his name. And I may tell you that the mantric effect resides in that form.

Sri is no more difficult to pronounce than many other Indian or Euro-American syllables. And I think it is not always healthy either to come down to the level of the average European or American under the plea that that is the best way to approach and convert the many. I am afraid it is a vain illusion; better rather to oblige the average to make an effort to rise up to and grapple with the truth as it is.

Mother has seen this admonition of mine to you and fully approves of it.

Begging to be excused for perhaps a highbrow tone in my letter, I remain

Your very sincere and affectionate *grand frère*,

Nolini Kanta Gupta

(Reproduced from the February 1981 issue of Mother India)

SIX POEMS WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S COMMENTS
AS NOTED BY NIRODBARAN

(1)

“Willing”

Beloved, I'm tired of thinking,
I put me in your hand,
If 'tis your will, I'll never
More try to understand.

But let me love you always,
Or I shall die, my dear;
And if our wills don't tally,
Mine 'will' be yours, I fear.

April 1946

Sri Aurobindo's comment: very good

(2)

I have almost traded on You, dearest,
Spread out Your love upon the ways,
Flared it about like common bargains,
Bought with it others' love and praise.

Our love which was so shy and silent,
That only You and only I
Could understand its quiet meaning,
Is now bemocked in truth and lie.

Its sweetest secret is all broken
And You will never come to me
The same old way with passionate vision,
With dance and song and ecstasy.

Each word and each unquiet rhyme
Is loud with pride and market-yells;

Your love is best, our goods are best,
But what's the heart that buys and sells?

1942 or 43

Sri Aurobindo's comment: very well written

(3)

The Fisher

Your impulse, wild, untaught,
Has brought you to My net;
And now that you are caught,
'Tis too late to regret.

Within the seas of pain,
The meshes of My love
Are cast with yearning strain
To lift you up above.

I play a strange, mad game,
All through the deeps of night;
Mine be the curse and blame,
And yours the sweet delight.

Sri Aurobindo's comment: very pretty

(4)

The quiet rhythm of your feet
Beat in the grass and on the street;
My soul pricks up her ears to catch
Your hand upon her front-door latch...

Within the silence speaks to me,
Inaudibly, inaudibly;
As all the world this morning spoke
From every flower and every tree.

If you have come, then come entire,
 My heart has lit the sacred fire;
 Love, come within and make it bright,
 Your thousand-columned fane of light.

Love, make me pure, and come and dwell
 Within my lonely, empty cell;
 The sweetness of your presence spill
 And cleanse it with your fragrant Will.

Within its poor starkness bring
 The music of your triumphing;
 And e'en as you have conquered me,
 So celebrate your victory.

1946

Sri Aurobindo's comment: much beauty

(5)

I am weary looking for You;
 I have searched for You long, have tried,
 But, through this thick unseeing,
 My faith has cracked and died.

My eyes are blind with searching,
 I seek You with my hands,
 Grope for your closer body
 Which my touch understands.

I do not think I have the strength now;
 Emptied on yielding air,
 'Tis lost in unshaped groping
 And broken to despair.

I do not think I shall come now;
 I shall sit with You unfound;
 May be, You're searching like me,
 And we are going round and round.

I shall sit right in the middle
 Of roads which You must pass;
 And though I shall not see You,
 I'll know You in the grass.

One day, You may not pass by,
 But quietly come and lay
 Your hands upon my eyes, so
 My blindness goes away.

1941 or 42

Sri Aurobindo's comment: well written

(6)

Within the room, the lamp is lit,
 My sleep and pain are gone,
 And now, awaiting You I sit,
 Quite helpless and alone.

I do not know who trimmed the wick,
 Who brought the touch of flame;
 Could it have been your usual trick,
 Was it then You who came?

...Who came, and went away to fake
 Indifference, signless, dumb?
 Don't You know, Love, my heart will break,
 If now You do not come?

1946

Sri Aurobindo's comment: same

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of March 2007)

17

[Krishnalal's correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo]

September to November 1940: Gujarat

ON 30 August 1940, Krishnalal wrote to the Mother that his mother was seriously ill. "She is remembering me and wants to see me once. If you permit me I may go."

The Mother replied: "Do just as you like."

On 1 September Krishnalal left for Gujarat and returned on 21 November, spending 81 days outside his *guru-griha* arriving where in 1933 had been, in his words, the beginning of his "real journey... a life and progress in the true direction". Why then did he submit to the family's call when, as his correspondence so far shows, his attitude to and relation with them had undergone a complete change and he was progressing both in Art and in Yoga?¹

Of course, the call of one's mother has been irresistible even for great yogis, and the recent death of his brother Hariyadan, just six months after he had spent his May vacation at the Ashram,² may have raised a fear that his mother may not survive this illness. Also, his wife, though currently with him, was ailing from a sickness that, in those days, brought great mental stress along with physical suffering and always swiftly reduced one's life-span. The pressure of family pulls was undoubtedly extremely strong.

But had he forgotten the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's replies when he asked them how to respond to the family's requests, demands etc.? "You might answer to this effect that you do not think that you could be of any help by going there, and that you think that whatever help can be given, can better be done from here than from anywhere else." (The Mother)—"These difficulties and the reproaches also are inevitable for a sadhak coming away from his family. If he wants to stay here he must be prepared to face them and live them down. Many have had to do that before you." (Sri Aurobindo). More importantly, Sri Aurobindo had categorically stated that the difficulties that visited his loved ones had "No relation" with his staying here for his sadhana. In January 1934, on hearing about the news of the death of his child and a brother's declaration to cut off all relations with him for his "callousness", he had asked what should be his "attitude as a sadhak in both matters". Sri Aurobindo: "The right attitude is perfect equanimity and faith that the Divine's Will is always for the

best.”³ Again, he had told the Mother that even under great difficulties his mother always maintained her calm because of her great faith in God and her regular religious practices, and that whenever memories of his past relations with family and friends revived he could “very soon become conscious of them and reject them”. Finally we have this significant exchange in April 1934. Admitting that because he had been “strongly attached” to them “sometimes I have the idea that they might be suffering a little more due to my absence”, he had asked, whether, by rejecting their requests had he not become unduly “harsh and indifferent” towards them. Sri Aurobindo had replied, “When one enters the spiritual life, the family ties which belong to the ordinary nature fall away—one becomes indifferent to the old things. This indifference is a release. There need be no harshness in it at all. To remain tied to the old physical affections would mean to remain tied to the ordinary nature and that would prevent the spiritual progress.”

But if the family ties and pressure were under control, what then succeeded in pulling this dedicated sadhak-artist at this stage of his progress?

There is a clue in the incident of his going out to Gujarat in May-June 1936 to hold exhibitions of his paintings in Ahmedabad and Baroda. So did the artist get the better of the sadhak then? Possibly not, for there is Sri Aurobindo’s reply to his question in January 1936: “Of course everybody is here for Yoga and not for painting. Painting or any other activity has to be made here a part of Yoga and cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it stands insuperably in the way, then it has to be given up; but there is no reason why it should if it be pursued in the proper spirit, as a field of and for a spiritual growth or as work done for the Mother.” And there is his own statement published in *Kumar* that it was only at Pondicherry that his paintings had begun to express “an added element which I could never have obtained in Gujarat” and he could turn “towards symbolic paintings”, because it was only Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who “perceived my inner movements and began to turn me towards the true nature of Art. But it was not at all easy to turn that way. Outwardly I knew nothing about Yoga. I used to even think, ‘I am an artist; spirituality is not for me.’ It was difficult to pull me out of this, but it was because of the devotee in my nature that it was finally made possible. Gradually, I immersed myself in the atmosphere of the Ashram. But the difficulty of progressing in my art still remained. I managed to accept the new lifestyle of the Ashram within, but to bring out its influence in my art took a long time. The sanskaras, thoughts, techniques etc. with which I had begun my training had established themselves inside and kept swallowing up whatever new things were coming in. How much of an obstacle the narrow viewpoints and methods one has learned can then become, can be known by one who has to go through this experience. Things that had made a home in my nature refused to leave. But under the influence of the new Force, it has been finally possible, and my pictures have, thanks to it, acquired a new element.”⁴

At Ahmedabad (in 1940), Krishnalal met his first mentor Ravishankar Rawal who, incidentally, had visited the Ashram in May 1934. Rawal was editor of the

prestigious art magazine *Kumar* to which Krishnalal too was asked to contribute. That year Rawal and Dr. Hariprasad (an influential leader of the Purani Mandal in which Krishnalal had once been active, and of which his brother Vasudev then was a foremost member⁵) had brought out a monograph on the sculptures and architecture of ancient temples after touring the country. Somalal Shah, Krishnalal's classmate under Rawal, was also at Ahmedabad. In 1935 Shah had sent his album of paintings to Krishnalal to be shown to the Mother. There was also Kanu Desai, another classmate, with whom he had gone to Karachi for decorating the Congress pandal.

Unfortunately, the only record Krishnalal has left of those two and a half months is his two interviews with Nanda-babu in Baroda. But before we come to them, we shall quickly review his Shantiniketan experience in order to get a more intimate idea of his mental-emotional state when he met his old guru.

*

In the mid-twenties, while planning to send Krishnalal to Abanindranath, Rawal had to send him and Somalal Shah to Promode Kumar Chatterjee at Baroda's Kalabhavan. Chatterjee's guidance widened and heightened their vision, freed their imaginations from their earlier bounds and introduced them to new techniques, but he suddenly resigned and left before completing the course. While studying under Nandalal at Shantiniketan (July 1932 to January 1933), an opportunity came to Krishnalal to visit Promode-babu one evening in October at his residence in Balliganj. The mystic artist was then financially in dire straits and, noted Krishnalal, "his body is worn out due to illness. He has not shaved since a couple of months."⁶

The same month, October 1932, Krishnalal met Abanindranath Tagore at his residence. "He put aside his writing work and talked to us: 'Art is aristocratic. The artist is the freest of men. But do not spare yourself from using your utmost energy. Finish your painting with very few colours and within a short time. Express your idea without fear of anybody. Teachers can only show you how to prepare and use colours. Perspective, life study, oil colour, etc. is the course of six months. Rest of your life is left to your imagination.' He talked for almost for two hours. The next morning, we went again and requested his autograph. Drawing a house in ruins and a hut, he copied underneath a Baul song and explained its meaning: houses of brick and lime are destructible just as we ourselves are, so build a hut to live in. Then he added a second song which said that the hut is in danger of collapsing because storm clouds have gathered and the storm begun, so leave the hut and take shelter under the tree where there is no fear. I offered him my painting 'Evening at the Well'; he accepted it graciously. Then he spoke at length on Art. Through many interesting stories, he described the secret of his life. He studied at the School of Art for six years and learned landscape painting last. His teacher asked him to stop his studies and start working. When he asked him where he should work and the teacher advised him to

travel all over the world, paint pictures of those places and sell them. But his mind did not accept this. He chose a particular place to work in and, letting his imagination roam, started to paint his pictures. It was the only place where his inspiration could manifest. He did not have to travel to any foreign lands, nor to the Himalayas, nor to Burma. Everything was created by his mind. Asked why he did not come to Shantiniketan he said, 'My chair is my Shantiniketan. One does not need to read a lot about Art, nor does one need to see a lot. Music and painting can be understood by and felt in the heart. If you ask me why I like a particular painting, I cannot answer that question. I like it because my heart likes it. A painting may not be liked today, but it may be liked tomorrow.' "

Under Nandalal Krishnalal found "sufficient nourishment" and the "obstructing walls began to collapse, my vision widened and deepened". One evening in October he had a long introspective session with his close friend Prabodh Mehta who was studying in another faculty of the university. "The materialistic element is greater in his nature while the opposite prevails in mine; but attachments are founded on sentiments. However, a prolonged stay in each other's company creates conflicts in one's mental progress! Poetic things don't touch him and arguments dominate his 'discussions'. To involve the mind in debates affects one's artistic and poetic flights and this is why I stopped writing long letters since some time. I must keep only those friendships which protect and promote an artistic environment around me. Back in Ahmedabad I shall have to be very alert about this [*i.e. among people for whom art had no place in practical or 'real' life*]; then only will I progress." The next month one of his talks with Nanda-babu cemented this realisation: "Keep the companionship of good people," he said, "make artists your friends, in order to garner beneficial things which help you to always keep in mind the path you have chosen. Good reading too is very helpful. Become more and more cultured. The atmosphere around us also can help us progress."

After Christmas (in 1932), Nanda-babu took twenty-four of his students to Vikramshila and Rajamahala.⁷ Let us recall some of Krishnalal's jottings about that educational tour:

"In the train Nanda-babu began a game of drawing.... He made some studies of animals. I feel he is not a born genius but has gained all his artistic knowledge by a constant *tapascharya*. Bringing into play his detailed and minute observation of man, animal, plant life and many other objects of Nature, he had developed a perfect understanding of these subjects and mastered the art of explaining them; at the same time he keeps achieving further siddhis. He sketched comparative studies of the cow, cat, dog, man, tiger, lion, etc., and explained the difference, the 'typicality' in the features of each of them....

"Conventional forms are built on the experience of centuries, he told us. They cannot be created single-handedly. There is a solid study of Nature behind conventional forms. A deep study of Nature has to be made before accepting them otherwise one

learns to copy but fails to understand. And remaining enclosed in convention without the continuous study and support of Nature throttles our education, and ‘cheapness’ creeps into our work....⁸

“To the question how can one be teacher and artist simultaneously, Nanda-babu replied, ‘Avoid the very thought of being a “teacher”. The thing itself is bad. It leads to stagnation, becoming a *pantuji* [dogmatic uninspired instructor] is death. We must see that along with those who are learning from us we further our own education.’ This is why Nanda-babu addresses his students as ‘artists’; the only difference between him and them, he believes, is that he is a more advanced artist, not a ‘teacher’. While teaching children, we must try to show what one knows, not draw what one does not know, admit one’s ignorance. That has a better effect. Also it enthralls us to learn that thing. Thus we progress and remain artists....

“On the steamer on our way to Rajmahal, a picnic spot nearby, a biting chill wind was blowing (it was around 4 a.m.) but we stuck to the deck. Among other subjects, Nanda-babu also talked about Buddha, Aravind Ghosh, the status of women, etc. At one of the stops on the way we got three hours to spend on land which we used for cooking our lunch. Late in the evening we reached Rajmahal where some portions of the Sange Dalan palace built in the 16th century by Mansingh are still standing.... I made some sketches and took every opportunity to talk to Nanda-babu. The others do not make full use of his presence; that saddens him. I explained this to them and urged them to do so. The next day (6th January) was the eleventh and last day of our tour. Nanda-babu distributed to each of us one of the cards he had made on the journey.”

Sunday 8th January 1933 was Krishnalal’s last day at Shantiniketan: “Met all my friends. Agreed to attend the farewell party thrown by Shridharani and others. Another was arranged at Kalabhavan. Did not want to leave this place; every now and then emotions threatened to overwhelm, but controlled them; wrote a letter to Bachubhai [Rawat] describing this state of mind. Met [Jayantilal] Acharya; gifted ‘Chitrashatak’ to Umaben; taking some cards from Jamuna and gifted them to her, Nivedita and Rani Dey; Nishikant and Shishir presented me with a painting each; Jayanti Jhaveri gave me some photos and a card. At the Kalabhavan party, emotions flooded me; expressed some of them to Nanda-babu; one last time listened to his words. He has a high opinion of Kantilal Dave. Overwhelmed with feelings, I could not eat anything at the party or at dinner. Meeting everybody was everything. I took my taxi to Nanda-babu’s and went in. I fell at his feet, but he immediately made me get up and *chhati sarso chanpyo* [clasped me to his chest]. I also took leave of Ma. Nanda-babu asked me to visit Shantiniketan sometimes.”

On the journey back to Ahmedabad, Krishnalal stopped at Benaras to meet Shri Raya Krishnadasji and visit his museums of sculptures and paintings, “fine collections, especially the latter which has twelve by Nicholas Roerich”. From Kashi he went to Sarnath. “There I met a Japanese artist. Hearing I was an artist, he offered me his wholehearted hospitality. He showed me portfolios of Japanese frescoes, offered me

tea, drew my portrait and gave his autograph. He admires the lines and proportions of Indian faces and bodies. He had brought printed designs for girls from Japan and, giving me some, asked me to distribute them to girls' organisations in India and send him similar designs for Japanese girls. He is eager to build a bridge of sentiments between the two nations. He was overcome with emotions as he offered me each thing. Such respect for an artist! I wished that the artists of India became outstanding and gained respect for their art. I should begin by dedicating myself entirely to Art. All this did not leave me enough time to see the Sarnath museum in detail; it needs to be studied in depth. Here I also met a Dutch lady. She loves to paint and is drawn to Indian painting....

“At Lucknow station... wrote a letter to Nanda-babu describing my Sarnath trip..., took a horse-carriage to the Art School to meet Shri Asit Halder [to whom Nanda-babu had given him an introduction].... At lunch Asit-babu served me rice, dal and chapattis. Then I was taken round the School by one of the teachers. They teach many crafts: metal works which includes moulding and brass and silver forging, carpentry, block-process, lithography, and painting. There is a section for architecture and another for clay toys for teaching which they employ the local artisans.

“I had a short discussion with Asit-babu before lunch. Though he is the Principal he is obliged to follow Government instructions and cannot develop his own vision and ideas, and the exams are taken by professionals from other provinces who don't know as much about the way things are run here as Asit-babu. No creativity is possible in the crafts as Government wants the school to support itself by producing and selling items of popular taste.”⁹

“At the School of Music, I met Shri Amar Singh Gupta. We spent an hour talking about Shantiniketan; it made him very happy.”

Krishnalal's return to Ahmedabad on 13th January 1933, (again without completing his course) marked the end of his short but indelible experience of Shantiniketan and Nandalal Bose.

*

Krishnalal's interviews with Nandalal Bose at Baroda—1940

Note that Nandalal's words reproduced here, in addition to having been noted by Krishnalal from memory and translated into his own succinct style for personal use, have undergone another translation by a different mind with its own limitations. More importantly, Krishnalal was neither a fresher in the ways of Art, nor an interlocutor of some news media, nor a 'research scholar'.

October 23rd: Technique is not important, he told me. What the artist has to achieve is the king, the technique to achieve it is the servant. The king leads the way and

whenever he needs he calls upon the servant.

While discussing the topic of study from models, he said that he himself had worked with models, but then found that method wrong. In that method the inner artist, the creative faculty, is stifled; for one gets into the habit of insisting, stressing only the technique. Recourse to a model is only justified when a significant gap is found in one's work. Even then it is better not to copy the model blindly but to make a thorough study of it and, keeping it aside, work from memory. The central thing is the "movement"—you should see that that comes through fully; because if that happens, defects in anatomy can be tolerated, or rectified later. In Egyptian paintings one can find many defects in anatomy, yet as paintings they are of a high order.

There should be a "freedom" in your pictures—such as in those of children. What is expressed freely in them lures us to look at them again and again. When a picture is made under many binding conditions [*such as technique, tradition, style*] without freedom, it disturbs us.

When our talk turned to fresco paintings, he said that Jaipur frescoes don't last long. In Delhi and near Agra, he had seen some 400 year-old frescoes but they are in a very bad condition. Whereas the Ajanta and Bagh tempera paintings have survived in a much better condition, on top of which the ones of Bagh are done over mud plasters. He stressed tempera. The Egyptian paintings are 8000 years old and yet they have survived in good condition. If they have survived so long, we ought to be happy if our tempera last 500 years, or even 100 years.

Frescoes don't last and the effort they demand is too much. Better choose to do tempera. We don't need to show off our craftsmanship but whatever we want to express ought to be fully brought out. Again, to attempt frescoes in a climate which has so much humidity is pointless. Both silk and Nepali papers are better surfaces to work on.

Nanda-babu does not believe in "Art for Art's sake". He believes that to hold to that would make our art a copy of modern European art, purposeless and confused. There must be a purpose behind our art, even if it be only to earn money or fame, otherwise it would degenerate and die. He recalled a story of Tolstoy in which a poor shoemaker is given funds by a customer pleased with his skill in order that he can become an expert, but instead the shoemaker stops working altogether!

October 24th, Kirti Mandir: I asked him what was behind the new forms of European art, like Cubism, Impressionism and others. He told me that he was too old-fashioned and unable to accept them, because though he is always eager to assimilate every new idea and is eager to learn from these, but as yet he cannot quite understand them. Only Van Gogh's pictures seem to have achieved something.

European artists say that everything one can see can be drawn. Nanda-babu agrees with that, but believes that one must be able to catch the inner spirit of the thing, for the Upanishads say that He is there within everything. If you can see that, it does not

matter whether you draw a pillar or a god,—you are going to bring out its inner Truth.

It seems to him that European artists are quite possibly in a confused state of mind. There is a vast difference between the artists before the Renaissance and those after it. We find the later artists committing suicides, driven into depressions and becoming morose, etc. But in truth Art should bring in the artist great joy and peace!

In order to see whether he is progressing or not, Nanda-babu has adopted the criterion that an object in Nature or elsewhere which had once inspired him and given him great joy must still be capable of doing the same. If that does not happen, he takes it as a sign that no progress has been made or there is a regression.

I asked him if there is some truth in the new techniques and styles because the whole country is turning to them.

The European mind, he replied, takes sex as the genesis of Life but is stuck with only its external form; this has led to all these distortions and perversions. We also believe sex is the genesis but in our conception it has taken the form of Adi Shakti, Adi Rasa, etc.

When Nanda-babu visited China in 1924, he met a certain Mr. Ling whose father was a Court Artist of the Emperor. When Nanda-babu enquired about the financial conditions of the Chinese artists, Mr. Ling told him that in China true artists don't have to bother about their economic conditions. Mr. Ling distinguished five classes of artists there:

1) Technicians: The ancient and extremely clever artists. Their creations are so powerful that they can usher in a new period; they cannot be copied.

2) Mad: These are always cultured people who are often monks, generals or princes. They care neither for money nor fame.

3) Sane: These become wealthy for they aim at pleasing their customers and generally work under the patronage of aristocrats or nobility.

4) Copyists: They copy others' works as a profession and reproduce the popular paintings.

5) False: Alas, they are and will always be around!

Nanda-babu is thinking of retiring in a year or two. At present he has about 75 art students under him and he feels he has not the energy to fulfill his duties towards them; he often gets very tired. Besides, there is great difference between the students of his early years and the present ones. The early ones went there to study and always behaved with great respect and faith, there was a guru-bhakti then and they were never in a hurry to finish their learning period. In those of the present day there is a lack of respect for the teacher, they never hesitate to express their opinions even of the greatest artists and personalities. Even in the class there is an undue stress on outward forms. And they wish to limit their courses to two or three years and expect to learn everything in that period. He does not find joy in teaching these types of students

and that is one of the reasons why he feels tired. In his experience, some unconscious relations are such that with some students there is spontaneous flow from him, whereas in front of others the flow stops automatically.

*

On 21st November 1940 Krishnalal returned to Pondicherry. His talks with Ambubhai led the latter to mention to Sri Aurobindo (during the evening talks upstairs on 5 December) how Nanda-babu's devotion to Gandhi had taken him to Porbundar to visit the room the Mahatma was born in. And how, while Nanda-babu failed to accept the current European forms of art, he accepted Gandhi's opinion that art must appeal to the average man to be true Art.

Sri Aurobindo's comment: These two influences unfortunately work for the deterioration of Art. One is this modernist spirit and the other this popularisation, that is, vulgarisation of Art. People very often forget that the tendencies seen in modernist poetry, painting, sculpture etc., and the rise of Hitler are not isolated but connected phenomena. They come from a common origin. Writers like Leonard Woolfe complain that "the barbarian is at our door", but they forget that it is they who put the barbarian in power by insisting on the importance of the average man. The average man, if you give him rights, will put such men as Hitler and Mussolini in power. These people themselves are average men—Hitler is nothing but an average man gone wrong.¹⁰

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

Notes and References

1. On his birthday in 1933 (a month before he arrived here) Krishnalal had the vision of a lotus. Sri Aurobindo explained later, "The lotus must represent owing to its numerous petals the thousand petalled lotus above the head which is the seat of the higher consciousness above the thinking intelligence. The vision may mean the opening of the consciousness there and in it the adoration of the Divine." (7.10.1933)—On the 15th day after his arrival, Krishnalal had a vision of a lotus in two positions. Sri Aurobindo wrote to him, "The white lotus is the Divine Consciousness-Force; the red lotus is the Avatar, the Divine Descent upon earth. This seems to be a combination of the two. It looks as if the first position indicated the double Power above and ready to descend, the second the first outflowering below." (26.8.33)—"I feel a kind of movement going on in my inner being...." Krishnalal had written. Sri Aurobindo had replied, "Mother is constantly putting you in relation with a world of true harmony and it is that that you feel trying to come down—but you must keep your mind very quiet to receive it." (30.12.33)—Sri Aurobindo: "The experience of silence was certainly the descent of the fundamental silence which prepares the transformation of consciousness—it is the beginning of spiritual peace. You saw aspects of the Mother probably because they were present in the work that was being done." (12.1.34)—Krishnalal: "Sometimes I begin to concentrate over the painting and Mother's presence is felt. The Mother's presence is felt so much that I feel myself and surroundings full of her presence.... The ideas of the old relations come up only to be rejected and turn me more towards the

Mother... What movement can this be? Has it any direct relation with art creations?" Sri Aurobindo: "Yes. It is the result of the pressure put by the Mother to see and do things in the true light. What you feel coming down is the true consciousness with the presence and action of the Mother." (13.3.34)—Krishnalal: "Generally I feel the Mother's presence descending in the inner self, but yesterday I had the experience that the Mother's presence descended surrounding me; and I felt as if I was broadening and so merging in the presence around me." Sri Aurobindo: "Both can and should be felt. After getting the inner consciousness one can get a wider consciousness extending to any distance around oneself—both should be filled with the presence of the Mother." (3.4.34)—Krishnalal: "Sometimes I close my eyes and see many different kinds of colour combinations having many different shades. These have no regular forms.... Have these abstract colour-combinations any meaning?" Sri Aurobindo: "It is movements of forces that you see. Each colour represents some kind of force." (Dec. 34)

2. That sojourn had turned out to be an unexpectedly painful experience for Krishnalal. On the other hand, perhaps the Grace had a definite purpose for allowing such an exit to Harivadan's soul. (See *Mother India*, March 2007, p. 190)

3. His child died on 13th January 1934, the news of which he received on the 15th. Curiously, on the 13th he had sent up a painting of a landscape which he had done the previous day while still under the influence of an experience. "Does it convey any mood?" he had asked. Sri Aurobindo: "It suggests solitude in a wide silence." On 15th he saw another vision: "I send a vision of a ship which I saw during my experience yesterday afternoon...." Sri Aurobindo: "It is the ship of the sadhana forcing its way through the difficulties...." (16.1.34)

4. See *Mother India*, January 2006, p. 31.

5. See *Mother India*, July 2005, pp. 589, 591-2. Despite being swallowed up by Gandhism, the Mandal maintained its martial training and organisation and Vasudev was one of its prominent instructor-leaders.

6. Promode Kumar would later come and settle in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. See "The Art of Promode Chatterjee and..." by Gurudas in *Mother India*, April 1977.

7. Some of Krishnalal's notes on this tour were published in *Mother India*, November 2005, pp. 1062-65.

8. "Nandalal's saying [about *Inspiration being based on study of Nature and knowledge of Tradition*] is true, but the three have to be combined and developed and harmonised in their combination to a sufficient degree before they bear the fruit of finished or great art." Sri Aurobindo's reply of 10.1.36 quoted in *Mother India*, November 2006, p. 932.

9. "The art schools of our country were, till recently, run by English painters of no distinction; and for over a hundred years, this foreign influence devoid of imagination hid our souls and filled the country with works of crude realism." Jayantilal Parekh quoted in *Mother India*, July 2005, p. 592. "Does the Art of 'independent' India express her soul?"

10. See *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, recorded by A. B. Purani.

The Yogin's aim in the Arts should not be a mere aesthetic, mental or vital gratification, but, seeing the Divine everywhere, worshipping it with a revelation of the meaning of its own works, to express that One Divine in ideal forms, the One Divine in principles and forces, the One Divine in gods and men and creatures and objects.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 142)

STAMP COLLECTING IN SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

(Based on some interviews with Noren Singh Nahar)

Q. Noren-Singh-da, how did philatelic activities begin in the Ashram?

The Mother was interested in stamps from her childhood. She had some stamps, but I do not know if any stamps from her collection are there in our own. Pavitra-da was the first collector in the Ashram. In France he had many albums, at least eight or ten. With the Mother's approval he got his stamp albums from France and started our stamp collection. This was in the late 1920's. So it was Pavitra-da who started this work.

Q. Where was this being done?

Pavitra-da was looking after it in his room in the main Ashram building, upstairs, where the Mother used to come daily. At times she would see the collection which was kept in Pavitra-da's bedroom, the room through which the Mother used to pass while going for the Balcony Darshan. There he had a small almirah where everything was stacked. I was working in Pavitra-da's dining room, where there was a small table and one stool. I used to sit there with the albums and catalogues which I had to keep on the floor.

Q. Did the Mother encourage this work?

It was due to the Mother's encouragement that the collection grew fast. All the covers addressed to her were given to Pavitra-da. Mother took a keen interest in the collection. Even afterwards, when Mother went to live in her second-floor rooms, she used to come downstairs with Pranab. At that time, whenever I received any new stamps I would show them to her. She would stand and look at them. Yes, she definitely took interest in the work.

Q. Why did Mother take so much interest in it?

The Mother took interest in everything that we, her children, did or were asked to do.

Q. Did Sri Aurobindo know anything about this work?

Of course. Sri Aurobindo knew everything that the Mother did.

Q. Noren Singh-da, when did you join the Ashram and why did Mother select you for this stamp collection work? Is there any special reason?

I joined the Ashram in 1939 and started working within a short period with Pavitra-da, assisting him mainly in the stamp work. When I started the work, the Mother was coming every day to Pavitra-da's office. I used to sit outside; then one day the Mother said I could come when she was there. The Mother alone could tell us the reason for selecting me. Of course, from my childhood I was interested in collecting stamps. The arrangement was made spontaneously, I suppose.

Q. What is the background of the present Ashram stamp department—the Department of Philately?

Earlier there was no philatelic department as such. It took shape in the present room; by then I was in charge. In the beginning, for a long time, only Suprabha used to help me. Sri Aurobindo lived in this room for four years, from 1922 to February 1927, till his retirement. It was in this room that the descent of the Overmind took place. After that, Anilbaran was given this room. When he left for Calcutta, in the mid-1960's, the Mother chose this room to house our stamp collection. By that time the collection had grown vastly and there was not enough space for it in Pavitra-da's room.

Q. How did the Mother support this work?

The Mother's interest in stamp collection was always there. The fact that she gave me the key to this room as soon as it became vacant, shows how much she cared about it. When the Mother was coming for Balcony Darshan, she would pass through the room called the Laboratory; there, whenever I received new stamps, I would arrange them on the table for her and she would look at them with great interest. Even earlier, at the beginning, the Mother used to look at the collection and the work I was doing in Pavitra-da's office. Every year she would ask me, "How many stamps do you have in the collection?" I used to count them and tell the Mother, "This year we have this many stamps." Like that, the collection started growing.

Q. Who purchased the stamps at that time?

At the beginning I was buying the stamps myself. It was Pavitra-da and Abhay Singh who were buying them from the French Post Office. When the question of merger between French Pondicherry and India arose on the last day before the merger the Mother told me, "Now that there won't be a French Post Office any more, go and

buy some French India stamps. How much money do you want?" I said casually, "Five hundred rupees" or something like that. The Mother said, "Only that much!" She gave me much more. Then I went to the French Post Office and requested them to give me stamps and asked if letters could still be posted. At first they said, "No, today is closed," but finally gave the permission. Only one letter was posted that day, the last from the French Post Office. And that letter was in the Mother's handwriting, addressed to her son André. That letter was later given back to us and it is still there in the collection. It is a unique cover.

Q. What was the last day of the French Post Office?

The 31st October 1954 was the last day of the French Post Office. The only letter posted that day was cancelled at Paris. That letter is now in our collection. Officially used covers are very rare, and as there is a postal mark on both sides, this one is authentic.

Q. How did the collection grow?

I used to exchange stamps with other collectors. Also, devotees used to send stamps to the Mother. The Mother would give them to me. Even when she was not seeing many people, my sister Sumitra used to go up to her because she was secretary to Pavitra-da and so she took letters to the Mother. Seeing covers with stamps, the Mother would say, "You go and give these covers personally to your brother." Earlier, all the letters which came were kept inside the drawer in Pavitra-da's office and when it was full I used to sort them out for stamps. On some covers I found the Mother's own handwriting. She used to write to a few disciples; for example she often wrote to Elsa Schunike. She herself would write the address on the cover and ask me to affix very good stamps. I have one cover like that. Elsa must have received many covers; those are valuable. Like that there are many interesting covers.

Q. Could you please tell us about your talks with the Mother regarding the collection?

As I said earlier, the Mother used to go to the Balcony through the Laboratory and Pavitra-da's bedroom. We were there, my brothers and sisters, and I would spread the stamps on the table for the Mother to see. One day, we received a magazine, *Life* magazine; on the cover were printed many stamps from around the world. The Mother saw this cover. Then I said, "But Mother, we don't have a single one of them." The Mother replied, "One day they will come."

The Mother remembered all the people who offered her anything, a stamp or anything else,—any grateful offering, the Mother would remember. One day she visited

the Ashram Press. There was a gentleman, Mr. Das, who was looking after the store at that time. He was a paid worker, a local person. He had a collection which he wanted the Mother to buy. We saw his collection, Pavitra-da also saw it, but it was a small collection and so it was not interesting for us. But the Mother said, "Take this collection, he is in need of money." And then I made the purchase.

Apart from that, there was a stamp dealer called Nilkant. He was an Ashramite at one time and was interested in philately. He left the Ashram and started a business, but he would send an offering of stamps to the Mother regularly, and the Mother remembered. Once he was in a very difficult situation. His wife and children had left him and he was penniless. The Mother came to know about it. Then she told me, "Go and tell Amrita to arrange a room, food and whatever he needs, immediately." I told Amrita-da, but naturally it takes a few days to look for a room. The Mother asked me again, "Has it been arranged?" Then I again went to Amrita-da and told him that the Mother wanted it to be done immediately; finally it was done. The Mother also gave him food and other things. Why? Because she remembered his offering. She didn't forget these things.

Q. What are the collections you have with you?

The Mother's stamp collection, or the Department of Philately as it is now known, has stamps from many countries of the world. We have good collections of post-independent India (British India—not much), French India and some countries of Western Europe, such as France, Holland and Switzerland. We also have a good representation of modern stamps of Canada, U.S.A., Brazil and other countries. We collect coins and banknotes too. The Mother was equally interested in them.

Q. Are there any specific timings for this work?

Previously I used to work for many hours, and there were no fixed timings then. At present, however, the timings are from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1.30 p.m. to 4 p.m. During the rainy season we cannot bring out the stamps due to the high humidity, but we do other work, such as catching up with correspondence and reading the stamp journals. This also is important. We also work with coins at that time.

Q. Did the Mother give you suggestions for your stamp work?

Once I showed the Mother some cellophane paper for interleaving the album pages, instead of the glassine paper we normally use. Immediately she disapproved of it. In fact, we found that this paper, in direct contact with stamps, partly absorbs the ink, thus damaging the stamps.

There are notes written by the Mother, many of them concerning the making of

our stamp almirahs. Occasionally, she sent a note asking me to affix good stamps on letters to be sent to a few specific persons. But in general I used to ask orally about the philatelic work.

Q. Did the Mother visit the present office?

No, she never visited this office, but still took interest in our work till the end.

Q. Noren Singh-da, can you please tell us about the special cancellation that the Mother gave on the occasion of the release of Sri Aurobindo's stamp on his birthday in 1964?

On 15th August 1964 the Mother gave a special cancellation on Sri Aurobindo's stamp in her music room upstairs. Those present were Champaklal, Madanlal Himatsinka, and myself. It was Madanlal to whom the Mother gave the responsibility of writing to the Minister for Communication for the release of the stamp. That day the Mother put her personal seal on a few stamps of Sri Aurobindo.

Q. How did the Government of India come to release a stamp on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary in 1972? Whose idea was it? Were coin sets also released?

Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary stamp was released on 15th August 1972. In connection with this I went to Madras to contact my friend Mr. Srinivas Rau, an advocate who was also a member of the Government Philatelic Advisory Committee. He told me that the proposal for the stamp had been cancelled, as a stamp with Sri Aurobindo's picture had already come out in 1964. I asked him if there was any possible alternative. He suggested that if we submitted our proposal along with a symbolic design, then there was a chance of acceptance. I put the matter before the Mother. She asked Jayantilal to prepare some symbolic designs. He prepared several designs and the Mother selected one of them. The design was forwarded to the concerned department and it was accepted.

On 15th August 1972 when the stamp was released the Mother affixed a special cancellation on the stamp in her room. Those present were the Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, B. D. Jatti (who later became Vice President of India), the Post Master General of Tamil Nadu circle, Champaklal, Counouma and myself. When the function was over, the Mother affixed her personal seal on a few stamps. No coin sets were released at that time, though one was issued later in 1999.

Q. On the Mother's centenary in 1978 a special stamp was released. Can you tell us about the occasion and how things were arranged?

For the Mother's birth centenary stamp in 1978, I asked the Trustees to write to the Government because the request had to come from the mother institution. That is the convention of the Postal Department. A request had already come from some foreign disciples for the release of a special stamp on the occasion, but the Government said that unless there was a request from the parent body it could not issue the stamp. Then I asked the Managing Trustee to write, but nothing happened for awhile. Finally, one day in January, Counouma sent me a note: "We won't object if the Government brings out a stamp." [I was disappointed and] was on the point of giving up, but I thought, "The Mother has done so much for Sri Aurobindo's stamps. Can't we take out one for her?" Then I was determined, and fortunately it succeeded.

I had contacted many senior philatelists in case their help was needed, as time was running out. My uncle, Shri Bijoy Singh Nahar, was a secretary at the Central Government. I informed him of the situation and requested him to ask the Minister for Communication for approval to issue the Mother's stamp. Finally it was agreed. Mr. C.V.S.N. Rau came down here, advising us what to do and how to proceed. We had to take the responsibility of selling everything, because we had prepared, not only the official first-day cover, but many other items: photos, folders, maxim cards, etc. This meant thousands of cancellations; it entailed a lot of work. The P.M.G. of the Tamil Nadu circle who had come earlier sent me a note from Madras, saying that I could send whatever articles were ready through the Postal Department and they would do the machine cancellation. That was finally done and everything turned out well. When the stamp came out, we had to find a place where we could sell those items to the devotees who came here in large numbers; for them these stamps would be souvenirs. I asked [for a place for their sale. But no place could be found.] I said, "All right, we will arrange it on the footpath." Finally, we got a place on the footpath in front of the Ashram Post Office and also across the street in Counouma's house.

The Mother's stamp collection is a continuous process; here we can't say 'this far and no further'. With time it is growing both in quantity and quality. We always go for the best. Quality albums for stamps, covers and documents for better preservation. Regular handling for giving light and air is important. Our Telecarte collection, started only a few years back, in 2000, is growing fast. We get help from an ardent collector in France.

(Interviews by S. Prabhakaran)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of March 2007)

The Mother in Her Mahakali Aspect

Mahakali is of another nature. Not wideness but height, not wisdom but force and strength are her peculiar power...for she is the Warrior of the Worlds who never shrinks from the battle.

It is Kali-puja celebration in the Ashram Meditation Hall. The Mother's chair has been tastefully decorated with a red Benarasi silk sari. There are red hibiscus flowers everywhere for the red hibiscus is the flower of Mahakali. On Kali-puja this flower is offered at the Mother's Feet. We have known this since our childhood but I did not know why the red hibiscus was offered at the Feet of Mahakali. It is after coming here that I found out that the Mother had given 'Power' as the spiritual significance of this flower. And what else can Mahakali as the incarnation of Power be offered! Isn't it amazing! How the *munis* and rishis had attained this knowledge through their subtle vision so many aeons ago! For every god or goddess there is a different flower. Holy Basil leaves or *tulsi* are offered at every puja. The puja in fact starts with an offering of *tulsi*. And the Mother's spiritual significance for *tulsi* is 'Devotion'. Without devotion one cannot find god. Isn't the phrase the 'devotee's god' most apt? That is why you start the puja with an offering of *tulsi*. In this context I am reminded of a strange aspect of the Mother as recounted by Mona:

One day the Mother entered with a tray filled with Devotion leaves (*Ocimum sanctum* or *tulsi* in India) crying out as if in an auction:

"Who wants some devotion? Who wants some devotion? I give it to the one who asks for it. Who wants... Do you want?"

You want it? Do you care for all these things? Does it mean anything to you, or are these only words? Look! No effect. He is like a piece of stone. No reaction at all. What? Do you want some? No need? No?

Mona: But Mother, didn't you feel it? Didn't you hear what I want?

You cunning little one, there, take. Can't you speak? What are you made of?

Mona: Don't know, but it is your fault.

My fault, but why?

Mona: Because you made me like this. You have made me, so you know.

But I have not forbidden you to ask me anything.

Mona: Yes, you did.

When?

Mona: You told me: when one keeps silent before you, then one receives better.

Ah! Really, you are...

Satisfied with the answer, the Mother turned all of a sudden and went into her room.

What a wonderful incident, this!

One day the Mother put a garland of *tulsi* leaves around Champaklal-ji and told him:

“Tie yourself with devotion.”

A line from a song comes to me:

Bhakter kangaal ami chirakaal, bhakta amaar praaner praan.

(Devotees' beggar have I been forever, for the devotee is the heart of my life.)

And so through this mysterious game the Mother made us conscious about the invaluable need for devotion.

Every year on Kali-puja day, the Mother used to come down to the Meditation Hall wearing a red Benarasi sari embroidered with flowers in *zari* (golden thread). She gave everyone flowers as blessings. Inside the small envelope there were dried petals of the pomegranate flower (*Divine's Love*). The Mother used to shower this divine Love on all on this special day. On this special day the Mother used to bring down Mahakali. Mahakali was seated within the Mother. And unknowingly we would all feel a little of the different aspects of the Mother. When one is close to the fire, one cannot but be touched by its warmth.

The Mother kept the Rudra aspect of Mahakali always under control but in spite of that sometimes this terrible aspect of hers did come through.

I remember an incident.

One day a young man of about 23 was talking very excitedly. Soon the tenor of his conversation went beyond the acceptable. I was standing just behind him in the queue on the staircase and so could hear everything. All of a sudden the Mother's voice rose as she sharply said:

“Stop! Stop! Otherwise you will provoke Mahakali, you will provoke Mahakali.”

The Mother was doing Her utmost to try and spare Her own child from the terrible wrath and fury of Mahakali. I stood on the staircase and went on praying to the Mother:

“Ma, Ma, please spare the boy from the awful wrath of Mahakali. Please save him. Please calm Mahakali down.”

I peeped in and saw that the Mother was still straining very hard to control Mahakali's unstoppable fury. A tremendous shiver ran down my whole body like lightning. It was only a few years earlier that I had asked the Mother:

“Mother, are you Mahakali?”

And the Mother had just nodded in agreement. Today She herself was saying:

“Stop! Stop! Otherwise you will provoke Mahakali.”

That vast, fearful figure of the Mother, that tremendous brow of Hers emerged before my eyes. Finally the boy calmed down with the Mother's Grace. He took the

flower-blessings and came down. He probably did not realise the frightening catastrophe he had been spared thanks to the Mother's Grace.

Another incident took place quite some time earlier. In those times all the sadhaks were having all kinds of experiences. By the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Grace each one would reach a very high level in his or her sadhana. One such sadhak was getting such significant experiences that he lost all control. He went up to the Mother and exclaimed:

"I am Sri Aurobindo."

There was no escape. The Mother roared:

"What? What did you say?"

Mahakali was awakened. The sadhak was so terrified seeing this frightful aspect of the Mother that he began desperately calling out to Sri Aurobindo:

"Sri Aurobindo, save me, save me."

Sri Aurobindo came out of his room on hearing his voice. He came to the Mother and requested Her:

"Mother, forgive him this time."

The Mother brought Mahakali back under control.

From time to time this ferocious aspect of the Mother would come through. She could not then tolerate even the smallest of mistakes. Sometimes She would erupt like a volcano with Her tremendous power, sharpness and divine fury. Her hand was ruthless over anything that was ignorant and unconscious. This incident also gives us an unmistakable glimpse of man's treachery and propensity for malignity. Sri Aurobindo describes this aspect of Mahakali in *The Mother*:

Intolerant of imperfection, she deals roughly with all in man that is unwilling and she is severe to all that is obstinately ignorant and obscure; her wrath is immediate and dire against treachery and falsehood and malignity, ill-will is smitten at once by her scourge.

I remember seeing a very beautiful well-known painting by Pramode Kumar Chatterjee: Mahadeva lying at the feet of Mahakali in her fearful dance in order to destroy the whole creation with that terrifying dreadful aspect of hers. She will not tolerate falsehood or the slightest deviation in the divine work. Mahadeva sees the danger and lies down at Mahakali's feet. And unknowingly her feet fall upon Mahadeva's chest and she suddenly stops. She withdraws her power. The battle-loving Mahakali calms down and the universe is saved.

This sadhak was saved only because Sri Aurobindo had Himself interceded on his behalf with the Mother. I still cannot forget that scene. Shiva, Mahadeva himself, taking Mahakali's tremendous power upon him!

Once while taking the French class in the Playground, the Mother spoke at length about the different forms of Kali.

The Mother had once gone for a drive by the sea near Ariancouppam. After travelling a little distance She asked that the car be stopped. But She did not get out of the car. Suddenly an awfully black, frightfully skinny figure with dishevelled hair came and stood near the Mother and began begging:

“Please help me. If I can get your force and help then a lot of people will come to me. Then my power will increase.”

The figure went on begging in this way. So then the Mother replied:

“You don’t need any more force or people. Be happy with whatever you have got.”

The car re-started and when the Mother reached the Kali temple in Virampattinam and got in She understood that the dark figure She had met was in fact the deity of this temple.

One day someone asked the Mother:

“What plane does this Kali belong to?”

The Mother answered:

“The most material vital plane.”

Then someone else asked:

“Why is she called Kali?”

The Mother continued:

I don’t know. It is one of the Kalis—I have a vague impression that the head was cut off or that she was buried up to the neck or I don’t know what. Something like that. There is a story of a head which comes out of the sand, buried up to the neck... It is a form of Kali—there are countless forms of Kali. Each believer has his image, has his particular relation with a certain Kali. Sometimes it is their own Kali: there are family Kalis—lots of family Kalis. I knew families that had very dangerous Kalis. If what they wanted was not done, always some misfortune befell the family members. There was a very strong formation. I suppose it was the family members who were still more responsible than their Kali. And I knew people who when the misfortune came, a real misfortune in the family... someone’s death—took the image of Kali and went and threw it into the Ganges.

Then someone enquired:

“This Kali has no connection with Mahakali, has she?”

The Mother’s answer:

No. She has a very close connection with the human mind. I believe these are almost exclusively constructions of the human mind... But I have found that there is really a Ganapati...something I didn’t believe. I used to think it was a purely human formation, that story of the elephant head—but there is a being like that. I saw it, it is quite alive, and it is not a formation. So too there is a black

Kali with her garland of skulls and her huge hanging tongue. I have seen her. I saw her entering my room with her eyes wide open. So I am sure she exists. And it was not a human formation: it was a being—a real being. Now, it is possible that some of the details may have been added by human thought. But still the being was a real being, it was not purely a formation.

I suddenly remembered these lines from Sri Aurobindo's *Durga-stotra*:

Mother Durga! Thou art Kali, naked, garlanded with human heads, sword in hand, thou slayest the Asura.

The next question put to the Mother was:

“What does that black Kali do?”

The Mother replied:

Well, I believe she does fairly bad things! It is obvious that she takes a great pleasure in destruction.

And in this context the Mother spoke to us about one of Her own experiences. We all sat in the Playground in rapt attention listening to Her:

...It was at the time of the First World War, the early days of the First War. I was here. I was staying in the house on Dupleix Street, Dupleix House. From the terrace of the house could be seen Sri Aurobindo's room, the one in the Guest House. Sri Aurobindo was staying there. He had two rooms and the small terrace. And from the terrace of the Dupleix House the terrace of the Guest House could be seen (...) And I used to sit on the terrace to meditate every morning, facing Sri Aurobindo's room. That day I was in my room, but looking at Sri Aurobindo's room through a small window. I was in meditation but my eyes were open. I saw this Kali entering through my door. I asked her, “What do you want?” And she was dancing, a truly savage dance. She told me, “Paris is taken, Paris will be destroyed.” We used to have no news, it was just at the beginning of the war. I was in meditation. I turned towards her and told her, “No, Paris will not be taken, Paris will be saved”, quietly, just like this, but with a certain force. She made a face and went away. And the next day, we received the “dispatch”. In those days there were no radios yet, we had telegraph messages, “dispatches”, which were proclaimed, posted on the gate of the Government House. We got the news that the Germans had been marching upon Paris, that Paris was not defended, the way was quite open, they had to advance only a few kilometres more and they would have entered the city. But when they saw that the road was clear, that there was nobody to oppose them, they felt convinced that it was an ambush,

that a trap had been set for them. So they turned round and went back! (*Laughter*) And when the French armies saw that, naturally they gave chase and caught them, and there was a battle. It was the decisive battle: they were stopped. Well, evidently it was that. It took this form. When I said to Kali, “No”, they were panic stricken. They turned back. Otherwise if they had continued to advance it would have all been over.

The Mother as Mahashakti dominates all Her other aspects even though Her different individual forms work quite independently. But from time to time the Mother as Mahashakti does intervene to control them.

The Mother has observed:

To a certain extent (these four are independent) but not totally. It is always the same thing. There is an independence which at times seems to be total, and at the same time a very close link and even one which is, so to say, absolute. The central consciousness, that is to say, here in the material world, is the Mahashakti, you know. Well, she always has the power to control the action of these different aspects—though they are quite independent and act according to their own aspirations. And yet she can control them.

Take for example, the instance of Kali. If Kali decides that she is going to intervene and the Mahashakti, who has naturally a much more total and general vision of things, sees that the moment for intervention is not opportune or that it is too soon, well, she can very easily put a pressure upon Mahakali and tell her, “Keep quiet”. And the other is obliged to keep quiet; and yet she acts quite independently.

The next question was about Mahakali’s intervention, for by her action what would have taken centuries could take place now.

I say it is for this that Mahakali is there and does her work. But Mahakali has a particular way of seeing the work; and when one has the total vision, one can see that this, you know... She sees only her side of the work, and when one sees the whole, one may say, “Ah, no, this is not quite the time!”

Then a child asked: “What is Mahakali like?”

And the Mother replied:

Well, my children, when you see her, you can tell me! She is not like that Kali. All I can tell you is that she is not black, she doesn’t stick out a big tongue, and she doesn’t wear a necklace of human heads!

Here I am reminded of an incident.

Almost daily at about midday, the Mother used to stand on the Meditation Hall staircase and throw toffees to everyone, especially to the children. And everyone would jump to catch them. There was such excitement in the air then! The Mother enjoyed this moment immensely. Amrita-da, trying to catch a toffee with both his hands stretched out wide, was a real spectacle! And the Mother would laugh along with us at Amrita-da's style of catching the toffee. Amrita-da explained to the Mother:

“Mother, actually I am trying to catch the force that is present behind the toffee!”

And we would all burst into laughter once again!

One day in the midst of all this gaiety someone suddenly came running to the Mother and said:

“Mother, there's a fire in the Ashram!”

Abruptly the Mother became most solemn. She asked:

“How did it happen?”

In the meantime another person came to the Mother. He was holding two 5-year-old children:

“Mother, these are the culprits. There was a pile of old papers behind the Flower-room (Pujalal-ji's room). These two set fire to the papers.”

Her aspect of fury slowly came over the Mother's face. The two children began trembling like goats at a sacrificial altar. We really saw the Mother that day revealing Her fiery, furious, fearful aspect of Mahakali. The Mother had stared at them in such an unflinchingly piercing way that even we began trembling with dread. But because these were but children, the two boys were spared. Then She climbed up the staircase with firm, strong steps, and every step felt that terrifying shiver while we just went on looking at Her in stunned silence.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of March 2007)

13. The Handsome Singer

THE *Peria Puranam* of Sekkizhar which narrates the lives of sixty-three Shaiva saints gives pride of place to Sundaramurti. He is spoken of as one of the servitors of Shiva on Mount Kailas. He fell in love with Anindita and Kamalini who were engaged in gathering flowers for Parvati. Shiva cursed him to be born on earth and go through the tribulations of being a young man in love. So the servitor was born to Sadayanar of Tirunavalur. His mother Isaijnaniyar excelled in music. The glowing little child was named Nambi Aroorar. The local chieftain, Narasinga Munaiyaraiyan who happened to see the child expressed a wish to bring him up. Brought up like a prince, Nambi Aroorar grew up to be a handsome young man and was called Sundarar. The elders arranged for his wedding with Sadangavi of Puthur. The festivities had reached the auspicious moment when an aged, shrivelled up Brahmin called upon those present to stop the wedding:

“O wise elders! Listen to my case. This bridegroom Nambi Aroorar is my slave. He has given me a palm document saying he has been my slave by virtue of his father and grandfather also being mine. How can he get married as a free person?”

The wedding guests were shocked. Whoever had heard of a Brahmin becoming a slave of another Brahmin? The incensed Sundarar went to the old man: “You mad fellow, if my family has bound itself for generational servitude to you, where is the document spelling it out? Show it to me!” As the elder shied away from him refusing to hand over the document, Sundarar snatched it and tore it up into pieces.

“The case has not been heard, and he has destroyed my evidence. So he is indeed guilty!” said the old man quaking at the turn of events. “Which is your native place? Where do you live? If what you say is true, shall we go to your place and solve this case?” challenged Sundarar.

“Sure,” said the stranger. “He has only torn a copy. The original document is in my place, Tiruvennainallur.” They went to the holy place of Tiruvennainallur where the old man was able to prove his point by producing the document. Sundarar and his people were amazed. Yes, the document was genuine. The assemblage then asked the old man to show them his house and properties. “Come with me to my house,” said the old man and led them to the Tiruvarulturai temple of the place, and presently he entered the sanctum and vanished. So it was yet another Shiva-leela! Lost in wonderment, Sundarar prostrated in front of the Linga in the sanctum. “Forgive me! You must save me now!”

A voice was heard: “You argued with me using harsh words. So you shall be known as Van-Thondan (The Harsh Servitor). I love most the worship through sweet

hymns. Sings hymns in Tamil!”

Sundarar felt weak. How could he sing about the transcendent divine? Did he have the ability to string Tamil verses? How to begin? Where? The voice came through again: “You called me a mad fellow. Use it as the opening word for your song-offerings!”

Thus began Sundarar’s ministry as a hymnologist. The first words he used were “*pithaa, piraisoodi*” (O mad One, crescent-crowned!”)

Mad One, crescent-crowned,
My Lord, full of compassion!
I shan’t forget you.
Forever my mind meditates upon you.
You have chosen to reside
In grace-laden Vennainallur,
On the southern bank of Pennai river.
Having become your slave
How can I deny the fact?!

Sundarar’s devotional hymns form the Seventh Book of the Tamil Shaivite canon, *Panniru Tirumurai*. The book contains 1026 verses divided into one hundred decads. The devotee’s life was spent in travelling to temples and singing. But there was more. Sundarar’s life is also one of the most colourful and romantic of all the devotional singers in *Panniru Tirumurai*.

Adherents of Shaivism are very fond of Sundarar because he is considered a “friend” of Shiva. There is constant interaction between the two at the physico-mystical level, and there is never a dull moment in the hagiology concerning their coming together. The first incident happened in Tiruvathigai. Sundarar was spending a few days in the local Siddhavata Math.

One night as he was sleeping, someone’s foot kicked his head. It was that of an elderly pilgrim who was sleeping nearby. Though warned, the old man kept kicking Sundarar’s head with his foot. Suddenly realisation flooded upon the devotee when the old man asked, “Don’t you recognise me?” and vanished. The young man realised that it was Shiva himself who had come to him again to show him the path of Shiva consciousness, and his feelings streamed forth as a lovely prayer:

Are there servants who know not their master?
The crescent-crowned Lord who rides the Bull,
Wears the elephant’s hide and dances in the crematorium,
Shiva whose throat is blue and who has chosen to reside
In Veerattanam on the northern bank of Gedilam river,
Had wished to press his feet on my head. He did so.

Alas, I knew it not and gave vent to my infuriation.
What an ignoramus I have been.²

Sundarar now journeyed to Chidambaram, the most important of the temples dedicated to Shiva. When he was worshipping the Lord he was lost to himself as his senses were all tuned to the mystic sight, his body had become sheer consciousness and his emotions focussed only on sattva. As he watched the Lord dance in ecstasy, he heard a voice from the sanctum: “Come to Arur³ to see me!”

At Tiruvarur he was met by a group of Shaiva devotees. Shiva-bhakti swirled all over as they worshipped and sang. Sundarar grew emotional as he asked the devotees:

I am no good in the way I live, in scholarship,
In helpful camaraderie or sense of what is right.
I go around troubling others and separating them.
All this I do moving as my mind directs me.
The Lord with matted tresses ornamented
With the crescent, the snake and Ganga
Lives in Arur. O servitors! Please go to him
And ask him whether he would accept me.⁴

Hagiology tells us that the Lord assured Sundrarar of life-long friendship and asked him to go about always dressed as a bridegroom. Sundarar wanted servitorship but was taken in as an equal! He had been thwarted on the day of his marriage, and now here was a boon to help him remain an evergreen bridegroom! Who can gauge the ways of the Divine’s play with the human aspirants in the Bhakti Movement?

Though Shiva had prevented Sundarar’s marriage with Sadangavi (who spent her days in meditation and passed away sometime later), the Lord had not meant his devotee to be a celibate. Living for a while in Tiruvarur, Sundarar fell in love with Paravaiyar from a courtesan’s family who used to come to the temple of Tyagaraja for worship. Paravaiyar was the human incarnation of Kamalini from Kailas. His love was reciprocated though the Lord had to intervene again and arrange the marriage between an Adishaiva brahmin and a devadasi. Time passed by swiftly in great connubial happiness.

One day when Sundarar was entering the temple, he forgot to salute the devotees of Shiva who were sitting in the Devasiriya Mandapam at the entrance singing prayers. One of them, Viranmindar was angry and burst out: “Henceforth both Sundarar who failed to salute us and Shiva who accepts his salutations are strangers to us!” When Sundarar reached the sanctum, the Lord explained to him the priceless value of devotees and that he should praise them. Sundarar replied that he was, indeed, a servant of these devotees of Shiva. When the Lord asked him to proceed with that line as an opening, the devotee burst forth with a poem:

I am servitor of the servitors
 of the holy people who live in Tillai.
 A servant of the potter
 Named Tiruneelakantar;
 Also of the noble Iyarpagai
 Who never denies what exists;
 Indeed a servant of the servants
 Of Maran of Ilayankudi;
 I am a servant of the heroic
 Devotee, Meypporul;
 A slave I am to Viranmindar
 In gardens-girt Chengunrur;
 Also to Amarneeti who wears
 the jasmine garland of a trader;
 And forever and ever
 I am slave to the Lord of Tiruvarur.⁵

The entire decad titled 'Tiruthondar Tohai' (List of the Holy Devotees) refers by name to sixty-two devotees apart from nine general references like "those who were born in Tiruvarur" and "the sages who wear the holy ash."⁶

When reading the extant legends concerning Sundarar's life, we enter a fascinating world of wonderment. There has to be a total suspension of disbelief in this world of bhakti, for we do watch Shiva's army of bhutas transporting bags of paddy to Sundarar's house! Once Paravaiyar requested Sundarar for money to celebrate a festival. The devotee went to sleep in the Tirupugalur temple with a couple of bricks as his pillow. On waking up he found that the bricks had turned to gold! This experience was the inspiration for eleven verses that call upon poets not to purposelessly praise human beings but hail only the Supreme Lord:

O ye poets! There is none on earth
 Who can give you generously
 Even should you praise the ugly as handsome,
 The grey-haired as becoming youth,
 The low-caste as of noble birth.
 Hence sing of Tirupugalur
 Where the fields are scented with lotuses.
 Thus will you rule easily the heavens.⁷

Travelling through several centres associated with the worship of Shiva, once Sundarar heard a friendly voice clearly: "Ah, you have forgotten Mazhapadi!" Sundarar sped to the holy temple on the banks of Coleroon and hailed the presiding deity

Vajrasthambhanatha with one of his most famous decads:

O golden-hued! You are garmented
 With the tiger-skin; the konrai bloom
 Decorates your matted locks that glow red;
 O king, colossal-sized gem,
 The jewel of Mazhapadi,
 O mother-imagined!
 How can I ever think of anyone else
 But you, my Lord!⁸

Not all hymns of Sundarar are such prayers of praise. He lived royally and would often get into financial difficulties. If no immediate relief came, Shiva would receive a tongue-lashing from his human friend. This is a most welcome area in the hymns of the Bhakti Movement where annoyance and irritation are also regarded as prayers known as “*ninda stuti*” (satirical prayers). After all, Sundarar’s first hymn was a *ninda stuti*, “Mad One, crescent-crowned!” Apparently Shiva loved it and repeatedly came to the rescue of Sundarar whenever the latter found himself helpless and hungry in strange places. The most intriguing of the Shiva-Sundarar encounters happened when Sundarar fell in love with a damsel Sangiliyar in Tiruvotriyur. Sangiliyar was the human incarnation of Anindita of Kailas. Sundarar gave a promise to Sangiliyar under the Vakula tree in the temple that he would never leave her for Paravaiyar, fully knowing about the presence of Shiva in the tree. The wedding took place and all seemed well.

After a while, Sundarar left Sangiliyar to meet his first wife. Because of the promise he had made in the presence of Shiva, he lost his eyesight immediately. Some of the most moving poems in the Seventh Book are the lamentations of Sundarar who prays to Shiva to give him back his eyesight as he moves from place to place with the help of a walking stick given by the Lord:

Who can gain glorious gifts like me?
 O generous One! Though I have lied
 And committed wrongs innumerable,
 You have forgiven me. Encouraged thus
 I have committed greater wrongs. My Lord
 Who destroyed the Three Cities by laughter!
 Lord Pashupata of Tirumullaivayil, Supreme Light!
 Do save my helpless self from this sorrow.⁹

This is a thought-provoking decad on the misuse of Free Will by human beings. After a considerable time elapsed when Sundarar realised his folly, Shiva was pleased to restore sight in Sundarar’s left eye. Like a spoilt child, Sundarar screamed at Shiva

for this partial restoration. What is there for Shiva to lose if he grants sight for both eyes?

You live in places like Turutti, Pazhanam
 And lord it over in Sotrutturai;
 Tiruvarur is your residence too;
 So you do not need our heart to stay.
 When devotees who love you exceedingly
 Speak to you of their sorrows
 You will keep them on earth ever in sorrow.
 If such be your decision, may you prosper!¹⁰

Sundarar's divine friend must have had a good laugh for he restored the devotee's sight completely.

But Sundarar's tribulations were far from over. On hearing the news of his remarriage, Paravaiyar rejected him. He sent some friends to explain his position but she said that she would rather commit suicide than live with the erring husband. Shiva took upon himself the responsibility of going as an ambassador of love to Paravaiyar. When she realised that the Lord had sought a reconciliation, she forgave Sundarar and happiness returned to Sundarar's married life.

Sundarar's making Shiva a go-between for his love-life had an unexpected result. Kalikkamar of the Eyar clan in Tirupperumangalam was a warrior and a great devotee of Shiva. He was now bitter that the Supreme had been demeaned by Sundarar. How could the Lord allow Sundarar such freedom and familiarity? Presently he became very sick with colic. Shiva assured him that Sundarar could cure him but Kalikkamar rejected the offer. All the same Shiva sent Sundarar to Kalikkamar. When he heard of this Kalikkamar stabbed himself to death. His wife was also a devotee and felt helpless. But she just hid the corpse and welcomed Sundarar as guests were holy men. When Sundarar heard of the tragedy he proceeded to commit suicide. As it happens in these meaningful legends created to show us the varied strands in the path of bhakti, Shiva appeared, restored Kalikkamar to life. Henceforth Sundarar and Kalikkamar became very good friends.

If Sundarar's life is all drama, his journey away from earth into the beyond is equally spectacular. One of his friends was the Chera king. Sundarar used to go to the Chera capital, Tiruvanjaikkalam now and then and spend sometime, immersed in Shiva consciousness. Cheraman and Sundarar also toured holy places in Pandya and Chola lands. It was in Tiruvanjaikkalam that Sundarar experienced a sudden revulsion for the earthly joys that he had been enjoying till now. After singing ecstatically of Shiva's ways he submitted:

Supreme whose earrings are sheer brilliance!
 My Lord who resides in Anjaikkalam
 Circled by groves in the city of Magodhai-on-the-sea!
 You pressed the king of Lanka so hard
 As if his ten heads with shoulders would drop off.
 Quaffing the sea-born poison, your neck became black.
 You slashed away one of the heads of Brahma.
 I detest my family life and have discarded it.¹¹

It was a decision from which he would not swerve. Shiva understood the renunciation to be final. He immediately sent a white elephant to Tiruvanjaikkalam along with a host of gods. Sundarar left at once for Kailas, riding the elephant.

Cheraman was at that time away, having his ritual bath. When he returned to the palace and learnt of what had happened he called for his horse. As he murmured the Panchakshara in the horse's ears, the animal galloped fast carrying the master and soon went ahead of Sundarar's elephant. The ten verses that conclude the Seventh Book are said to have been sung by Sundarar as he was overjoyed that he was getting back to Kailas:

I know no mantra; enjoying
 The bliss of family life
 I had worn the noble signs of a devotee
 Yet was engaged in committing wrongs;
 My heart! Is it right for the Good One
 Of Nodiththanmalai to send me
 A beautiful elephant so I could ride
 In the huge skies above?¹²

The decad describes how Varuna himself came to receive Sundarar with flowers. The Mount resounded to Vedic chants and music while the chief of Ganas, Vaana showed the way within. Shiva, Indra, Brahma and other gods received Sundarar. When the sages wondered who this person was, Shiva said: "This is my friend. His name is Arooran." In the final verse, Sundarar requests Varuna to take the decad "sung in sweet Tamil" to the Lord at Tiruvanjaikkalam.

"Sung in sweet Tamil" is a phrase that forms the very basis of the origin of the Bhakti Movement. Both the Alvars and Nayanmars spread the Vedic religion through the language of the common man and thus scored their victories over Buddhism and Jainism. The Tamil of these hymnologists was couched in very simple terms and most of the time it is as if we are overhearing a dialogue. Which is what the hymnology is about for it is a constant dialogue with the Divine. They were all proud that they were using the Tamil language and described it as amenable to music (*isai-Tamizh*),

and capable of conveying thoughts pertaining to Realisation (*jnana-Tamizh*).

Though these inspired singers have left behind thousands of verses, there is no monotony in the hymnal literature. Sundarar's hymns are eminently suitable for being set to music. His similes are drawn from everyday life and so immediately understood by the common man. In a sad poem that refers to his distress as a blind man, he compared himself to a dog that has been bound to a stick:

My Lord who resides in Otriyur!
 I am trying to walk the ethical path.
 I do not consider myself a superior.
 Like water caught in a maelstrom
 I go round, and so does my heart.
 Do prevent my being pulled around
 Like a dog bound to a stick
 And grant me your compassion.¹³

As with most of the hymnologists, Sundarar also draws dazzling portraits of Mother Nature:

Using plantain and screw pinestalks
 Idiotic monkeys fight amongst themselves
 For the fruits of the plantains
 And juice of the jackfruit, screeching
 "My portion is less!" Such are the scenes
 In Tiruvanjiyam. Never shall we
 Consider someone else as god except Shiva
 Who resides here, the Ardhanareeshvara.¹⁴

Sundarar has an easy familiarity with the Lord which helps in a comfortable bandying of words with him or praising him through satire. For instance, there is the legend of women falling in love with Shiva even though the deity wears the terrible ornamentation of the Kankala Murti. Sundarar presents the description in the words of the women themselves, watching the Lord at Tiruppaineeli:

Lord residing in the forest!
 Your hand holds a snake.
 A snake is your waistband.
 Your necklace is a snake as well!
 All over your body where the snakes
 Slither, you have smeared holy ash;
 Reciting the Vedas, you sing well.

Gently, gracefully you stand
 Saying, "I am from Paineeli."
 What kind of a dress this be
 When you stride out for alms?¹⁵

So the divine singers come from the beyond and stay with us for a while as god-intoxicated hymnologists, spreading the message of love and devotion, faith and compassion, giving us some broad hints on how to direct our own actions. These singers are present no more, but because of their songs man has been able to move upwards steadily, without succumbing to the forces of darkness. In the bleakest moments of our lives, one hymn sung with trust in the Supreme has often saved the day. For these songs are for ever, the treasure-house of the spirit:

He spoke and ceased and left the earthly scene.
 Away from the strife and suffering on our globe,
 He turned towards his far-off blissful home.
 A brilliant arrow pointing straight to heaven,
 The luminous body of the ethereal seer
 Assailed the purple glory of the noon
 And disappeared like a receding star
 Vanishing into the light of the Unseen.
 But still a cry was heard in the infinite,
 And still to the listening soul on mortal earth
 A high and far imperishable voice
 Chanted the anthem of eternal love.¹⁶

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. Decad One, verse 1. All translations from Sundarar quoted in this essay are by Prema Nandakumar.
2. Decad Thirty-eight, verse 1.
3. "Tiru" meaning auspicious is generally added to place-names in South India. For example, Paineeli becomes Tiruppaineeli and Arur is referred to as Tiruvarur.
4. Decad Seventy-three, verse 4.
5. Decad Thirty-nine, verse 1.
6. Sekkilar used the life-histories of these sixty-two devotees and the life of Sundarar to write the Shaivite hagiological epic, *Peria Puranam*. This in turn has given us the magic number of "63 Nayanars". It may be mentioned that the Jains have the lives of sixty-three saints in their scriptural work, *Tri Sashti Salaka Charithram*. Sekkilar was writing at a time when Jainism and Shaivism were contending for supremacy in South India, and perhaps he wanted to give a parallel "Sixty-three".

7. Decad Thirty-four, verse 6.
8. Decad Twenty-four, verse 1.
9. Decad Sixty-nine, verse 6.
10. Decad Ninety-five, verse 4.
11. Decad Four, verse 8.
12. Decad One Hundred, verse 3. Nodiththanmalai is the Hill of the Destroyer. Here it refers to Mount Kailas.
13. Decad Forty-four, verse 5.
14. Decad Seventy-six, verse 9.
15. Decad Thirty-six, verse 10.
16. *Savitri*, Book VI, canto ii, p. 462.

Indian bhakti has given to this divine love powerful forms, poetic symbols which are not in reality so much symbols as intimate expressions of truth which can find no other expression. It uses human relations and sees a divine person, not as mere figures, but because there are divine relations of supreme Delight and Beauty with the human soul of which human relations are the imperfect but still the real type, and because that Delight and Beauty are not abstractions or qualities of a quite impalpable metaphysical entity, but the very body and form of the supreme Being. It is a living Soul to which the soul of the bhakta yearns; for the source of all life is not an idea or a conception or a state of existence, but a real Being. Therefore in the possession of the divine Beloved all the life of the soul is satisfied and all the relations by which it finds and in which it expresses itself, are wholly fulfilled; therefore, too, by any and all of them can the Beloved be sought, though those which admit the greatest intensity, are always those by which he can be most intensely pursued and possessed with the profoundest ecstasy. He is sought within in the heart and therefore apart from all by an inward-gathered concentration of the being in the soul itself; but he is also seen and loved everywhere where he manifests his being. All the beauty and joy of existence is seen as his joy and beauty; he is embraced by the spirit in all beings; the ecstasy of love enjoyed pours itself out in a universal love; all existence becomes a radiation of its delight and even in its very appearances is transformed into something other than its outward appearance. The world itself is experienced as a play of the divine Delight, a Lila, and that in which the world loses itself is the heaven of beatitude of the eternal union.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 576)

THE DATE OF THE MAHABHARATA WAR

Foreword

My first visit to the Ashram was in 1948. I was a year old and the youngest child allowed in. My mother, Suprobhat, had brought me along with her cousin Nilima after getting permission through Dr. Indrasen, with whom my grandmother used to share rented premises in Delhi. My parents had Sri Aurobindo's Darshan on 15th August that year. My next visit was two decades later, in 1969. When I called on Nolini-da, he told me—learning of my fascination for our epics—that the library had a copy of the *Mahabharata* that had lines marked by Sri Aurobindo when he was studying it for distinguishing the original composition from later accretions and it would be nice if I could dig it out. After a right royal hunt in the library I found a copy that had lines marked separately in red and in blue pencil. I showed it to Nolini-da who said that I had found what Sri Aurobindo had been using. Unfortunately, in subsequent visits I could not locate this copy. Perhaps it lies somewhere among Nolini-da's personal effects that the Ashram Archives may locate.

Around this time I went through Sri Aurobindo's *Vyasa and Valmiki* and was struck by his reference to a "recent article of the Indian Review" on the date of the Mahabharata War because he praised it as "an unusually able and searching (*or almost conclusive*) paper".¹ The annotation stated that it was Velandai Gopala Aiyer's "The Date of the Mahabharata War". I do not remember how I managed to get hold of a typed copy of this article published in Vol. II, January-December 1901 of this monthly journal edited by G. A. Natesan. Perhaps Jayantilal-ji, with his characteristic generosity, dug it out and sent it to me. I was struck by the fact that Sri Aurobindo was obviously fully convinced by Aiyer's arguments, because elsewhere he writes, "It is now known **beyond reasonable doubt** that the Mahabharata war was fought out in or about 1190 B.C."² (my emphasis). This puts a conclusive seal on the incontrovertibility of Aiyer's arguments. So far so good.

But, what does investigator par-excellence, Amal Kiran, have to say about this? His *Ancient India in a New Light* revolutionises Indian chronology following the painstaking piecing together of evidence and the demolition of every conceivable objection that so characterises him. "Supplement One" of Part Three of the book deals with this vexed question. His date, based on collating Buddhist chronology with the list of generations of teachers of the *Kaushitaki* or *Shankhayana Aranyaka*, is 1452 or 1482 B.C. for the War, with Krishna casting off this mortal coil 36 years later in 1416 or 1446 B.C. Surprisingly, there is no reference to the article that elicited such high praise from Sri Aurobindo. Did Amal Kiran not have access to it, or is it the

1. *On the Mahabharata* (first edition: 1991), p. 3.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

solitary catch that slipped through the net he cast so far and wide? Somehow, despite our regular correspondence, this is a question that did not occur to me when he asked for my comments on his research.

One would dearly like to know if any reactions to Aiyer's research were published in the *Indian Review* and whether he carried out some other investigations. Libraries in Chennai might yield the information. An abridgement is presented for enabling us to read what Sri Aurobindo had found so convincing. —P. B.

Aiyer had published a previous paper fixing the date of the beginning of the Kaliyuga from four different sources:

1. Vedanga Jyotisha—1173 B.C.
2. Gargacharya—a few years prior to 1165 B.C.
3. Classical historians—851 years before Alexander's stay in India, viz. 1177-76 B.C.
4. which is confirmed by the Malabar Kollam Andu commencing in August/September 1176 B.C.

Aiyer concluded that the Kaliyuga began with the winter solstice immediately preceding the commencement of the Kollam Andu, or at the end of 1177 B.C. The Mahabharata War, he proposes, was fought a few years before the beginning of the Kaliyuga.

According to the *Mahaprasthanika Parva* and the *Vishnu Purana*, the Kali age would not affect the earth so long as it was touched by Sri Krishna's holy feet. When the Pandavas abdicated, Parikshit must have been about 16 years old (the age of majority according to Hindu lawyers). If Kali began in 1177 B.C., Parikshit would have probably been born in 1193 B.C. and the War should have occurred towards the end of 1194 B.C.

Again, the *Mausala Parva* says that the Yadava race was destroyed 36 years after the War and the Pandavas left soon thereafter at the beginning of the Kaliyuga. On the other hand, the *Bhagavatayana Parva* states that Kali began at the time of the War itself. The *Ashramavasika Parva* states that when 15 years had expired after the War, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti left for the forest. In the 16th year after the War, the Pandavas visited them along with Uttara who had recently become a mother and had her child in her lap. Now, Parikshit was in the womb during the War (*Sauptika Parva*), hence he could not be an infant in the 16th year after the War. Therefore, this statement in the *Ashramavasika* is incorrect. Rather, in the 16th year after the War the Pandavas started not on a visit to the old people, but on their last journey. There is no mention of Parikshit's marriage, which would have occurred later. If Parikshit were really 36 years of age when the Pandavas left, why should he be placed under the tutelage of Kripacharya as stated in *Mausala Parva*? It would be more consistent if Parikshit was about 16 when he was crowned, and the War took place 16 years

before the beginning of the Kaliyuga. This conclusion is supported by other evidence.

Kalhana Pandit's *Rajatarangini*, the well-known history of Kashmir written in 1148 A.D., is the only indigenous work in India that can pass for history. Verses 48-49 of the first Taranga state:

Misled by the tradition that the Bharata war took place at the end of the Dwapara, some have considered as wrong the sum of years (contained in the statement that) in the Kaliyuga the kings beginning with Gonanda I (and ending with Andha Yudhishtira) ruled of the Kasmiras for 2268 years.

This Gonanda I was, says Kalhana, the contemporary of the Pandavas. The 52nd in descent from him was Abhimanyu, son of Kanishka, whose successor Gonanda III was the first of a new dynasty "which came to power 2330 years before Kalhana's time" (1st Taranga, verses 52 and 49). In the *Rajatarangini* the total for the reigns from the end of Andha Yudhishtira—the last of Gonanda III's dynasty—to Kalhana's own time is 1329 years, 3 months, 28 days, say roughly 1330 years. Kalhana would have presumed that the interval between the end of Abhimanyu's reign and that of Andha Yudhishtira was 2330-1330 = 1000 years.

Clearly, in Kalhana's time it was believed that 2268 years had elapsed from the time of Pandava Yudhishtira to that of Andha Yudhishtira. Hence, Kalhana gives 2268-1000 or 1268 years for the reigns of the first 52 kings from Gonanda I to Abhimanyu and 1000 years for the 21 kings of the dynasty of Gonanda III. This was the "tradition" Kalhana refers to in the excerpt above. The latter portion may well be a later addition because Kalhana himself says it is "thought" that the 52 kings down to Abhimanyu reigned in all "for 1266 years" (verse 54, Taranga I—obviously an error for 1268 years).

However, Kalhana accepts only part of the old "tradition", namely that 2268 years elapsed from the time of Pandava Yudhishtira to that of Andha Yudhishtira. He does not accept the part that Pandava Yudhishtira lived at the end of the Dwapara Yuga because in Kalhana's time, as now, the Dwapara was supposed to have ended and the Kali to have begun in 3102 B.C. Kalhana relied on Garga's verse (quoted in Varahamihira's *Brihatsamhita*, XIII. 3-4) which he erroneously interpreted as meaning that Yudhishtira commenced to reign 2526 years before the era of Salivahana, in 2428 B.C. As Abhimanyu lived 1268 years after Pandava Yudhishtira, Kalhana placed him in 2448-1268 = 1180 B.C. Since Kanishka and his successor Abhimanyu lived in the 1st century after Christ, the false figures given by Kalhana for Abhimanyu and all the subsequent kings down to the 6th century A.D. can be traced to his mistaken interpretation of Garga's verse.

Almost all Sanskrit scholars agree that Kanishka lived in the 1st century A.D., though Cunningham thought that the Vikrama era from 57 B.C. began with Kanishka, and the Saka era beginning on 3rd March 78 A.D. dates from him. Coins show that

Kanishka reigned down to 40 A.D. Irrespective of whether the era of Salivahana dates from Kanishka, clearly Abhimanyu must have been reigning about the commencement of this era in 78 A.D. If so, Yudhishtira, who lived 1268 years earlier, must have begun to reign about $1268 - 78 = 1190$ B.C. Since his coronation took place soon after the War, it must also have been fought around 1190 B.C.

Aryabhata—whose fame spread to Arabia as Arjabahr and Constantinople's vast empire as Andubarius or Ardubarius—was born in 476 A.D. and the first to promulgate the theory that the earth revolved round the sun, calculate the circumference of the earth and explain the eclipses. According to him, "the line of the Saptarshis intersected the middle of Magha Nakshatra in the year of Kaliyuga 1910", i.e. 1192 B.C. According to the *Vishnu Purana*, the Saptarshis were in that very same position at the birth of Parikshit who was, therefore, born about 1192 B.C. Since the War occurred at the most a few months earlier than his birth, it might have taken place about 1193 B.C.

The same result is arrived at if we consider the number of kings who occupied the throne of Magadha from the time of the War to the accession of Chandragupta. According to the *Vishnu Purana*—which is mostly agreed to by the other Puranas—the 9 Nandas reigned for 100 years; the 10 Saisunagas of the next previous dynasty for 362 years; the 5 kings of the still previous Pradyota dynasty for 138 years succeeding the famous Barhadhratha dynasty whose 22 kings sat on the throne since the date of the War. Thus, we get 100 years for the Nanda and 500 years for the 2 previous dynasties. Very probably the same number was reported to Megasthenes. However, what strikes one most is the large average for each reign. The same *Vishnu Purana* gives 137 years for the 10 kings of the later Maurya dynasty, 112 years for the 10 kings of the Sunga dynasty and 45 years for the 4 kings of the Kanwa line, i.e. an average of about 12 years against 28 for the Pradyota dynasty and 36 for the Saisunaga! For the Nandas, it is scarcely probable that a father and his sons could have reigned for 100 years, especially when the last sons did not die naturally but were extirpated by Chandragupta with the help of Chanakya. The Puranas may have left out insignificant reigns, or these ancient kings may have been longer-lived than those of the post-Chandragupta period, but even then the averages are too large. It would be unsafe to deduce therefrom the probable date of the War.

In England, from the Norman invasion to the 20th century, 35 monarchs had ruled for 835 years, the average being about 23 years. From Hugh Capet to the execution of Louis XVI, France was ruled by 33 kings for $1793 - 987 = 806$ years, yielding an average of about 24 years. 8 kings ruled Prussia from Ivan III with an average of 23 years. In Russia 22 monarchs up to the last Emperor Nicholas II for $1894 - 1462 = 432$ years giving an average of about 19 years. In Japan, the present Emperor Musu Hito is the 123rd, his ancestor Jimmu Tenno having established the dynasty lasting unbroken for 2500 years, which gives an average of 21 years for this long-lived dynasty. Thus, the averages for each of the 5 foremost powers of our hemisphere are 23 for England,

24 for France, 23 for Germany, 19 for Russia and 21 for Japan. The average of these, about 22 years, may be taken as the probable duration of each reign of the pre-Chandragupta dynasties. There were 22 Barhadrathas, 5 Pradyotas and 10 Saisunagas = 37 in all from the time of the War to the Nandas, and they might therefore have reigned for $37 \times 22 = 814$ years.

Moreover, according to the Buddhist *Mahavamsa*, composed by Mahanama around 460 A.D., Mahapadma Nanda, called Kalasoka in the chronicle, reigned for 20 years and had 10 sons who conjointly ruled for 22 years. Then there were 9 brothers who reigned for 22 years. Thus, the Nandas reigned in all for $20+22+22 = 64$ years, a figure more likely to be correct than the Puranic round figure of 100 years. Thus, the War must have happened about $814+64 = 878$ years before Chandragupta, at $878+315 = 1193$ B.C.

Against our reckoning of 814 years between the War and Mahapadma Nanda's accession, the *Vishnu Purana* (IV.24) gives 1015 years. This seems based on supposing a round period of 100 years from the start of the Kaliyuga to the time of Nanda's accession and presuming that the Kali began 15 years after the War. If so, the genuineness of an interval of a round period of 1000 years between the beginning of the Kali and the coronation of Nanda is suspect. The Purana period of 1015 years for the 37 kings between the War and the coronation of Nanda yields an improbable average of over 27 years. The author of the *Vishnu Purana* deals vaguely in round figures, giving 100 for the Nandas, 500 for the Pradyotas and Saisunagas and 1000 years (IV.23) for the Barhadrathas, the last figure directly conflicting with the statement about 1015 years intervening between the War and the end of the Saisunaga dynasty.

This Purana also states that the Saptarshis, which are supposed to move at the pace of one Nakshatra for every 100 years (IV.24) had moved 10 Nakshatras from Magha to Purvashada during this interval, which therefore comes to $10 \times 100 = 1000$ years. Obviously, this supposed movement was arrived at by the author not by actual observation, for such a movement is astronomically impossible, but by his deducing it from the other statement in the preceding verse that 1015 years had elapsed during this interval. The author seems *first* to have had in mind that the Kali began 15 years after the War and that 1000 years elapsed from the beginning of the Kali era to the accession of Nanda, and *then* to have deduced therefrom the proposition that the Saptarshis which were in Magha at the time of the War had moved on to Purvashada at the coronation of Mahapadma Nanda.

In Chapter XIII of the *Brihatsamhita*, Varahamihira, born in 505 A.D., deals with the Saptarshi cycles and quotes Vriddha Garga: "When king Yudhishtira ruled the earth, the seven seers were in Magha; the Saka era is 2526 years after the commencement of his reign." The translator, Dr. Hultzsch (*Indian Antiquary* VIII, p. 66) comments, "The coronation of Yudhishtira took place 2526 years before the commencement of the Saka era, or at the expiration of the Kaliyuga-Samvat 653 and in B.C. 2448." This agrees with Kalhana in thinking that the Yudhishtira era is

different from the Kali era.

On the other hand, *Jyotirvidabharana*, an astronomical work attributed to Kalidasa, but which scholars place in the 16th century A.D., states that in the Kaliyuga six different eras will flourish one after another: the Yudhishtira to last 3044 years from the beginning of Kali; the Vikrama to last for 135 years afterwards; the Salivahana for 1800 years thereafter; and the Vijaya, Nagarjuna and Bali eras to be current in the rest of the Kaliyuga. The three last are fictitious. This shows that Hindus have all along thought that the Yudhishtira era commenced with the Kali. So also Aryabhata computes by the era of Yudhishtira, which corresponds to the Kaliyuga. Therefore, it is not possible to concur with Kalhana and Dr. Hultzsch in placing the beginning of the Yudhishtira era “at the expiration of the Kaliyuga-samvat 653 and in B.C. 2448.”

What does “Sakakala” really mean? It has been proved that Garga, the author of the shloka, lived about 165 B.C. Even granting Dr. Kern’s contention that Garga lived in the 1st century B.C., it is not possible that Garga could have meant by “Sakakala” either the Vikramasamvat, which began later in 57 B.C., or the Salivahana Sakabda, which commenced still later in 78 A.D. It has not yet been proved that the Vikramasamvat era had been in use ever since 57 B.C. Fergusson, Max Müller and Weber opine otherwise. Besides the Kali or the Saptarshi era, there was in the days of Garga only one other prominent era in existence, namely, the era of Nirvana, “which,” says Fergusson (in *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, p. 46), “was the only one that had existed previously in India.” The era of Mahavira beginning in 527 B.C. might have been then in existence, but the Jain religion was only confined comparatively to a few and its era was not much in evidence before the public. The era of Buddha’s Nirvana was, on the other hand, very widely known (being the State Religion during Asoka’s time). A Tibetan work records a schism having occurred under a “Thera Nagasena” 137 years after the Nirvana. Chandragupta is recorded to have ascended the throne 162 years after the Nirvana; the inauguration of Asoka is stated to have taken place 218 years after the Nirvana; and the *Dipavamso*, a history of Ceylon written in Pali verse about the 4th century A.D., makes use of the era of Nirvana in its computations. Therefore, the era of Buddha’s Nirvana, which was in current use in the time of Garga, might have been probably referred to by him.

Gautama Buddha was known by the name of “Sakya Muni” and his paternal grandfather was also known by the name of “Sakya”. The race to which Gautama belonged was often called by the name of Sakyas. R. C. Dutta says, “A little to the east of the Kosala kingdom, two kindred clans, the Sakyas and the Koliyans, lived on the opposite banks of the small stream Rohini...Kapilavastu was the capital of the Sakyas.” The followers of Gautama Buddha were often spoken of as “Sakyaputriya Sramanas” in contradistinction possibly to the Sramanas of other sects. We may therefore infer that the era of Gautama Buddha was probably known as “Sakya Kala” in those times. The era could not have been called “Nirvana Kala” as the term might equally apply to the Nirvana of Mahavira.

The shloka is written in the usual Arya metre. Similarly, the first 2 shlokas of the chapter are in faultless rhythm, but the third shloka under discussion satisfies the rhythmic requirements in only the first three quarters. The last quarter, *shakakalastasya...* is short by one “matra”. It is inexplicable how Kalhana and other scholars could overlook such a glaring slip. As the *Rajatarangini* also makes this mistake, we may infer that the error might have been in existence from a very long time. The only way of correcting the error is by insertion of the letter “Y” which has been somehow omitted, between the letter “K” and “A” in the word “Saka”, correcting “Sakakala” to “Sakyakala” which makes the shloka perfect and then we have the best of reasons to suppose that Garga refers to the era of Nirvana, the epoch of the Sakyas, or of the Sakya prince Gautama, or of the Buddha called Sakya Muni. Some early copyist, better acquainted with “Sakakala” than with “Sakyakala” changed the latter into the former, which he might have thought to be the correcter form. Even without such a correction, “Sakakala” may be considered a corruption of “Sakyakala”. Thus, in any case, the era of Buddha’s Nirvana is the one most undoubtedly referred to.

The expression *shadadvikapancadvi* means “twenty-six times twenty-five” or 650 and not “six two five two” denoting 2526 as Dr. Hultzsch interprets. The termination “ka” denotes “so many times”, and is not an expletive that a precise mathematician like Garga may be expected to use unnecessarily. Garga computed here by the Saptarshi cycle, which denoted the lapse of every 100 years by a new Nakshatra and gave 25 years for each Nakshatrapada, into four of which a Nakshatra was then usually divided. If the Saptarshis had moved $6\frac{1}{2}$ Nakshatras from the time of Yudhishtira’s coronation to the Nirvana of Buddha, that would be more appropriately expressed as the movement of the Rishis through 26 padas and the period denoted thereby would be put down as twenty-six times twenty-five years.

Though Max Müller offers very fair reasons for fixing the date of the Nirvana in 477 B.C., yet as Bigandet points out in his life of Buddha, both the chronicles of Ceylon and Further India unanimously agree that Buddha attained the final Nirvana at the age of 80 in 543 B.C. The *Dipavamsa* computes by the era of Nirvana beginning in 544-43 B.C. Burma, Siam and Ceylon are all unanimous in giving this date and such widespread unanimity of opinion cannot be expected unless the era of 544-43 B.C. had existed from a very long time.

Garga’s statement now indicates to us that the coronation of Yudhishtira, and therefore the Mahabharata War, took place in the year 544 or $543 + 650 = 1194-93$ B.C.

Almost in all parts of India the Brihaspati 60-year cycle prevails from a very long time. In commenting on *Taittiriya Brahmana*, I.4.10, Sayana says that this cycle comprised 12 of the ancient 5 cycles, which are so often referred to in the Vedic works and in the *Vedanga Jyotisha*. The sun and the moon take about 5 years to return to the same position at the beginning of a year, which gave rise to the cycle of the 5 years known as Samvatsara, Parivatsara, Idavatsara, Anuvatsara and Idvatsara

respectively. As Brihaspati makes a complete circuit of the heavens in about 12 years, all the 3 heavenly bodies were expected to return to the same celestial region on the expiry of every 60 years. Because of a correcter knowledge of Brihaspati's motions, Northern India has been expunging 1 year of the cycle in every 85-and-65/211 years so that after one such period the name of the next year is left out and the name of the one following the next year is taken to be the next year's name. As no such practice prevails in Southern India, the current year (April 1901 to April 1902) which is the year "Pramadicha" in the North, is the year "Plava" in the South.

When the names were invented, the year of the Mahabharata War, the only famous epoch in the history of Ancient India, was named "Prabhava", the name of the 1st year of the cycle. But the dates given by the orthodox for the War or for the beginning of the Kaliyuga do not correspond to the 1st year of the cycle. But, if we adopt the date given by Garga for the epoch of Yudhishtira, i.e. 1194-93 B.C., we find that the corresponding year of the Brihaspati cycle for that date is "Prabhava", the name of its very 1st year.

We have suggested that the Kaliyuga began at the winter solstice of 1177 B.C. We have also seen that, barring the argument based on *Rajatarangini*, which gives us about 1190 B.C. for the War, our other lines of discussion point to 1194-93 B.C. as the probable date of the War. This date is further confirmed by the application of the principles of the *Vedanga Jyotisha* to certain statements contained in the *Mahabharata* itself. We may here observe that these statements are not to be explained by the astronomical calculations of modern times, for these were unknown in the days of the War, but rather by the calculations of the *Vedanga Jyotisha*, which, though cruder, are better applicable to them, inasmuch as it is the oldest Hindu astronomical treatise known to us and its astronomical details, as we have seen, relate to the beginning of the Kaliyuga.

In the *Swargarohanika Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, we are told that Yudhishtira having observed "that the sun ceasing to go southwards had begun to proceed in his northward course" set out to where Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows. After telling Yudhishtira that the winter solstice had set in, Bhishma said, "Yudhishtira, the lunar month of Magha has come. This is again the lighted fortnight and a fourth part of it ought by this time to be over." Whatever historical weight may be attached to these statements, they may be at least taken to mean that the winter solstice then occurred on the expiry of the fourth part of the bright fortnight in the month of Magha, that is, on the fourth or the fifth day after new moon. Nilakantha, the commentator, thinks that the expression *tribhagashesha pakshah* denotes 'Magha Sukla Panchami' or the fifth lunar day in the month of Magha after Amavasya, the new moon.

As according to the *Vedanga* the winter solstice always occurred with the sun in Dhanishtha, the Amavasya referred to by the *Mahabharata* must have occurred with the sun and the moon in Sravana Nakshatra; and as the winter solstice occurred on the fifth day after this, the moon must have been, on the solstitial day, in or near Revati

Nakshatra. According to the *Jyotisha*, this position could have occurred only at the beginning of the fourth year of a five-year cycle, for it was then that the moon was in Aswayuja, next to Revati Nakshatra. The difference of this one Nakshatra is due to the imperfections of the elements of the *Jyotisha*. Thus we may infer that the winter solstice following the Mahabharata War, and just preceding Bhishma's death, was the fourth of the five winter solstices of a five-year cycle. The particular five-year cycle in which the Mahabharata War took place appears to have been the fourth cycle previous to the beginning of the Kaliyuga in 1177 inasmuch as we have found that the *Rajatarangini* points to 1190 B.C., and that all other lines of discussion lead to 1194-93 B.C. as the probable date of the War. Consequently, the winter solstice shortly following the War was the fourth of the fourth five-year cycle preceding the commencement of the Kaliyuga, which began, like the five-year cycle, with a winter solstice and with the sun and the moon in Dhanishtha Nakshatra. In other words, the Mahabharata War took place a little before the seventeenth winter solstice preceding the commencement of the Kaliyuga or towards the end of 1194 B.C.

(To be concluded)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

This European mind finds Rama and Sita uninteresting and unreal, because they are too virtuous, too ideal, too white in colour; but to the Indian mind even apart from all religious sentiment they are figures of an absorbing reality which appeal to the inmost fibres of our being. A European scholar criticising the Mahabharata finds the strong and violent Bhima the only real character in that great poem; the Indian mind on the contrary finds greater character and a more moving interest in the calm and collected heroism of Arjuna, in the fine ethical temperament of Yudhisthira, in the divine charioteer of Kurukshetra who works not for his own hand but for the founding of the kingdom of right and justice. Those vehement or self-asserting characters or those driven by the storm of their passions which make the chief interest of European epic and drama, would either be relegated by it to the second plan or else, if set in large proportions, so brought in in order to bring into relief the greatness of the higher type of personality, as Ravana contrasts with and sets off Rama. The admiration of the one kind of mentality in the aesthetics of life goes to the coloured, that of the other to the luminous personality. Or, to put it in the form of the distinction made by the Indian mind itself, the interest of the one centres more in the rajasic, that of the other in the sattwic will and character.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 253)

Book Extract

TWO POEMS OF SRI AUROBINDO

In the context of the Hitler Phenomenon

JUDGING from the this-side of existence, Sri Aurobindo could perhaps be seen in the first place as a poet, if poetry is understood in its original sense as an activity of the levels above the mind with the power to discover, to 'see', to act and to create. Words have power; being the seer who is inspired with the words of power and able to formulate them is to be a revealer of truth. "To us [people of the contemporary world] poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy", wrote Sri Aurobindo, "imagination a plaything and caterer for our amusement, our entertainer, the nautch-girl of the mind. But to the men of old the poet was a seer, a revealer of hidden truths, imagination no dancing courtesan but a priestess in God's house commissioned not to spin fictions but to image difficult and hidden truths; even the metaphor or simile in the Vedic style is used with a serious purpose and expected to convey a reality, not to suggest a pleasing artifice of thought. The image was to these seers a revelative symbol of the unrevealed and it was used because it could hint luminously to the mind what the precise intellectual word, apt only for logical or practical thought or to express the physical and the superficial, could not at all hope to manifest."¹

Sri Aurobindo was one of the great poets of the twentieth century and its greatest spiritual poet. He stood aside from and above the poetic trends, although he was fully aware of them and kept himself informed about their developments even in his apparent seclusion. He greatly appreciated Mallarmé, Yeats, Whitman and Eliot, among others. But in him the poets of ancient Greece and Rome had also remained alive, as well as the 'hearers' of the Vedas and the Upanishads and the classical Sanskrit poetry, and what he sought for was the adequate, irreplaceable form, without any concession whatever.

Sri Aurobindo's major opus *in poetics* was *Savitri*, his epic of nearly 24,000 lines on which he worked from his years in Baroda till a few days before his passing. From a story in the *Mahabharata* it grew into the creation of a poetical universe. "I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level", confided Sri Aurobindo to Nirodbaran. The epic was revised eleven or twelve times, a labour which resembles metaphorically the multi-layered city of Troy. "*Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative."²

Raymond Piper, professor at the University of Syracuse (USA), has rated *Savitri* as follows: "During a period of fifty years... [Sri Aurobindo] created what is probably

the greatest epic in the English language... I venture the judgment that it is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of Supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence and meta-physical brilliance."³

Yet, in Sri Aurobindo's poetry one finds not only the sublime. His attention, like his yoga, covered all aspects of human existence, and this open, all-embracing attitude is reflected in his poetry by concrete and scientific statements, epigrams, the lyrical mood, humour, satire, rhythmical innovations, autobiographical facts, historical and mythological interpretations.

‘The Dwarf Napoleon’

Sri Aurobindo wrote two poems about Hitler and Nazism; both poems are reproduced *in extenso* below. The first, called ‘The Dwarf Napoleon—Hitler, October 1939’, is written in a polemical, scathing vein; it is an *ad hominem* attack on Adolf Hitler shortly after his invasion of Poland. The poetic quality of these lines is of secondary importance. The writing of ‘The Dwarf Napoleon’ was much more a yogic act, an act of yogic magic, to counter the aggression of a dictator who had already annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia and was therefore, now that Poland's turn had come, frequently compared with Napoleon. Sri Aurobindo has often stressed the importance of standing up against a spreading negative force, and in this case he doubtlessly wanted to inform the Asuric Power behind Hitler that the spiritual opposition had taken note.

Behold, by Maya's fantasy of will
A violent miracle takes sudden birth,
The real grows one with the incredible.
In the control of her magician wand
The small achieves things great, the base things grand.⁴

‘Maya’ is often understood to be Illusion. However, Maya is essentially the manifesting power of the Divine, in other words the supreme feminine principle or Universal Mother. She is ‘Shakti’, the inherent power of the Divine, or ‘Prakriti’, Nature as opposed to the Spirit. It should always be kept in mind that, in spite of the dualities for the working out of the Divine self-manifestation, the Spirit and its Shakti are inherently one and the same. She is He; He is She; both are the One.

In *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, his two books most relevant to our story, Sri Aurobindo often uses the word ‘Nature’ for what in this poem he calls ‘Maya’. He writes for instance: “...there is nothing that can be set down as impossible in the chances of the future, and the urge in Nature always creates its own means.”⁵

Our universe is the work of Nature, and so is its own evolution, 'moving with difficulty upward from Matter to Spirit'. The primal condition, responsible for the fact that this is an evolutionary universe, is the work of Nature, for so is the manifestation of the great negative beings, called 'asuras', and the great positive beings, called 'gods'. And all is the work of the One, for nothing can exist without That.

"When we speak indeed of the errors of Nature, we use a figure illegitimately borrowed from our human psychology and experience; for *in Nature there are no errors* but only the deliberate measure of her paces traced and retraced in a prefigured rhythm, of which each step has a meaning and its place in the action and reaction of her gradual advance... For Nature tired of the obstinate immobility of an age-long resistance seems to care little how many beautiful and valuable things are destroyed so long as her main end is accomplished: but we may be sure that if destruction is done, it is because for that end the destruction was indispensable."⁶

This puny creature would bestride the earth
 Even as the immense colossus of the past.
 Napoleon's mind was swift and bold and vast,
 His heart was calm and stormy like the sea,
 His will dynamic in its grip and clasp.
 His eye could hold a world within its grasp
 And see the great and small things sovereignly.
 A movement of enormous depth and scope
 He seized and gave cohesion to its hope.

It is now usually forgotten how often Adolf Hitler, at the zenith of his glory, was favourably compared with Napoleon Bonaparte. The annexation of Austria, the cutting up of Czechoslovakia, the invasion of Poland, and the invasion of France—all these were occasions of praising Hitler to the skies and calling him the greatest genius, military strategist and conqueror in history. This spontaneous appreciation of their Führer by the people of Naziland will continue till the first serious setback in Russia, when Goebbels' propaganda machine will need to carry it on.

Hitler had been the first to compare himself with the French Emperor. "What Napoleon did not accomplish, I will succeed in doing", he boasted to Rauschnig in the 1930s.⁷ "Hitler saw himself in a certain traditional line with the Corsican", writes Reuth.⁸ Toland and Maser, in their biographies of Hitler, work out the parallels between the Führer and the Emperor. John Lukacs writes: "The parallels—or more precise, the similarities—between Napoleon's and Hitler's careers (their careers rather than their lives), should be apparent even to the general readers who do not possess detailed historical knowledge... but the differences are still more substantial."⁹

Thomas Mann saw Napoleon as the man who had to secure the ideals of the Enlightenment as formulated by the French revolutionaries, and who had to divulge

these ideals everywhere in Europe.¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo was very strongly of the same opinion. “If [Napoleon] had not risen at the time, the [reactionary] European powers would have crushed French democracy. What he did was to stabilise the French Revolution so that the world got the idea of democracy. Otherwise it would have been delayed by two or three centuries.” Napoleon gave not only glory to France, “he gave peace and order, stable government and security to France. He was not only one of the greatest conquerors but also one of the greatest administrators and organisers the world has seen... The only trouble was that he was not bold enough. If he had pushed on with the idea of unification of all Europe, which he had at the back of his mind, then the present Spanish struggle [the Spanish Civil War] would not have been necessary. Italy would have been united much earlier and Germany would have been more civilised. If instead of proclaiming himself Emperor he had remained the First Consul, he would have met with better success.”¹¹

Hitler “can’t stand any comparison with Napoleon”, said Sri Aurobindo. “Hitler is a man of one idea... while Napoleon had many sides: he was not only a military general, but also an administrator, organiser, legislator and many other things. It was he who organised France and Europe, stabilised the French Revolution. Besides being a legislator he established the bases of social laws, administration and finance which are followed even today. He is not only the greatest military genius in history but one of the greatest men, with manifold capacities. Hitler is a man of one idea, with no intellect, which he applies with strong force and violence; he has no control over his emotions. He hesitates in his policies which some call cautiousness. And all his power comes from the Asura by whom he is possessed and guided while Napoleon was a normal being acting through the power of his brain which reached the highest development possible in a human being.”¹²

Far other this creature of a nether clay,
 Void of all grandeur, like a gnome at play,
 Iron and mud his nature’s mingled stuff,
 A little limited visionary brain
 Cunning and skilful in its narrow vein,
 A sentimental egoist poor and rough,
 Whose heart was never sweet and fresh and young,
 A headlong spirit driven by hopes and fears,
 Intense neurotic with his shouts and tears,
 Violent and cruel, devil, child and brute...

Adolf Hitler was a ‘solipsist’. The dictionaries define ‘solipsism’ as “the theory that the only thing you can be certain about is your own existence and your own thoughts and ideas” or “the extreme form of skepticism which denies the possibility of any knowledge other than of one’s own existence”. In other words: the solipsist is

the sole protagonist in his own play of life and the world which he experiences is his stage. In psychology this is also called ‘narcissism’. Hitler’s biographer Reuth affirms that he was ‘an egomaniacal loner’, and Kershaw that he was ‘a narcissistic egomaniac’, suffering of ‘an egomania of monumental proportions’. “He simply could not bear not to dominate any situation in which he found himself”, Hanfstängl concurs.¹³

Examples of this attitude abound in Hitler’s life.

[. . .]

Towards the end Hitler-the-solipsist was moving for months depleted or non-existing armies across his maps, sending ‘with swiping gestures’ thousands to a meaningless death.

[. . .]

“Hitler”, said Sri Aurobindo, “has cruelty in his blood.”¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo found in January 1939 that Hitler was “becoming more and more criminal and going down very fast.”¹⁵ It was at this time that he decided upon ‘the final solution’ concerning the Jews, indirectly announcing this decision in his notorious Reichstag speech on 30 January. After coming to power he had exclaimed: “We are ruthless! I have no bourgeois scruples! They think I am uncultured, a barbarian. Yes, we are barbarians! We want to be. This is an honourable epithet.”¹⁶ Heartless, fearsome and cruel is how he wanted his youth to be.

[. . .]

This screaming orator with his strident tongue,
The prophet of a scanty fixed idea,
Plays now the leader of our human march;
His might shall build the future’s triumph arch.

These perceptions of Sri Aurobindo—it bears repetition—are dated October 1939, a time when the world held its breath but Hitler’s intentions were as yet far from clear. Germany and Russia were still partners under their non-aggression pact; Mussolini had not yet taken his decisive step into Hitler’s camp, staging many shows of ‘everlasting’ friendship with the Third Reich but also often making denigrating remarks about the Germans and their Führer, who to him was something like an epigone; and Japan seemed fully tied down in East Asia.

Now is the world for his eating a ripe fruit.
His shadow falls from London to Korea.
Cities and nations crumble in his course.
A terror holds the peoples in its grip:
World-destiny waits upon that foaming lip.

Sri Aurobindo never had any doubts about the scope of Hitler's plans. "Hitlerism is the greatest menace the world has ever met", he said; and "the destiny of the world depends on one man..." "His aim is clearly a world-empire." Or rather it was the Asura who "aims at world-domination. It is the descent of the Asuric world upon the human to establish its own power on the earth."¹⁷

A Titan Power supports this pigmy man,
 The crude dwarf instrument of a mighty Force.
 Hater of the free spirit's joy and light,
 Made only of strength and skill and giant might,
 A Will to trample humanity into clay
 And unify earth beneath one iron sway,
 Insists upon its fierce enormous plan.
 Trampling man's mind and will into one mould
 Docile and facile in a dreadful hold,
 It cries its demon slogans to the crowd...

The outcome of the apocalyptic drama, of which the prologue was being performed with the moustached 'strident' puppet in the centre of the spotlights, was nothing less than the destiny of humanity:

But if its tenebrous empire were allowed,
 Its mastery would prepare the dismal hour
 When the Inconscient shall regain its right,
 And man who emerged as Nature's conscious power,
 Shall sink into the deep original night
 Sharing like all her forms that went before
 The doom of the mammoth and the dinosaur.

Sri Aurobindo knew how the possession had come about and where Hitler's 'inspirations' came to him:

It is the shadow of the Titan's robe
 That looms across the panic stricken globe.
 In his high villa on the fatal hill
 Alone he listens to that sovereign Voice,
 Dictator of his action's sudden choice,
 The tiger leap of a demoniac skill.

However, those who feel inflated or aggrandised by being the instrument of a black power, and delight in being taken beyond their limits, often forget that they will

have to pay the price. Not only are they selling their soul to the devil, as the saying goes, they usually also suffer in their body:

Too small and human for that dreadful Guest,
An energy his body cannot invest,—
A tortured channel, not a happy vessel,
Drives him to think and act and cry and wrestle.

We know now about the ‘crises of possession’ Hitler was subject to, but he was also going down physically from 1937 onwards, according to Werner Maser.¹⁸

[. . .]

Things became worse towards the end. “Physically [Hitler] represented a dreadful sight. He dragged himself about painfully and clumsily, throwing his torso forward and dragging his legs after him from his living room to the conference room of the bunker. He had lost his sense of balance; if he were detained on the brief walk (twenty to thirty metres), he had to sit down on one of the benches that had been placed along either wall for this purpose, . . .”¹⁹ The last documentary films, eg. the one taken when he pinned an Iron Cross on the chest of a few child heroes of the Hitler Youth, show how much his left hand was shaking, as was his leg when he sat down.

His fits of madness increased. He pronounced offhand one death sentence after the other, . . . And sometimes, as his Chief of Staff tells it: “Cheeks flushed with rage, with raised fists, he stood before me with his whole body shaking, beside himself with fury and altogether out of control. After each eruption of wrath Hitler paced back and forth on the edge of the rug, then paused right in front of me and hurled the next reproach at me. He choked up with shouting; his eyes bulged from their sockets and the veins in his temples swelled.” Yet, as we know, “he still preserved something of his magnetic powers”.²⁰ “A nation in which there is even one righteous man will not perish”, he said during those last days, and Speer comments: “There was no doubt that he regarded himself as this one righteous man.”²¹

In 1939, though, the dream of the Third Reich and German domination of the world was still alive—indeed it had never been more alive than then:

Thus driven he must stride on conquering all,
Threatening and clamouring, brutal, invincible,
Perhaps to meet upon his storm-swept road
A greater devil—or thunderstroke of God.

* * *

‘The Children of Wotan’

In the part of the globe which one may roughly call ‘the West’, the Christian Era and its civilisation were breaking up, and the West had become, since the Renaissance, a world in transition. “As the Christian view of the world loses its authority, the more menacingly will the ‘blond beast’ be heard prowling about in its underground prison, ready at any moment to burst out with devastating consequences”, wrote C. G. Jung. “The memories of the old German religion have not been extinguished ... We are always convinced that the modern world is a reasonable world, basing our opinions on economic, political and psychological factors. But if we may forget for a moment that we are living in the Year of Our Lord 1936 [the year in which these words were written]... we will find Wotan quite suitable as a causal hypothesis. In fact I venture the heretical suggestion that the unfathomable depths of Wotan’s character explain more of National Socialism than all reasonable factors put together.”²²

In an earlier chapter of our story we have heard about Wotan, the one-eyed God with the green hat who rides at the head of his wild hunters, and who possesses the berserkers with his force and invulnerability. Nazism took pride in this revival of the ruthless Germanic warrior spirit. The Hitler Youth sang; “If all the world lies in ruins,/ What the devil do we care?/ We will go on marching,/ For today Germany belongs to us,/ And tomorrow the world.” And the SS-magazine *Das Schwarze Korps* saw, in 1940, the burning English cities as gigantic bonfires to celebrate the summer solstice; for it was the god Thor whose lightning (the exploding bombs) was taking revenge on Germany’s enemies.²³

This elementary force line in Hitler and Nazism has been sufficiently dealt with in our story to interpret Sri Aurobindo’s poem: ‘The Children of Wotan (1940)’. The date, part of the title, is relevant because at that time the further complexities and the outcome of the war still lay in an uncertain future and the destiny of humanity hung in the balance. It makes this forceful poem, written at that critical juncture of history by an Indian spiritual master, all the more pregnant.

“Where is the end of your armoured march, O children of Wotan?
Earth shudders with fear at your tread, the death-flame laughs in your eyes.”
“We have seen the sign of Thor and the hammer of new creation,
A seed of blood on the soil, a flower of blood in the skies.
We march to make of earth a hell and call it heaven.
The heart of mankind we have smitten with the whip of the sorrows seven;
The Mother of God lies bleeding in our black and gold sunrise.”

“I hear the cry of a broken world, O children of Wotan.”
“Question the volcano when it burns, chide the fire and bitumen!
Suffering is the food of our strength and torture the bliss of our entrails.

We are pitiless, mighty and glad, the gods fear our laughter inhuman.
 Our hearts are heroic and hard; we wear the belt of Orion:
 Our will has the edge of the thunderbolt, our acts the claws of the lion.
 We rejoice in the pain we create as a man in the kiss of a woman.”

“Have you seen your fate in the scales of God, O children of Wotan,
 And the tail of the Dragon lashing the foam in far-off seas?”
 “We mock at God, we have silenced the mutter of priests at his altar.
 Our leader is master of Fate, medium of her mysteries.
 We have made the mind a cipher, we have strangled Thought with a cord;
 Dead now are pity and honour, strength only is Nature’s lord.
 We build a new world-order; our bombs shout Wotan’s peace.

“We are the javelins of Destiny, we are the children of Wotan,
 We are the human Titans, the supermen dreamed by the sage.
 A cross of the beast and demoniac with the godhead of power and will,
 We are born in humanity’s sunset, to the Night is our pilgrimage.
 On the bodies of perishing nations, mid the cry of the cataclysm coming,
 To a presto of bomb and shell and the aeroplanes’ fatal humming,
 We march, lit by Truth’s death-pyre, to the world’s satanic age.”²⁴

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

(With acknowledgement to the author for this extract from his book *Hitler and his God*, pp. 598-612, 624-626, published 2006 by Rupa and Co., New Delhi.)

Notes and References

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18. See the chapter “Der kranke Führer, Reichskanzler...” in Werner Maser: *Adolf Hitler—Legende, Mythos, Wirklichkeit*.

19. Joachim Fest: *Der Untergang*, pp. 34-35.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 728, 729.

21. Albert Speer: *Spandau—The Secret Diaries*, p. 19.

22. Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh: *Secret Germany*, p. 226.

23. Rüdiger Sünner: *Schwarze Sonne*, p. 85.

24. Sri Aurobindo: *Collected Poems*, p. 112.

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Winston Churchill

LEAFING THROUGH AWARENESS THROUGH THE BODY

Awareness through the Body by Aloka Marti and Joan Sala. Published by Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville, India. 2006.

HERE is a book that carries the feel of Auroville. It combines method and innovation, the outward and the inward, the tangible and the subtle, the traditional and the modern—typically, using all available means and inventing new ones, to explore deeper, to go farther. It is a manual for teaching as well as for self-exploration. The subtitle explains it thus: “a way to enhance concentration, relaxation and self-knowledge in children and adults.”

The cover catches our eye, and the get-up, the production, the profusion of photographs are an invitation to browse, to read, to explore, to apply, to try out, to discover.

The authors, in their introduction, explain:

This book is meant as a guide for those who want to discover the existing connections between mind, emotions and the physical body and to offer ways in which to integrate these different parts into a more harmonious whole, organised around their inmost centre. Because we use the physical body to achieve this task, we call our work *Awareness through the Body*. We developed this approach while working with children at schools in Auroville over the last fourteen years. ...This book is focused mainly on our work at the elementary school level; however, you will find references to how we introduce *Awareness through the Body* in the kindergarten. We also use the exercises described, with slight modifications, with older children and adults. (p. 7)

And further:

Awareness through the Body is a comprehensive curriculum of exercises that aim to raise awareness and enable children—and adults as well—to become conscious of their own perceptions and abilities so that they may become self-aware, self-directed individuals. The activities are creative and often fun; they develop gradually and encourage concentration, focus, relaxation and a sense of accomplishment.

The programme works by first bringing the individual into a state of receptivity in which he can better “listen” to the many and varied inputs he is continuously receiving from both his inner and outer world. The exercises then allow him gradually to discover the complex amalgam of which he is made and to find the tools to manage this complexity effectively. (pp. 7-8)

They also make it clear at the very beginning that the underlying philosophy is based on the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, “their thought permeates and provides a general framework” for the work. But there have also been borrowings from several other sources—“dance, hatha yoga, Taoism, martial arts, physiotherapy, shiatsu, relaxation and breathing techniques”, the work of Elfriede Hengstenberg and Ute Strub—borrowings that have been adapted to the actual needs of the classes.

Aloka, a Catalanian, came to India at the age of twenty, worked in the Ashram School for some years and then moved to Auroville in 1991. Joan, a fellow-Catalonian came to Auroville in the same year with a background in the martial arts and natural therapies. What began as a sports programme for little children led from exercises for posture correction to development of concentration to the assuming of responsibilities, to a methodology for self-awareness. New activities were evolved and new techniques discovered, new games invented. As a clearer programme began to take shape it was called “Body Awareness”. As the authors put it so simply, “but as the years went by, our work used the body more and more as a tool for gaining awareness at all levels. When we realised this, we changed the name to Awareness through the Body to better express the intention of our work. We sense that Awareness through the Body has a life of its own and we are simply following its unfolding.” (p. 17)

The starting-point of the exploration is this passage from Sri Aurobindo:

We are not only what we know of ourselves but an immense more which we do not know; our momentary personality is only a bubble on the ocean of our existence.

(Quoted on p. 18)

The object of the course could be said to be “to provide tools for individuals to expand their consciousness”, “to refine and internalise the senses”, “to better manage their mind and emotions”, and even to come up with their individual “owner’s manual”. “We think that the way to achieve this high goal is to discover and explore the body, and **through** the body awaken the consciousness of the entire being and all the parts that form it.” (p. 19)

Towards this end, eight principles are laid down, with the principle of the “*witness attitude*” constantly behind them all:

- We are complex beings and all our different planes are interrelated.
- Teaching, as well as learning, is always a dialogue; following and leading are two aspects of the same movement.
- Everything is an opportunity for expanding awareness.
- Be in the moment without taking anything for granted.
- Take, give and expect the appropriate amount of responsibility.

- Find your own pace and inner patterns.
- Become aware of the inner and outer space simultaneously.
- Find your own *subjective sensory landmarks*. [*By subjective sensory landmarks we mean personal memories of sensations that one has experienced in the different planes of one's being, as well as sensations of how it feels to be in different states of consciousness.*]

(p. 20)

As for the persons who have been conducting this course, the following statement of Sri Aurobindo has been for them a guiding light:

He will seek to awaken much more than to instruct; he will aim at the growth of the faculties and the experiences by a natural process and free expansion. He will give a method as an aid, as a utilisable device, not as an imperative formula or a fixed routine. And he will be on his guard against any turning of the means into a limitation, against the mechanisation of process.

(Quoted on p. 46)

So much for the first section, covering the genesis, the general approach, the underlying philosophy, the objectives, covered in the opening 50 or so pages.

The most important and interesting section of the book, the nearly 250 pages that follow, are a manual and a sourcebook for the teachers who would like to try out this approach. Using readily available materials like ropes and sticks and plates and wooden blocks, a gradually increasing awareness is developed, all the while keeping the approach flexible but structured. Exercises for attention, concentration, relaxation, breathing, sensory awareness, awareness of the elements, of space, of form, of evolution, of the body, of the different parts of our being—all these woven into the fabric of a game so that learning and progress and growth become an invitation to joy and mastery.

It was difficult, while leafing through, not to try out for oneself some of the exercises described in the book.

‘AN OLD-FASHIONED BROWSER’

*India must rise to the height of her mission
and proclaim the Truth to the world.*

15 November 1955

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 363)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

*How beautiful, grand, simple and calm
everything becomes when our thoughts
turn to the Divine and we give ourselves
to the Divine!*

11 May 1954

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 108)

With Compliments from B.