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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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I MADE DANGER MY HELPER

I made danger my helper and chose pain for thy black anvil my strength hammering
to sheen,
And have reckoned the snare and the pit as nought for the hope of one lonely ray;
I turned evil into good, drew out of grief force and returned love to the hate in men:
I have dared the abyss, I have climbed the night, I have cloven the perfect Way.

SRI AUROBINDO

(‘Incomplete Poems from Manuscripts’ — *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 670-71)

THE DEMAND MADE ON US

. . . THIS, in short, is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and a devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions, not less the smallest and most ordinary and trifling than the greatest and most uncommon and noble, must be performed as consecrated acts. Our individualised nature must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement dedicated to Something that is beyond us and greater than our ego. No matter what the gift or to whom it is presented by us, there must be a consciousness in the act that we are presenting it to the one divine Being in all beings. Our commonest or most grossly material actions must assume this sublimated character; when we eat, we should be conscious that we are giving our food to that Presence in us; it must be a sacred offering in a temple and the sense of a mere physical need or self-gratification must pass away from us. In any great labour, in any high discipline, in any difficult or noble enterprise, whether undertaken for ourselves, for others or for the race, it will no longer be possible to stop short at the idea of the race, of ourselves or of others. The thing we are doing must be consciously offered as a sacrifice of works, not to these, but either through them or directly to the One Godhead; the Divine Inhabitant who was hidden by these figures must be no longer hidden but ever present to our soul, our mind, our sense. The workings and results of our acts must be put in the hands of that One in the feeling that that Presence is the Infinite and Most High by whom alone our labour and our aspiration are possible. For in his being all takes place; for him all labour and aspiration are taken from us by Nature and offered on his altar. Even in those things in which Nature is herself very plainly the worker and we only the witnesses of her working and its containers and supporters, there should be the same constant memory and insistent consciousness of a work and of its divine Master. Our very inspiration and respiration, our very heart-beats can and must be made conscious in us as the living rhythm of the universal sacrifice.

It is clear that a conception of this kind and its effective practice must carry in them three results that are of a central importance for our spiritual ideal. It is evident, to begin with, that, even if such a discipline is begun without devotion, it leads straight and inevitably towards the highest devotion possible; for it must deepen naturally into the completest adoration imaginable, the most profound God-love. There is bound up with it a growing sense of the Divine in all things, a deepening communion with the Divine in all our thought, will and action and at every moment of our lives, a more and more moved consecration to the Divine of the totality of our being. Now these implications of the Yoga of works are also of the very essence of an integral and absolute Bhakti. The seeker who puts them into living practice

makes in himself continually a constant, active and effective representation of the very spirit of self-devotion, and it is inevitable that out of it there should emerge the most engrossing worship of the Highest to whom is given this service. An absorbing love for the Divine Presence to whom he feels an always more intimate closeness, grows upon the consecrated worker. And with it is born or in it is contained a universal love too for all these beings, living forms and creatures that are habitations of the Divine — not the brief restless grasping emotions of division, but the settled selfless love that is the deeper vibration of oneness. In all the seeker begins to meet the one Object of his adoration and service. The way of works turns by this road of sacrifice to meet the path of Devotion; it can be itself a devotion as complete, as absorbing, as integral as any the desire of the heart can ask for or the passion of the mind can imagine.

Next, the practice of this Yoga demands a constant inward remembrance of the one central liberating knowledge, and a constant active externalising of it in works comes in too to intensify the remembrance. In all is the one Self, the one Divine is all; all are in the Divine, all are the Divine and there is nothing else in the universe, — this thought or this faith is the whole background until it becomes the whole substance of the consciousness of the worker. A memory, a self-dynamising meditation of this kind, must and does in its end turn into a profound and uninterrupted vision and a vivid and all-embracing consciousness of that which we so powerfully remember or on which we so constantly meditate. For it compels a constant reference at each moment to the Origin of all being and will and action and there is at once an embracing and exceeding of all particular forms and appearances in That which is their cause and upholder. This way cannot go to its end without a seeing vivid and vital, as concrete in its way as physical sight, of the works of the universal Spirit everywhere. On its summits it rises into a constant living and thinking and willing and acting in the presence of the Supramental, the Transcendent. Whatever we see and hear, whatever we touch and sense, all of which we are conscious, has to be known and felt by us as That which we worship and serve; all has to be turned into an image of the Divinity, perceived as a dwelling-place of his Godhead, enveloped with the eternal Omnipresence. In its close, if not long before it, this way of works turns by communion with the Divine Presence, Will and Force into a way of Knowledge more complete and integral than any the mere creature intelligence can construct or the search of the intellect can discover.

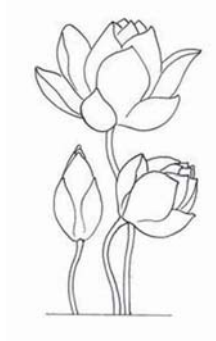
Lastly, the practice of this Yoga of sacrifice compels us to renounce all the inner supports of egoism, casting them out of our mind and will and actions, and to eliminate its seed, its presence, its influence out of our nature. All must be done for the Divine; all must be directed towards the Divine. Nothing must be attempted for ourselves as a separate existence; nothing done for others, whether neighbours, friends, family, country or mankind or other creatures merely because they are connected with our personal life and thought and sentiment or because the ego

takes a preferential interest in their welfare. In this way of doing and seeing all works and all life become only a daily dynamic worship and service of the Divine in the unbounded temple of his own vast cosmic existence. Life becomes more and more the sacrifice of the eternal in the individual constantly self-offered to the eternal Transcendence. It is offered in the wide sacrificial ground of the field of the eternal cosmic Spirit; and the Force too that offers it is the eternal Force, the omnipresent Mother. Therefore is this way a way of union and communion by acts and by the spirit and knowledge in the act as complete and integral as any our Godward will can hope for or our soul's strength execute.

It has all the power of a way of works integral and absolute, but because of its law of sacrifice and self-giving to the Divine Self and Master, it is accompanied on its one side by the whole power of the path of Love and on the other by the whole power of the path of Knowledge. At its end all these three divine Powers work together, fused, united, completed, perfected by each other.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 111-14)



**‘GIVE US THE FULL CONSCIOUSNESS
OF THY LAW . . .’**

February 17, 1914

O LORD, how ardently my aspiration rises to Thee: give us the full consciousness of Thy law, the constant perception of Thy will, so that our decision may be Thy decision and our life solely consecrated to Thy service and as perfect an expression as possible of Thy inspiration.

O Lord, dispel all darkness, all blindness; may every one enjoy the calm certitude that Thy divine illumination brings!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 77)

THE TRUE REASON

THOSE who want to follow the true path will naturally be exposed to the attacks of all the forces of ill-will, which not only do not understand but generally hate what they do not understand.

If you are troubled, vexed, even discouraged by all the spiteful stupidities that people may say about you, you will not be able to advance much on the way. And these things come to you not because you are unlucky or because your lot is not a happy one, but because on the contrary the divine Consciousness and Grace take your resolution seriously and allow circumstances to become the touchstones on the way, to see if your resolution is sincere and you are strong enough to face the difficulties.

Therefore, if someone laughs at you, or says something which is not kind, the first thing to do is to look within yourself and see what is the weakness or imperfection which has allowed such a thing to happen, and not to be disconsolate or indignant or sad because people do not appreciate you for what you consider to be your proper value; on the contrary, you should thank the divine Grace for having pointed out to you the weakness or imperfection or deformation that you have to rectify.

So instead of being unhappy, you can be fully satisfied and take advantage, a great advantage, of the harm that someone wanted to do to you.

Besides, if you truly wish to follow the path and to do the yoga, you should not do it so that people will appreciate and honour you; you should do it because it is an imperative need of your being and because you can be happy only in that way. Whether people appreciate you or do not appreciate you has absolutely no importance whatever. You can tell yourself beforehand that the farther you are from the ordinary man, the more foreign to the way of the ordinary creature, the less you will be appreciated — quite naturally, for they will not understand you. And I repeat that this has no importance whatever.

True sincerity consists in following the way because you cannot do otherwise, in consecrating yourself to the divine life because you cannot do otherwise, in endeavouring to transform your being and emerge into the Light because you cannot do otherwise, because it is the very reason for which you live.

When it is like that, you can be sure that you are on the right path.

Undated: Before February 1960

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 377-78)

THE SACRIFICE OF SRI AUROBINDO

1.26 a.m., December 5, 1950. A moment like any other, in a night like many a night — except to those who watched in the room where for over two decades Sri Aurobindo had lived. For them there was all human history coming to a cryptic climax: after summing up in himself the aspiration of man in entirety — man the soul, the mind, the life-force, the body — and after bringing a power of complete godhead to answer this fourfold aspiration, Sri Aurobindo was throwing away the earnest of the final and supreme triumph, a physical being in which the very cells were beginning to flower into a divine substance such as the world had scarcely dreamt of in even its most apocalyptic hours.

The doctors who were his attendants knew their patient to be no mere mortal: they treated his body for what they recognised it to be, a vehicle of supranatural light, and they had to accept the mysterious “No” he had categorically returned to their question: “Are you not using on yourself the sovereign spiritual force with which you have saved hundreds?”, — a body that seemed able to live without end by the protection of an all-transformative power was being allowed by its master to suffer extreme uraemia and pass into profound unconsciousness. Indeed the doctors were permitted — as if out of compassion for them — to try their palliatives; but there was no suspension of Sri Aurobindo’s fiat that though he had the whole perfection of man in his own hands he should lay aside its last victory in himself and embrace death.

No doubt, it was not death in its utter commonness. The uraemia that preceded it had been unique. Every medical sign was there of its absolute hold over the body’s reactions — save one: Sri Aurobindo, as if by an independence of comatose brain and nerve, could command consciousness again and again, inquire what the time was or ask for water. Unique also was the sequel of the uraemic poisoning. Between the instant when life clinically ended and the instant when the body was lowered into a special vault in the Ashram courtyard, more than four days passed without a trace of decomposition. And many saw with even their physical eyes the body glowing with what the Mother had called the concentration in it of the light of the Supermind, the Divine Consciousness in its integrality which Sri Aurobindo and she had been labouring with the patience of heaven-sent pioneers to bring down for the first time to suffering earth. Mortality in its normal form was not here; yet something of its age-old doom was present and that was a question-mark glaring in the face of every disciple and making most enigmatic that varied wonderful life of seventy-nine years, triumphant over all human difficulties.

The question-mark cannot be completely removed. Depths beyond depths lie in an event of this nature: the human mind is unable to compass them all. But a few

significances gleam out for an initial understanding and set a general perspective in which our aching and groping gaze may rest.

There was no failure on Sri Aurobindo's part: this is certain from the psychological and physical details put together — of the preceding months as well as of the actual illness. There was only a strange sacrifice. And if Sri Aurobindo the indomitable gave the sacrifice, it must be one that was a sudden terrible short-cut to some secret victory for God in the world at the cost of a personal consummation. What occasioned the sacrifice appears to have been earth's insufficient receptivity to the Aurobindonian gift of the descending Supermind. Something in the gross constitution of terrestrial creatures would not thrill to the Grace from on high, would not appreciate with a response deep enough the colossal work that was being done at a selfless expense of energy and with a silent bearing of "the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal". If the earth's consciousness had been more receptive, the crisis of the human body's conversion into terms of divinity would have begun in a less radical shape and without so extreme an upshot for one individual in the van of life's fight towards perfection. Hence much of the responsibility for the upshot lies with the absence of co-operation by the mind of the race. It was as if the beings Sri Aurobindo had come to save had turned his enemies — not deliberately in all cases, yet with a dullness of perception and an inertia of the will that were as crucial.

This dullness and this inertia were not only an obstacle to the descending Divine: they were also perilous for the world itself. To the obscure occult forces — powers and principalities of darkness — which always oppose the Divine's work and which were reacting against the tremendous pressure of the Aurobindonian light in a vast upsurge, to those forces bent on a final calamitous counter-attack across the battle-field that is man, man's dullness and inertia gave a ground of support and thus signed his own doom. Sri Aurobindo, born to put his mission above everything else, could not but follow the course he did: how could he betray the long-invoked Supermind whose hour on earth was preparing to strike, or let the world which he had bound to his heart pay disastrously for its unreadiness before the divine advent? He gathered, as it were, the myriad antagonist spears into his own breast, took upon himself a globe-wide catastrophe. Most unlike him would it have been to do anything in the crisis save sanction the very worst that could happen to him because of humanity's unresponsiveness, and somehow weave it with his invincible spiritual art into the design of his own master mission.

That mission was the conquest of the very foundations of life's imperfect structure through the ages. Not only to build a golden dome but to transform what he symbolically called the dragon base in the Inconscience from which the universe has evolved: this was Sri Aurobindo's work. And it had to be done one way or another. There could have been a way of slow conquest, preserving his own body by a careful rational spirituality which would run no deadly hazards for the sake of rapid salvation of the sorrow-burdened world. The way of revolutionary evolution,

thrown open like an abyss, was to let his body admit an illness symbolic of the drive of the Inconscience from below and, after a limited though intensely significant contest, carry in an actual death its own godlike presence into the stuff of the Inconscience. Death was the glory-hole desperately blown into the massive rock of that stuff for the physical divinity of Sri Aurobindo to permeate in a direct and literal sense the darkness wrapped within darkness which the Vedic seers had long ago intuited to be Nature's cryptic womb of lightward creation. By identifying his physical divinity with that primal Negation of the Divine, he has taken by surprise the central stronghold of all that frustrates and destroys, all that renders precarious the body's beauty, frail the life-energy's strength, flickering the mind's knowledge and swallows up in its monstrous void the marvellous legacy left to mankind by the hero and the sage.

By passing beyond the visible scene he has not passed to some transcendent Ineffable. He who has held incarnate within himself both the potence and the peace of the Transcendent — the creative Supermind, the Truth-Consciousness of the ultimate Spirit — needed no flight from the universe to reach the Highest. Nor like a background influence would he act now on earth, he whose whole aim was not only to widen and heighten the individual but make all wideness and height focus themselves and become dynamic in the individual instrument. Still in the foreground of events, in the thick of time's drama and eternity as his theme, still as a concentrated individualisation of the wide and the high, an organised being in whom the Supramental *kārana sharira* or causal divine body has descended into the *sukshma sharira* or subtle body of mind-stuff and life-stuff, he stands close to earth with his sacrificed physical substance as a firm irremovable base and centre in the Inconscience for spreading there his immortal light and changing earth's fate from the sheer bottom of things no less than from the sheer top.

This is how the occult eye sees the paradoxical climax whose anniversary falls today. And as one watches the holy spot that is Sri Aurobindo's *samadhi* in the midst of his Ashram and all about is the aroma of flowers and incense-sticks expressing the mute prayer of a thousand hearts to whom he is the Avatar of a super-humanity to be, the concrete close reality of the Master of the Integral Yoga requires no proof. But the entire sacrifice, with its immense mysterious potency, was possible because, commemorating the anniversary and conducting the Ashram, there is amongst us his co-worker, his manifesting and executive *Shakti*, the Mother. It is because she, in harmony with his plan to fight from two bases, remains on earth to foster the golden future that he could draw back from the visible scene as if to pull more inward the taut string of the spiritual bow and make the God-tipped arrow fly swifter and farther. She who has been one with him in the Supramental attainment, one in vast vision and integral work, joint-parent of the new age in which the outer physical as well as the inner psychological is meant to be Godlike and wonderfully immune, she is the bridge across which Sri Aurobindo's triumph of winning all

while seeming to lose everything moves in ever-increasing beauty and power into Matter's ignorant world of a life that is but death in disguise. Without her embodied mediation, without her retention of the Aurobindonian consciousness in full visibility before us, the upward illumining of the Inconscience by Sri Aurobindo for Matter's transformation would lack in completeness of result. Her protective hold on earth justifies the withdrawal he has accomplished. Her radiant presence fulfils the miraculous power of his absence.

By the co-operation between that absence and this presence a leap in spiritual evolution has been made. A hint of it is in a new expression that comes again and again over the Mother's face. The Supermind, whose realisation and subsequent descent are the Aurobindonian Yoga, seems now not only active as before from above, unfolding its gigantic downward dynamism in its own time, but also operative as a gleaming nucleus of World-Will from even the physical brain-level of the embodied consciousness that is the guru, day after day, to the Godward movement of our souls. In other words, the Supermind possessed overhead by the Mother is now commanded more and more by her from its own growing poise below. The wish of the very earth-self in her begins to be binding, so to speak, on the creativity of her own Supreme Self in the Transcendence. This means a developing adjustment of the incalculable time-rhythm of the Supramental descent from on high to the impatient beat of the aspiring human heart. The possibility dawns of a rapturous acceleration of the Truth-Consciousness's transforming process — and a greater, more luminous mastery of material life, a deeper invasion of the body by the Immortal Existence, a swifter and more palpable progress towards the conquest of darkness and death for which the secret decisive blow was struck in that strangely fateful moment in the dead of night a year ago.

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

(India and the World Scene by K. D. Sethna, published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 1997, pp. 345-49)

There are two attitudes that a sadhak can have: either a quiet equality to all regardless of their friendliness or hostility or a general goodwill.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 826)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

(Continued from the issue of November 2009)

Chapter Five

Lama in Inner Mongolia (Cont.)

Ling-Shi-Shien, December 15, 1924¹

My dearest Papa,

My last letter (of November 29) was already a partial reply to the questions that you have been asking yourself, questions that arose because of certain terms in my previous letters, but I ought to make myself more clear.

First of all, I use the word "teaching" in a very wide sense. Human activities could be grouped in many ways, among which is one where the dominant faculty is thought (the others are those of art, of political activity, etc.); this is the path of knowledge. It includes not only science, in the modern sense of the word, but also philosophy, metaphysics, and even occultism, and the study of truths which are hidden in religious symbols.

Personally I do not find a real satisfaction unless I feel that I am participating in the great life of the world, pouring out externally as much force as I am able to draw from my inner being; thus, I do not seek knowledge for myself, for the pleasure of knowing. I would even say that knowledge for me is nothing but an instrument which allows me to act correctly, to play my role in the grand symphony.

And even in thus defining my activity, I find that there are many roads which I could take: that of pure science (mathematics, chemistry, etc.), that of occultism (where one acts upon the world in a very subtle manner totally unknown to the world) and that which I may call spirituality. This last is a kind of synthesis by which man constantly seeks to bring about the awakening and the progress of the spirit, in himself and in others, and for that, to take advantage of all experience and to utilise all the knowledge and all human faculties. The aim is not exactly to "lull

1. Philippe had sent in the same envelope along with this letter to his father, a letter addressed to his mother, and the draft of an article. [*The article on the journey to Mongolia was published in the last issue of Mother India.*]

my human misery” but to help man in the effort he makes towards truth, beauty, harmony, self-mastery and liberty. Simply to relieve the suffering is not always to help the spirit. (Gandhi does not lead his people to pleasure, and yet he works marvellously for the victory of the spirit over force.)

Pure science does not satisfy me completely even though I value and appreciate the immense effort that has been made and the results obtained. With joy and gratitude I use all that it brings to me, but, as you yourself acknowledge, its domain is limited. I do not feel that I am at present qualified to enter into occultism which is an arduous and painful path. It demands qualities which I possess as yet only in a very small measure, and moreover, one cannot decide for oneself if one is fit or not. Occultism cannot be practised all by oneself. It is necessary that your Master should guide you on the way, without that you fall into illusion or charlatanism because, I repeat, this is the most difficult of roads that man can follow and not the easiest one.

Also, it is the third path, which is in a way a spiritualisation of the whole life that I have committed myself to at present. As, in my opinion, it consists of a constant interchange between oneself and humanity, and as it is almost exclusively concerned with mankind, whereas science and occultism focus their attention also to other kingdoms; it is for these two reasons that I have called it “teaching”.

You see, this is not about taking a doctrinal tone and pontificating about absolute truths from a pulpit. My last letter spoke about what I call truth and what my position is regarding this topic.

What I communicate to others is the expression of my inner life and it is the manifestation of the spirit in others which makes me vibrate in unison with their life. But, for example, I claim the right to express all that my sense of truth, of rectitude and of harmony calls for; that, for me, is sincerity. I do not possess any psychic power, and I do not seek it, although I strongly hope for a greater intuition or spiritual insight — as well as an illumination which could be termed, it is true, a higher psychism — but if I had it and felt that it could be useful to communicate certain experiences, I would use it without any hesitation.

None more than I deplores the tendency towards sectarianism which is spreading more and more in the Theosophical Society and transforming it almost into a religious sect. I know that it could die of it (if it does die of it, the world will not be deprived of light due to that!). But the fault, in my opinion, is due to the human weaknesses: superstition and intolerance. These act in the Theosophical Society as they have acted on all the great religions. It is these that have brought about what is known as clericalism, that terrible scourge of the Christian Church, which tries to smother liberty in order to dominate the souls. But one cannot rationally accuse Christ for the horrors of the Inquisition. The teachings of Christ, like those of Buddha and of the great *rishis* of India, do not seem to me to have caused so much misery, and their balance sheet is not as gloomy as you suppose; on the contrary, it seems to me very luminous, if I keep out of it the three enemies of mankind: fanaticism, intolerance

and superstition (basically, types of ignorance all of them!). The great spirits, everywhere and always, have fought against them: Christ leading, and he died for it. . . The action of Buddha, of Guru Nanak (founder of Sikhism), like that of Christ and other religious reformers, has been precisely to break the obstacles opposed to the free development of the soul through intolerance and sectarianism. It is their successors who have built on their teachings the subsequent religions which you criticise.

Here is what a Hindu, Swami Vivekananda, wrote:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal to attain is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

And this is eternally true!

You live in Europe which had to struggle hard to attain the freedom of thought (the struggle still continues at the present hour); that is why you readily identify mysticism with fanaticism or religion with superstition. It is not like this everywhere, although the sectarian tendency is human because it is a result of ignorance or weakness. Here is what Rinzai, one of the Buddhist patriarchs, said in a sermon to his monks:

O you, seekers of the truth, if you wish to obtain the orthodox understanding (of Buddhism) do not allow yourselves to be deceived by others. Inside or outside, if you encounter an obstacle, destroy it immediately. If you encounter the Buddha, kill him, if you encounter the patriarch, kill him, if you encounter an *arhat*, or a parent or a friend, kill them all without hesitation because it is the only way to the deliverance. Do not allow yourselves to be fettered by whatever it may be, but hold yourselves above it, pass on and be free.

Can you imagine a catholic bishop saying, in his cathedral, these strong but beautiful words, replacing Buddha by Christ and the Patriarch by the Pope? The devotion and the respect of these Buddhists towards Buddha have not diminished at all for that. And it is an element that one frequently observes in Asians — they are infinitely more tolerant and understanding than us.

Allow me here to point out to you that in wanting to forbid others to act according to their inner law — for example, to publish the account of occult investigations — you infringe upon the principle of liberty (a principle which, in reality, cannot be applied socially except in the domain of thought, not in the political domain where equality is the ideal, nor in the domain of economics where fraternity ought to reign).

Moreover you are not consistent; if you call yourself an agnostic, remain agnostic, but then how can you **be sure** that nothing can be grasped which is beyond our perceptions. It is an affirmation as categorical as can be and consequently, it limits the truth; it is the counterpart of “thou shalt not go further” of religion.

But in addition I maintain that the account of the visions beyond the understanding of ordinary man, the books of Swedenborg, of Jacob Boehme, the *Apocalypse*, similar books from India etc., have not actually perpetuated the evil that you attribute to them. Even the most doubtful visions, like that of the little shepherdess of Lourdes, would be harmless if the human failings, the enemies of spiritual progress, did not take hold of them to subjugate man. The example of Lourdes is particularly appropriate. Next to that compare that of Joan of Arc. Perhaps you will say that this is like supplying arms to the enemy, but it is truly an insufficient pretext to consider oneself to have the right to stifle and to eliminate the entire section of humanity which finds its satisfaction in spiritual aspirations!

Again, you will object that spiritual aspirations are not occult visions and that the latter, far from developing the former, hinder them. That is true for some but not for all, it depends on the stage of evolution. To recognise man's deep aspirations is to know their very foundation, that is to say, these aspirations are the affinities of the soul. To say that these movements which you feel in yourself are not susceptible to development like the other human faculties and that their blossoming will not be the acknowledgement of that to which they aspire, is to have a limited vision of the cosmic evolution; think of the difference that exists between the animal and man, for example, and how much the human faculties would seem incomprehensible to the animal if it were aware of them. It is absolutely true that Theosophical books have not always observed a wise moderation, and that the sane reason and the common sense have not always controlled the results of the psychic researches. I am convinced that some books contain numerous and grave errors. But these books are not really dangerous unless we make them authorities, bibles, instead of taking them for what they are. The human tendency to rely on an external authority is harmful, I admit, but what is to be done about it? The other extreme, the negation and the pure scepticism, is equally harmful. Here, as in everything, a balance has to be maintained.

To sum up this dissertation, I will say that regarding the direction that my activity in the world must take, my inner being is my only guide: this activity aims at the liberation (and not subjugation) of the human spirit as far as possible for me with my feeble powers. The impediments that it seeks to break are superstition, intolerance and fanaticism as well as man's ignorance of his inner forces and what needs to be done to develop them.

Frankly, I must add that at present I have no idea of the exact nature of my work: materially, to earn my living, spiritually, along the lines mentioned above; **absolutely none**, I emphasise. I do not worry about it yet, it is not the moment.

Scepticism, when it is a destroyer and not the simple caution of a well-balanced mind — which unfortunately is often the case — kills the energies of the soul and ends up in a nihilistic materialism (which is not at all scientific, although it pretends to be).

This is not in the least a personal reference and I know very well your inner effort towards light and your love of truth, but you are subject to the influence of the environment, and of the great wave of negation which was necessary for Europe to free itself from the Roman influence.

I am again putting off the account of my material settlement here to a subsequent letter. I hope that you will find that which will calm your anxiety, and, at least, have the certitude that I shall conduct myself honestly, logically and sincerely whatever be the circumstances in which I shall be placed.

I know that man contains within himself energies which will make him a veritable god and I consider it my duty to help in his liberation. If you admire Gandhi, do you know from where he draws his formidable energy, do you know that it is from “*the still small voice*” of which he speaks? Without that he would not be able to shake the British empire.

I thank you, for the book on Gandhi which I have much appreciated, and for the offer which you have passed on to me on behalf of the magazine *Le Temps*. I knew its reporter in Japan: Albert Maybon. Enclosed you will find a letter about my travels upto here.² Perhaps it is a bit long, but I have no idea about what a column in a journal is! It could be published in two successive parts, I can hardly cut out any portion from it without spoiling the little interest that it may have. If it is appreciated, I could write other articles, on Mongolia and on Lamaism.

As for the money, take from it, let us say 150 F for some books which I have asked from you or which I may ask for, and because of their subject, you may hesitate to make a gift of them to me (like the books of Steiner;³ you should read his works, he is logical even though the translation from the German is difficult to read); then, in spite of the bad exchange rate, send me the balance through the Société Générale to the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation, Peking Branch. Please send me two copies of the Journal if they publish my letter, and some pictures of Paris and some illustrated magazines, to do a bit of propaganda among the Mongols who constantly ask me how my country is (as well as some old publications on the war with prints of soldiers and of cannons, etc., but if you do not have them, it is not necessary to buy them).

I embrace you tenderly, your affectionate son,

Signed: Philippe

2. [As mentioned, published in the November 2009 issue of Mother India.]

3. Rudolf Steiner.

P.S. In the foreword of *La Généalogie de l'homme*, Annie Besant says:

While presenting to the theosophists the text of four conferences which constitute the present work, I wish to add to it a word of warning. This work does not have the pretension to impose itself as an article of faith, any more than the other works which have emerged from my pen. It would seem unnecessary to repeat a declaration that I have made so often, but as the tendency of a seeker to consider the studies to be the teachings of an authority reappears constantly, I feel obliged to renew this warning. In these conferences I have touched upon an extremely difficult and complicated subject; I did not have the opportunity of consulting anybody on the correctness of the observations which have allowed me to fill the lacunae in the series of facts given by H.P.B.⁴ These then are the unverified observations of a sole observer, made with the little power that I may possess, and made in the midst of the agitations of a busy and encumbered life, which I present. . . .

But in spite of this warning, the tendency spoken of persists. It is clear though that we must consider this book, among others (which precisely contain the mistakes) as a simple book to study; that is how I look at it; it is then harmless and may be useful. The prudent reservations of A. Besant are not always followed; that, evidently, is a pity.

*

Ling-Shi-Shien, December 16, 1924

Dear little Maman,

Along with the long philosophical letter, I want to add these few words for you. First of all, to tell you how happy I am that your health is improving and you are returning to a normal state free of all these sufferings; and to tell you that I have never stopped thinking of you with affection and gratitude, and that I have suffered from the moral separation that Papa and you have placed between us.

I am settled here in a simple manner, without comfort but without privations, and I do not suffer too much from the cold because I have a good stove brought from Peking. The country is harsh; there are terrible winds which blow from the West and which bring sand and snow. The average temperature for the first week of December is: maximum (the warmest time of the day) -6°C, minimum (the coldest time of the night) -15°C. As I do not go out much the cold does not affect me.

4. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

My food consists exclusively of roasted millet with a little white cheese resembling a dry melon, with tea and sugar. I shall give you more details next time.

But the inner difficulties are harder than the physical difficulties. As I know very well that it is by fierce struggle that the soul acquires strength and light, I am not afraid of the difficulties.

I think of you often and regularly send you my thoughts of strength and of light. I have had no news of Albert for a long time and I am totally in the dark about what he is doing. Tell me the news of the family, there must have been changes of which I know nothing: marriages, births, etc. From France, I have no news of Madame Potel and of Rauzin. Lang has not written to me for a long time. Tell me also about La Minelle and the changes in its organisation!

I embrace you very affectionately as a devoted son.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. In re-reading my letter to Papa, I realise that I have been much too logical. Also, wanting to follow Papa on his ground and in giving my thought the form of an argument, I have diminished its reality and its life, and I have thus deformed and altered it. On many points, I could write the opposite of what I have said and it would be equally true. On the spiritual plane, one thing can be itself and its opposite at the same time, but not on the intellectual plane. Papa must above all seek to understand my soul-state by attuning himself to me and not by sticking too much to the words.

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001. Our thanks for their permission.)

... Nirvana is nothing but the peace and freedom of the Spirit which can exist in itself, be there world or no world, world-order or world-disorder.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 53)

THE ASHRAM LIBRARY

THE first Ashram Library came into existence somewhere in the late 1920's in what is known as the Library House in the Ashram main building. It is the house we see first as we enter the Ashram by the main gate. The main room of the Library was named 'Mind' by the Mother. This room became Amrita's room after the Mother and Sri Aurobindo moved into this house in 1922. Punamchand-bhai was the first Librarian, he was succeeded by Premanand.

Premanand Shukla had come from Gujarat and settled down here in 1927. He had been a school teacher before coming here. He had the great good fortune of being granted an interview by Sri Aurobindo at the end of which he had been accepted as a disciple. Sri Aurobindo had put to him many searching questions about his aspiration, his educational qualifications, family background and other details of his personal life, which Premanand had answered candidly, without holding anything back. Sri Aurobindo had remained silent for a while and then said, "Although there is no ceremony, you are accepted." Sri Aurobindo had pointed his finger at an earthen pot kept in the sun in the courtyard and made Premanand observe how it lay open to the sun, absorbing the light and the heat. "Be like the pot," he said, "and remain open to the Divine Force." Thus had the Master given his new disciple his first guideline for sadhana. This was the most precious experience of Premanand's life, for Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn into seclusion by the time Premanand had wound up his affairs in Gujarat and returned to the Ashram for good, and he could see his Master only during the four Darshan days in the year.

When I settled here in 1947, I was given work in the Library under the supervision of Premanand. He was a strict disciplinarian. Great emphasis was laid on punctuality and regularity. Fixed methods of working were laid down to the minutest detail. Everything had to be done "just so" and no other way was good enough. Two of the older workers — Noni-da and Sadashiv — were told to show me the way he wanted everything done. But on the second day, after giving me certain instructions, he took care to tell me that he was not the boss, that we were all equal children of the Mother, and that I should consider myself directly responsible — answerable — only to the Mother.

Besides Noni-da and Sadashiv Athavle, I remember Chhobi and Jyotsna-di (Light's mother) who came every day to dust the books. There were thirty thousand volumes by the time I joined, so there was enough dusting and cleaning to do. If any books were found to be attacked by worms, they were treated with a liquid insecticide and minor repairs were done by us which we did sitting on a mat on the floor of the lending section itself. The more damaged books were sent for repair to the Ashram Bindery which was being looked after by Biren-da.

In addition to the cleaning of books I was given work in the lending section. A book was lent for a fortnight, after which period the borrower had either to return the book or get it “renewed” — the term extended by another fortnight.

I learnt that most of the books had not been bought. They had been donated by sadhaks who had brought their personal collections with them when they came to settle here for good. The largest of them had been donated by Dilip-da (Dilip Kumar Roy). There were not only books on philosophy and spirituality, but also on art, poetry, history and literature in general, even fiction. Most of the books were in English, but there was also a good collection in French and Bengali. Sacred literature was also there, like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran, the Dhammapada etc.

The formidable task of classifying all these thousands of books was undertaken by Prithwi Singh Nahar after he settled down in the Ashram permanently in 1938. Prithwi Singhji followed a decimal system of classification known as the Dewey System. He could only get part-time helpers, beginning with Parichand-ji, and later Ila-di and others. It was only when his children settled here that he could get some regular help. His daughters, Sumitra and Suprabha, and son Nirmal Singh, are the ones I remember at this point of time. Not only had the actual classification and numbering to be done, but the labels also had to be prepared and stuck neatly and attractively on the book covers. In all this work he was ably assisted by his children. By the time I joined, most of the work had been finished, and all the volumes had been beautifully arranged in their proper places on the shelves.

The French books had been arranged in what is now the Office and Photo Sales Section of the Reception Service. In the adjoining room was the small Hindi Section and still smaller collections of Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and other Indian languages. In the Reception Hall, beautifully bound volumes of the collected works of great authors had been displayed.

Besides the lending of books, another important activity was done in the Library — that of sorting the daily post. The present Sri Aurobindo Ashram Post Office did not exist in those days. The post was brought from the Main Post Office by a sadhak and delivered to Nolini-da. Bholā did this work for many years. The first sorting was done in Nolini-da’s office and letters addressed to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and those Ashramites who lived in the Ashram main building were taken out. It was Ranju-da mainly who did this first sorting. Then he brought the rest of the post to the Library where we sorted it again and arranged the letters for Ashramites in alphabetical order in the glass cases which hung on the walls just outside, in the room which was used — and is still being used — as a passage to the Publication Department on the left and to the verandah on the right where the notice boards are fixed.

We also had a postbox fixed outside the Library door in the same inner passage, in which Ashramites dropped their letters for posting. We did the daily clearance,

and, if we found that some of the envelopes had not been closed by the writers of the letters, we applied glue and closed the flaps. Then we took all those letters to Nolini-da's office where Ranju-da put the necessary postage stamps on them and sent them to the Main Post Office.

When the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother began to be regularly published, the Publication Department was started, I don't know the exact date. It was already well developed by Prithwi Singh-ji when I came to live in the Ashram. I shall confine myself here only to the interaction I had with it. In the lending room of the Library we also sold books for the Publication Department. Just one cupboard was enough to display all the published works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at that time! The books that we sold were sent upstairs by Prithwi Singh-ji to be autographed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which made the buyers — all devotees, of course, — very happy indeed. That was sufficient incentive and we did not need to display any salesmanship!

The Publication Department began to receive orders from different parts of the world. It had not yet started its own dispatch section. The dispatching was done by Suman of the Ashram Press. A rough packing of the books was done in the Publication Department and the bundles were kept ready for Suman to pick up and take to the Press where he got the books properly packed and dispatched to the addresses given by Prithwi Singh-ji. Premanand sent me to Prithwi Singh-ji to help with this preliminary packing. I remember preparing these bundles with the help of Jugal-da, who had just joined the Ashram and had been assigned work with Prithwi Singh-ji. He was shifted to the School later and given teaching work. My own packing work was also over soon, as Prithwi Singh-ji developed a highly efficient dispatch section.

Strange as it may seem, an unlibrarylike activity took place in the Library twice a week when a Dhobi (washerman) came to collect the bundles of washing brought by a number of Ashramites, and to deliver the washed and ironed clothes when they were ready. Each bundle carried a chit with the name of the Ashramite and the list of the clothes contained in the bundle which Premanand checked personally. When Sutapa was working with Prithwi Singh-ji, she would come to our section to help Premanand on Dhobi days. The Ashram already had a laundry to which Ashramites gave their clothes for washing, but when they had extra washing to be done, they brought it to the Library to be given to the Dhobi.

At the end of the year 1950 Premanand's health broke down and he retired from the Library. Rajen-da (Rajen Ganguli) was made the Librarian.

Late in 1954 a large building became available and the Mother chose it as a suitable location for the Library. Almost all the books in the Ashram Library were shifted to the large building, and the Mother renamed it as Sri Aurobindo Library with Medhananda as the Librarian.

Looking back at the first seven years of my Ashram life during which I worked

in the old Ashram Library, I feel grateful for the training I received and the values inculcated in me, all of which has stood me in good stead later in life. For both these old Sadhaks, Premanand and Prithwi Singh-ji, though vastly different in temperament, had in common a great sense of dedication to work, a constant striving after perfection and exacting standards of performance.

VASANTI

These feelings are the usual attitude of the physical consciousness left to itself towards the Divine — a complete Agnosticism and inability to experience.

The knowledge of the impersonal Divine by itself does not affect the material facts of earth or at least need not. It only produces a subjective change in the being itself and, if it is complete, a new vision and attitude towards all things immaterial or material. But the complete knowledge of the Divine can produce a change in material things, for it sets a Force working which ends by acting even upon these material things that seem to the physical consciousness so absolute, invincible and unchangeable.

* * *

Why cannot one love or experience [the Cosmic and the Transcendent Divine] concretely? Many have done it. And why assume that He is immobile, silent and aloof? The Cosmic Divine can be as close to one as one's own self and the Transcendent as intimate as the closest friend or lover. It is only in the physical consciousness that there is some difficulty in realising it.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 108)

SOME GLIMPSES OF KOBİ NISHİKANTO

[2009 is Kobi Nishikanto's Centenary year.]

WHEN I reached Sri Aurobindo Ashram for my first Darshan, my heart at once overflowed with joy. Such serenity, such purity reigned all around! Wherever I turned my gaze, I saw colourful flowers brightening the Ashram. The pure fragrance of incense transported my being to another world. After doing pranam to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother we came out. I noticed a man standing under a tree. He had tranquil, dreamy eyes. Like a pair of lotus-blossoms. Quite charmed, we greeted him with folded hands and introduced ourselves. We discovered we were face to face with Kobi Nishikanto. I had heard of him before. He spoke to all of us very warmly.

That very evening we headed for Kobi's house. His house was exactly as I picture a poet's house, surrounded by a lovely garden with innumerable flowers in full bloom and several tall, green-leaved trees around. We went into his room, sat down and had a long chat. I discovered that the poet was also a painter. He showed us his work, each painting as beautiful as his poetry.

Kobi also had a wonderful sense of humour. The sadhus of yore, he remarked one day, carried the '*kamandalu*' (water-pot) in one hand and a '*danda*' (staff) in the other, but our modern-day sadhus at the Ashram carry a tiffin-carrier in one hand and a cloth-bag in the other! His house was half-way between the Ashram main building and the Ashram Dining Room. He would tell me in this lighter vein, "Stop by my place, if you can, on your way to Khyber Pass." Khyber Pass obviously did not refer to the geographical landmark but to the Dining Room as '*Khaibar*' in Bengali means 'for eating', so Khyber Pass was the pass that led you to where you could 'eat' and as the Bengali word '*pass*' means 'near', it would imply that Kobi lived close to the Dining Room.

After that, I always went to see Kobi whenever I could. He would welcome us with great warmth and recount to us all kinds of stories. Had I noted down all his stories I could have written an epic. I noted just a few while he was recounting them to us. The rest of what I have written comes from my recollections or from what others have recounted to me.

Sometimes he recited his poems and I was enthralled. I have never heard anyone recite poetry as he did. In his recitation, the inner meaning of the poem came to life. One day, I saw a special notebook of poems belonging to Kobi, a notebook filled with numerous poems. It would be wrong to call it just a notebook because this notebook had been touched by Sri Aurobindo. He hadn't just touched it but read each poem attentively and written his comments. Probably out of absent-mindedness

Kobi had misspelt some words which Sri Aurobindo thoughtfully corrected in his own hand. Kobi wrote many poems just after he had had a vision and Sri Aurobindo explained its significance. The very sight and touch of this notebook overwhelmed me. That was the first time I had seen Sri Aurobindo's handwriting in the original.

*

(The following was recounted to me by a sadhika who was very close to Nirod-da and heard it from him.)

When Kobi came to the Ashram for the first time, Sri Aurobindo told him, "Don't remain here (at the Ashram). Go away. If you live outside, you will enjoy better health and acquire fame and reputation. You will become well-known as a poet. But if you stay here, you will suffer great physical pain."

"What sort of pain?" Nishikanto asked.

Sri Aurobindo replied, "The sort of pain a man suffers falling from a cliff."

Nishikanto answered, "I am ready to bear this pain. But what about my spiritual progress?"

Sri Aurobindo: "You will progress here in one life what would take ten lives elsewhere."

Kobi decided to stay on in the Ashram.

*

I also found out that he had been ailing with a number of serious diseases for quite some time. However, I never heard him refer to any of them or ever complain. Being no ordinary human being but a yogi, he looked always happy. Otherwise, with all his numerous problems, how could he remain so serene and unperturbed? None but a yogi is capable of such fortitude and detachment.

*

Kobi's father was Bijoyshankar Raichowdhury and his mother, Saudamini Devi. He was born in 1909 in Unnao (U.P.) three months premature. Kobi's father was a scholar with an extraordinary oral memory. Held in high esteem by well-known people of his time including Rabindranath Tagore, he was a pundit in several fields of knowledge, a lawyer by profession and a great jurist as well. He became blind at the age of 65 but such was his memory that he would fight cases with the help of an assistant. Kobi's mother was a deeply compassionate woman. She was Bijoyshankar's second wife. Kobi Nishikanto had one elder brother and a younger sister. Bijoyshankar's first wife had given him four children: three sons and a daughter.

His second son died after contracting tuberculosis and Saudamini Devi, who had looked after this boy like her son, also passed away afflicted by the same disease. Until her passing she had lived a quarantined life, confined to a room in the house. As a result, Kobi did not receive a mother's love in his childhood. Kobi had barely turned four when his mother died. After Saudamini Devi's death, Bijoys Shankar moved to Shivahati village with all his children. Kobi's grandmother loved him very much and even though the days passed by happily in Thakurma's warmth, at nightfall Kobi would miss his mother. What can replace a mother's love? Few could understand Kobi's suffering. He used to live at the time with an orphan-boy who was slightly older and who had become like a member of the family. In the stillness of the night both these motherless kids would hold each other tightly and cry for a mother they had not known.

*

Kobi's first meeting with Gurudev (Rabindranath) was most interesting. Kobi was a very young boy then. Before meeting Gurudev, Kobi was living in Shivahati in the 24 Paraganas district in his father's house. He grew up surrounded by the loving care of his paternal grandparents, uncles and aunts. There was in the house an old edition of the Arabian classic, *Thousand and One Nights*. His sister Bela-didi used to read out to him stories from it about the Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid of Baghdad and Kobi would roam in his imagination along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. As a child he eagerly dreamt of visiting the old city of Baghdad. After some time, Kobi moved to Kolkata. This was his first discovery of a metropolis and so he would ask people in the street what this city was. "Kolkata," everyone replied but he refused to believe them. "You don't know, this is not Kolkata, this is Baghdad." From Kolkata he went to his uncle's house in Barisal. There, every morning he would see a Brahmin who was known as Gurudev. His impressive figure and face left a very strong impression on young Nishikanto. After living in Barisal for some time, he came to Santiniketan with his elder brother, Sudhakanto. He arrived in Santiniketan one evening as the cloak of darkness was slowly enveloping the place. Just then, astonished, he saw the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun-al-Rashid himself, dressed in his typical Muslim outfit, advancing towards him along with his retinue. Delighted beyond belief, he whispered to his elder brother, "Dada, do you know who this is?" "This is Gurudev," Dada answered gently smiling, "the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore. Bow down to him." Kobi laughed at his brother's reply in utter disbelief. "My brother doesn't seem to know anything," he said to himself, "Bela-didi knows much more than he does." He began explaining to his brother very wisely, "How can this be Gurudev? He isn't dark nor does he have a 'tiki' (tuft of hair) on his head. Where is the Saligram stone of Narayana in his hand? He is, in fact, the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun-al-Rashid!" Seeing the little boy whispering to

his elder brother, Gurudev smiled and asked, “Sudha, who is the boy?” Sudhakanto replied with a laugh, “This is my little brother, Nishikanto. His mind is wandering in Baghdad, in the court of the great Caliph, Haroun-al-Rashid.” It was a blessed evening indeed when Kobi met the world-poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

*

One day Kobi, who was staying with his elder brother, heard him talking very softly to his ‘*didima*’ (grandmother) about Kobi’s marriage. Some time later Kobi saw the girl they had selected. Sitting on a mango tree, the girl was eating a mango with its juice dripping all over her. When he found out that this was the girl he was to marry he exclaimed, “Good lord! Marry this mango-sucking girl? Never!” And he ran away from home. After wandering for a long time, he reached Katua.

Near Katua, he stayed in a beautiful, tranquil ashram with Sadhu-baba who was a Vaishnava and a realised seeker too. He warmly welcomed Kobi into his ashram. Kobi’s heart was overwhelmed with a strong faith in the presence of this divine being. Sadhu-baba cured Kobi of the recurrent attacks of fever that he had been suffering from ever since childhood. However, he warned him, saying, “You’ll have to bear terrible physical pain and disease all your life.” Sri Aurobindo was to tell him the same thing years later.

Nishikanto lived very happily in Sadhu-baba’s ashram. One day, he requested Sadhu-baba to give him initiation as he wished to offer his life to his guidance and care. When he mentioned this to him, Sadhu-baba told him very gently, “I can see three great beings standing behind you, one is Rabindranath and behind him the supreme Purusha and the omnipotent Mother. It is not for me to initiate you.”

*

One day Sadhu-baba told Nishikanto, “Go and get some good quality mangoes from the mango-market. Tell them they’re for me.” Sadhu-baba wanted to offer these mangoes to the other fellow-sadhus who lived in the ashram or came to visit him.

Kobi was totally enchanted with the luscious beauty and fragrance of the different varieties of mangoes. He requested the sellers to make him taste some samples, which they readily did. He was extremely pleased with their exceptional taste and flavour. He got a few baskets filled with these different varieties and returned to the ashram. Sadhu-baba was waiting for him. “What’s this?” he asked. “These mangoes were meant to be offered to other sadhus and mahatmas. You should not have tasted them first!”

Kobi was flabbergasted. How did he come to know? But then Sadhu-baba’s scolding was filled with such gentleness that he did not take it to heart.

*

On another occasion Kobi saw great preparations being made in the ashram. The morning of the special festival, Sadhu-baba gave Kobi a piece of paper with a long list of provisions, saying, "Go and get these things from the market."

Kobi looked at the long list: flour, ghee, oil, vegetables, fruit, sweets and so many other things were to be brought. Food was to be served to over 350 guests. Kobi was thrilled just thinking about all the wonderful things that he was going to enjoy that day. "Where's the money?" he asked Sadhu-baba. "Don't worry about that. Just tell the shopkeepers it's for me."

Kobi went to the market and did as instructed. As soon as the shopkeepers heard Sadhu-baba's name, they left whatever they were doing and began attending to his order. They even arranged to send the stuff over with their porters.

By evening the guests began to arrive at the ashram. On one side there was devotional singing, and food was being served on the other. The singing and dancing continued late into the night. Sadhu-baba had a garland of flowers round his neck and his fair-complexioned body was radiant with an unmistakable glow. Kobi kept staring at him, mesmerised. He had never seen him so beautiful. He noticed that Sadhu-baba's eyes were not blinking and that they were shedding a continuous stream of tears as he sat immobile like a statue. Was this the famous state of samadhi, he wondered. Had Kobi not seen Sadhu-baba in this state he would never have believed that such a state was possible.

It was well past midnight when the *kirtan*-singing ended. Sadhu-baba began to enquire how everyone had felt about the festival. Kobi mentioned that there was still a lot of food left. "Distribute it to everyone," Sadhu-baba advised. "All of it?" Kobi asked. "There are still a lot of *pantuas*, we can enjoy them tomorrow. Do you want me to distribute those too?" Sadhu-baba replied in his Jessore-dialect, "Look, Nishi! If you don't give up your greed for food, you'll suffer tremendously. We Vaishnavas don't store anything. Listen to me. Go out and distribute all the food on fifty banana leaves on either side of the road and feed whoever is hungry. Nothing should remain, mind you!"

Nishikanto nodded though with little enthusiasm. All those mouth-watering *pantuas* he could have eaten the next day, he thought. He proceeded to follow Sadhu-baba's instructions. He distributed all the food on the fifty banana leaves on either side of the road and waited under a tree. Who would come in the deep of night to eat this food, he wondered. A while later something unbelievable happened: from the thick darkness in front, all of a sudden a herd of jackals emerged. They all went to a banana leaf each and began lapping up all the food! Fifty of them to be exact! Sadhu-baba knew precisely how many were coming. Without any noise or commotion they finished all the food served on the banana leaves and disappeared into the same darkness they had come from.

He wanted to question Sadhu-baba about this but once near him, he just could not open his mouth.

Kobi had another quality, his capacity for extraordinary visions, all kinds of visions.

There was a beautiful flower-garden in Sadhu-baba's ashram. Every morning he collected flowers from this garden for Sadhu-baba's puja. He was very fond of this work. One day while Kobi was plucking flowers in the garden, he noticed two persons inside. He looked up and saw two exceedingly handsome Vaishnavas standing in front of him. They were tall, fair-limbed and with shoulder-length hair — so handsome that he could not take his eyes off them. He stared at them for some time and then ran to Sadhu-baba, shouting, "Come quickly! Two beautiful boys dressed like Vaishnavas are walking in your garden!" Sadhu-baba accompanied Nishikanto to the garden but there was nobody there. Nishikanto looked for them everywhere quite astounded, "They were here just a moment ago! Their bodies seemed to glow!" Sadhu-baba understood at once and he hugged Kobi with uncontrollable joy, "You know who was here? Gaurango and Nityananda themselves! The first time I saw you I knew your eyes were special and they could see into the subtle worlds."

Later when Mother was to see Nishikanto's photograph, she too would remark: "He has a capacity for inner sight."

*

Kobi observed that Sadhu-baba was concerned with the country's problems even though he was deeply spiritual. Many young patriots and revolutionaries came to see him. The country was led at that time by Gandhi's ideals. Kobi used to listen to Sadhu-baba's conversations with these freedom fighters. He understood that Sadhu-baba was not quite happy with the direction the country was taking. He would talk to these leaders about Sri Aurobindo Ghose, even though he had withdrawn from active politics. But that did not stop him from referring to Sri Aurobindo's vision of India. Whenever he heard Sri Aurobindo's name Kobi's heart filled up with profound bhakti (devotion), although he knew nothing about him at that point in time. When he was young he had sometimes heard the name from his father and elder brother. When Sadhu-baba told him that he had seen the supreme Purusha and the omnipotent Mother standing behind him, did he mean Sri Aurobindo to be that Purusha? So one day he asked Sadhu-baba, "Is it Sri Aurobindo you saw one day as the supreme Purusha standing behind me?" Sadhu-baba replied, "Yes, it is Sri Aurobindo who is going to be your life's inspiration. It is he I saw standing behind you."

A few days after this Sadhu-baba left for the Himalayas accompanied by a few fellow-seekers. Kobi also wanted to go with him but Sadhu-baba told him, "You neither drink nor smoke, how will you be able to bear the cold there? You can remain here in the ashram for as long as you wish." But after Sadhu-baba's departure, Kobi found the ashram desolate and soulless. He, therefore, left the ashram and began wandering again.

After much wandering, one day he sat down exhausted on a bench in a railway station. A friend of his elder brother recognised him there and persuaded him to go back home.

*

When Kobi was 18 he returned to Santiniketan to study art at Kala Bhavan along with famous artists like Santidev, Sagarmaya Ghosh, Bonobihari, Ram Kinkar and others. They were all friends. He spent a lot of time in their company, chatting, singing, having fun and indulging in all kinds of mischief.

Kobi remained in Santiniketan for a while under the care and affection of his elder brother Sudhakanto and Gurudev.

Kobi began writing verses and short poems as a very young boy and his brother used to sometimes correct these. One day some of these verses fell into Gurudev's hands. After reading them he asked Sudhakanto not to correct the little boy's creations, saying, "Nishi's style is quite original, he will grow up to be a great poet. Let him write as he wants to."

*

Kobi was interested in food from his very childhood. One day he laid a bet with his friends that he could interrupt Gurudev in the middle of his performance. If he were to succeed, his friends would feed him one kilo of *roshogollas*. The day of Gurudev's play arrived. Nishi took his seat among the spectators. As soon as Gurudev came on stage to begin his performance, Nishi stood up and started applauding loudly. Gurudev strongly disliked applause in the theatre. He turned red with anger. Without uttering a word he turned around and left the stage and the play was cancelled. Nishi was summoned but there was no trace of him anywhere. Gurudev became a little worried and himself started looking for him. After an interval of three or four days Nishikanto turned up. "I haven't eaten for all these days," he informed Gurudev whose heart at once melted. He enquired, "Tell me, Nishi, why did you behave that way at the theatre? Was it fair?" "My friends had offered me a kilo of *roshogollas* for the feat," Nishi murmured. "I would have given you all the *roshogollas* you wanted if only you had asked me," Gurudev replied.

*

(*Dada — Pranab-da — narrated this to me and he had heard it from Kobi himself.*)

During Kobi's childhood, one Kumaraswami had planted a new variety of Sri Lankan coconut in Santiniketan. After planting the saplings he announced that the first fruit from these trees would be offered to Gurudev. The coconut trees soon became big and the first fruits appeared. When Kobi remembered that Kumaraswami had wanted to offer the first fruit to Gurudev, he said to himself, "Why should the first fruit's water go to Gurudev? Why not to me?" So with the help of a ladder Kobi climbed up a coconut tree. He then bored a hole into the coconuts and drank up all the tender coconut water. When the coconuts of that tree were plucked it was discovered to everyone's dismay that they were all empty! How could this happen? Who could have made a hole into the coconuts and drunk the water? All the suspicion naturally fell on Nishikanto.

On another occasion, some cows were brought from Gujarat to Santiniketan. Gurudev's daughter-in-law, Pratimadevi, would milk these cows and keep the milk covered in a large vessel inside the kitchen and the doors would be locked. But the amazing thing was that the level of the milk seemed to decrease considerably. Now, how was this possible when the doors were locked? Yet another mystery.

One day Gurudev was conducting an enquiry into these two mystifying incidents at Santiniketan with his staff. Seeing Kobi's large, innocent eyes who could imagine Kobi to be the culprit? Gurudev, however, called Kobi and enquired, "'Bauma' (daughter-in-law) was saying that the milk in the kitchen, even though kept locked, keeps decreasing! How can the milk disappear when the doors are shut?"

"So? The doors might be shut all right but what about the window? It was very simple: I broke a long hollow stalk from a papaya tree and pushing it through the window managed to suck a little bit of the milk!"

Stifling his laughter, Gurudev tried to be serious and asked, "Why did you have to drink the milk in that way? There's no lack of milk here, is there?"

"I was curious to know what a Gujarati cow's milk tasted like, that's all! So I devised this plan!" Nishikanto answered.

"But what about the coconuts?" Gurudev enquired.

"How would I have known the taste of Sri Lankan coconut water? I climbed up the tree with the help of a ladder, bored a hole into the coconuts and tasted some of the water, that's all!"

Gurudev tried once again to suppress his laughter, saying, "Next time you feel like having anything, just tell *Bauma!*"

That was all the scolding Gurudev could give Nishi.

"You saw Gurudev's reaction. He cannot cease from indulging this boy," whispered some of the students who were present.

“How do you expect this boy’s waywardness to stop with such an attitude from Gurudev?” muttered some teachers under their breath.

But Gurudev was very fond of Kobi. At that young age he was capable of writing such extraordinary poems! How could Gurudev not love the boy? He was indeed Gurudev’s ‘*chand-kobi*’ (favourite poet).

*

When Kobi Nishikanto held the pen a marvellous inspiration would simply descend from the higher planes, new rhythms and an utterance rich with a new style flowed onto his notebook. The world-poet, Rabindranath himself, had recognised his poetic genius. That’s why he always nurtured and protected him. He wanted his distinctive style of poetry to grow in beauty and felicity.

Few probably know that Nishikanto was as proficient a painter as he was a poet. When he painted, he would shut himself up for four or five days at a stretch. During such times he did not pay any heed to food and survived just on puffed rice.

One day Kobi told me with a laugh, “Everybody thinks I am mad about eating. On the other hand, when poetic inspiration overwhelms me, I do nothing else but write uninterruptedly. Sometimes this can last for a few days and during such a period there is no question of thinking about food. People don’t speak about this Nishikanto who is continually writing. People only talk about Kobi’s love of eating and that he eats at all times of the day.”

“But I’ve seen you eat hardly anything with all your illnesses!” I interjected. “But I am told you can also cook.”

Kobi laughed once again, “When Sri Aurobindo was there I was once asked to cook. I made *alurdom*. People enjoyed my *alurdom* so much that they ate twice the amount of rice that they normally did. Dyumanbhai was terribly upset, “If Kobi cooks like this then it would be difficult to meet the Dining Room expenses!”

*

One day, while Kobi Nishikanto was in Pondicherry waiting to be accepted in the Ashram, he went to Dilip Kumar Roy’s house to ask if he would get Sri Aurobindo’s permission to join the Ashram. Many people used to come to Dilip Kumar Roy’s house to listen to his music. His room would be full of lovers of music. When Kobi met Dilip Kumar Roy, the latter told him that Sri Aurobindo’s yoga was very difficult indeed. Then he served Kobi bread and jam and a few other snacks. Being of a humorous mien, Kobi looked at all that food before him and remarked, “However difficult Sri Aurobindo’s yoga-sadhana might be, I’m now quite ready to embrace it!”

*

When Dada arrived in Pondicherry, *jhatkas* pulled by bullocks and *pousse-pousses* pushed by men were the only means of transport available in the town. The bullocks used to run almost like horses. Dada began the tradition of picnics at the Ashram. On one such picnic to the Lake, Dada invited Kobi as he was known for his culinary skills. Four *jhatkas* were hired to take the group to the Lake. Kobi cooked delicious *khichdi* and a few other items for the occasion. Just before leaving Dada introduced Kobi to someone from the Ashram. They began talking and the gentleman told Kobi that he considered Dada a ‘leader’ of the Ashram. To which promptly came Nishikanto’s rejoinder: “Dada might be a leader, all right, but I am the ‘feeder’ of the Ashram!”

*

One day during a conversation, Kobi Nishikanto told me that his guru in art had been the great artist Nandalal Bose.

“Weren’t Abanindranath Tagore and his disciple Nandalal Bose, indeed, our greatest Indian artists?” I asked him.

“No,” Kobi answered, “it was someone else.”

“Someone else?” I enquired quite taken aback. “Was it Gaganendranath Tagore?”

“No,” Kobi replied, “Suren Ganguli. He died very young. It was Nandalal Bose who discovered him.”

One day Nandalal Bose went to buy something in a village shop. He noticed inside a boy sculpting wood without referring to any drawing. He was sculpting lotuses and he had them all figured out in his head.

Astonished at seeing his work, Nandalal Bose asked, “Can you draw?”

“Yes,” the boy replied. “Drawing’s very easy!” And taking a piece of charcoal he sketched pictures of Lakshmi and Saraswati. Nandalal Bose said, “Would you like to learn drawing from Aban Tagore?”

“Who is Aban Tagore?” the boy enquired.

“Why don’t you come with me and learn from him?” Nandalal added.

“No,” the boy replied, “I’m very poor. I have a widowed mother, a widowed sister to feed. That’s why I work as a carpenter.”

Nandalal persuaded the boy to go with him to meet Aban Tagore.

Abanindranath Tagore was so impressed with the boy’s artistic sense that he exclaimed, “What more can he learn of Indian art. Everything he does is perfect in accordance with the canons of Indian art.”

Then he suggested that he enrol in an art school but the boy refused. Aban Tagore said, “I’ll do the needful to get you a scholarship. Tell me, how much money do you make as a carpenter?”

In the end the boy agreed. But what use was it? The boy was afflicted with

tuberculosis and died shortly afterwards. But about the few paintings he left behind Abanindranath commented, "If you put all of Indian art on one side and Suren Ganguli's work on the other, the scales will tip over in his favour."

Nandalal Bose reiterated it to Kobi, "You didn't know Suren Ganguli but just one painting by him could stand up against the combined work of all the Indian artists."

One of Suren Ganguli's paintings is of a pining Yaksha from *Meghdoot*. It is so amazingly beautiful that it is impossible to describe it. The maharaja of Burdwan acquired it. When Aban Tagore came to know of this he went to the king to try and retrieve it but the latter refused and did not even allow him to see it. On another occasion when a painting by Nandalal Bose titled *Parthasarathi* was bought by a Western buyer, Aban Tagore told him, "Quote your price because I must have it." The man accepted and Aban Tagore managed to retrieve the painting from abroad.

Kobi remarked that he had seen a painting by Suren Ganguli titled *Karttikeya* and was left spellbound by his craft and style.

Kobi told us what Sri Aurobindo had said about Suren Ganguli. An English critic once wrote about some lines of poetry by Blake and remarked that no play by Shakespeare could stand up to them. When Dilip Kumar Roy read this, he was not at all convinced and wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking him what he thought about the statement.

Sri Aurobindo replied, "Never judge the arts like poetry, painting, etc in terms of volume. It is true that these lines of mystic poetry from Blake are so fine that in comparison no play by Shakespeare comes anywhere near them. (It can be said that Blake as a mystic poet achieved things beyond Shakespeare's measure — for Shakespeare had not the mystic's vision.) It is the same with Suren Ganguli from Bengal, no painting can stand up to the very few paintings he has done."

One day Kobi asked Nandalal Bose, his painting teacher, "I notice that you always paint pictures of Shiva. Why don't you paint pictures of Krishna?"

Nandalal Bose replied, "Once I painted a picture of Krishna and showed it to Sister Nivedita. She looked at it and remarked, 'Why have you made Krishna's eyes so restless? Krishna's eyes aren't like that.' After that I stopped painting Krishna."

*

Abanindranath Tagore, like Gurudev, saw in Kobi Nishikanto a new potential for genius. That is why he had directed Nandalal Bose to allow Nishikanto to paint freely according to his inner inspiration. Nandalal was very friendly with his students and would often take them on picnics. On such occasions the line between student and teacher vanished, he became one of them. Thanks to this warm, understanding teacher, Kobi's artistic work reached a very high standard. Like Gurudev, Abanindranath Tagore also kept a close watch over Nishikanto's artistic flowering. Once Kobi

went with his friend and fellow-student Bonobihari to Ranchi to the latter's aunt's house. The wild natural surroundings of Ranchi offered a wonderful backdrop for their artistic imagination and both of them completed a series of paintings there. For Kobi, Bonobihari's aunt's warm hospitality and affection were an additional 'bonus'.

After seeing their Ranchi paintings, Guru Abanindranath Tagore was so pleased that he wrote to Nandalal Bose expressing his deep appreciation of the work and suggested that a special exhibition be organised for these two painters' Ranchi-work.

Quite a few years ago Bonobihari came to Pondicherry and I was fortunate enough to meet him as I knew his sister. He told me a lot of things I did not know about Gurudev and Nishikanto while they were at Santiniketan. It was he who told me that Nishikanto would regularly read the *Arya* edited by Sri Aurobindo.

(To be concluded)

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTY

I do not take the same view of the Hindu religion as J. Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with his endeavours that come in in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral-temple, half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail but always fantastic with a significance — crumbling or badly outworn in places, but a cathedral-temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and its real presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. The outer social structure which it built for its approach is another matter.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 139)

SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE TO THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY

It was on 11 December 1948 that the Andhra University awarded the University's Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize to Sri Aurobindo.

It was for this occasion that Sri Aurobindo sent his message, a message whose importance for India and for the world is perhaps second only to the 15 August 1947 message.

In this issue we reproduce that message.

We have added some incidental material:

Some correspondence, an article by and two articles on C. R. Reddy who was the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University and a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO'S MESSAGE TO THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY

You have asked me for a message and anything I write, since it is to the Andhra University that I am addressing my message, if it can be called by that name, should be pertinent to your University, its function, its character and the work it has to do. But it is difficult for me at this juncture when momentous decisions are being taken which are likely to determine not only the form and pattern of this country's Government and administration but the pattern of its destiny, the build and make-up of the nation's character, its position in the world with regard to other nations, its choice of what itself shall be, not to turn my eyes in that direction. There is one problem facing the country which concerns us nearly and to this I shall now turn and deal with it, however inadequately, — the demand for the reconstruction of the artificial British-made Presidencies and Provinces into natural divisions forming a new system, new and yet founded on the principle of diversity in unity attempted by ancient India. India, shut into a separate existence by the Himalayas and the ocean, has always been the home of a peculiar people with characteristics of its own recognisably distinct from all others, with its own distinct civilisation, way of life, way of the spirit, a separate culture, arts, building of society. It has absorbed all that has entered into it, put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements into its fundamental unity. But it has also been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, republics also, diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, developing different brands or forms of civilisation and culture, many schools of art and architecture which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilisation and culture. India's history throughout has been marked by a tendency, a constant effort to unite all this diversity of elements into a single political whole under a central imperial rule so that India might be politically as well as culturally one. Even after a rift had been created by the irruption of the Mohammedan peoples with their very different religion and social structure, there continued a constant effort of political unification and there was a tendency towards a mingling of cultures and their mutual influence on each other; even some heroic attempts were made to discover or create a common religion built out of these two apparently irreconcilable faiths and here too there were mutual influences. But throughout India's history the political unity was never entirely attained and for this there were several causes, — first, vastness of space and insufficiency of communications preventing the drawing close of all these different peoples; secondly, the method used which was the military domination by one people or one imperial dynasty over the rest of the country which led to a succession of empires, none of them permanent; lastly, the absence of any will to crush out of

existence all these different kingdoms and fuse together these different peoples and force them into a single substance and a single shape. Then came the British Empire in India which recast the whole country into artificial provinces made for its own convenience, disregarding the principle of division into regional peoples but not abolishing that division. For there had grown up out of the original elements a natural system of subnations with different languages, literatures and other traditions of their own, the four Dravidian peoples, Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Sind, Assam, Orissa, Nepal, the Hindi-speaking peoples of the North, Rajputana and Behar. British rule with its provincial administration did not unite these peoples but it did impose upon them the habit of a common type of administration, a closer intercommunication through the English language and by the education it gave there was created a more diffused and more militant form of patriotism, the desire for liberation and the need of unity in the struggle to achieve that liberation. A sufficient fighting unity was brought about to win freedom, but freedom obtained did not carry with it a complete union of the country. On the contrary, India was deliberately split on the basis of the two-nation theory into Pakistan and Hindustan with the deadly consequences which we know.

In taking over the administration from Britain we had inevitably to follow the line of least resistance and proceed on the basis of the artificial British-made provinces, at least for the time; this provisional arrangement now threatens to become permanent, at least in the main and some see an advantage in this permanence. For they think it will help the unification of the country and save us from the necessity of preserving regional subnations which in the past kept a country from an entire and thoroughgoing unification and uniformity. In a rigorous unification they see the only true union, a single nation with a standardised and uniform administration, language, literature, culture, art, education, — all carried on through the agency of one national tongue. How far such a conception can be carried out in the future one cannot forecast, but at present it is obviously impracticable, and it is doubtful if it is for India truly desirable. The ancient diversities of the country carried in them great advantages as well as drawbacks. By these differences the country was made the home of many living and pulsating centres of life, art, culture, a richly and brilliantly coloured diversity in unity; all was not drawn up into a few provincial capitals or an imperial metropolis, other towns and regions remaining subordinated and indistinctive or even culturally asleep; the whole nation lived with a full life in its many parts and this increased enormously the creative energy of the whole. There is no possibility any longer that this diversity will endanger or diminish the unity of India. Those vast spaces which kept her people from closeness and a full interplay have been abolished in their separating effect by the march of Science and the swiftness of the means of communication. The idea of federation and a complete machinery for its perfect working have been discovered and will be at full work. Above all, the spirit of patriotic unity has been too firmly established in the people to be easily effaced

or diminished, and it would be more endangered by refusing to allow the natural play of life of the subnations than by satisfying their legitimate aspirations. The Congress itself in the days before liberation came had pledged itself to the formation of linguistic provinces, and to follow it out, if not immediately, yet as early as may conveniently be, might well be considered the wisest course. India's national life will then be founded on her natural strengths and the principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to her and its fulfilment the fundamental course of her being and its very nature, the Many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma.

This development might well be regarded as the inevitable trend of her future. For the Dravidian regional peoples are demanding their separate right to a self-governing existence; Maharashtra expects a similar concession and this would mean a similar development in Gujarat and then the British-made Presidencies of Madras and Bombay would have disappeared. The old Bengal Presidency had already been split up and Orissa, Bihar and Assam are now self-governing regional peoples. A merger of the Hindi-speaking part of the Central Provinces and the U.P. would complete the process. An annulment of the partition of India might modify but would not materially alter this result of the general tendency. A union of States and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India.

In this new regime your University will find its function and fulfilment. Its origin has been different from that of other Indian Universities; they were established by the initiative of a foreign Government as a means of introducing their own civilisation into India, situated in the capital towns of the Presidencies and formed as teaching and examining bodies with purely academic aims: Benares and Aligarh had a different origin but were all-India institutions serving the two chief religious communities of the country. Andhra University has been created by a patriotic Andhra initiative, situated not in a Presidency capital but in an Andhra town and serving consciously the life of a regional people. The home of a robust and virile and energetic race, great by the part it had played in the past in the political life of India, great by its achievements in art, architecture, sculpture, music, Andhra looks back upon imperial memories, a place in the succession of empires and imperial dynasties which reigned over a large part of the country; it looks back on the more recent memory of the glories of the last Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, — a magnificent record for any people. Your University can take its high position as a centre of light and learning, knowledge and culture which can train the youth of Andhra to be worthy of their forefathers: the great past should lead to a future as great or even greater. Not only Science but Art, not only book-knowledge and information but growth in culture and character are parts of a true education; to help the individual to develop his capacities, to help in the forming of thinkers and creators and men of vision and action of the future, this is a part of its work. Moreover, the life of the regional people must not be shut up in itself; its youths have also to contact the life

of the other similar peoples of India interacting with them in industry and commerce and the other practical fields of life but also in the things of the mind and spirit. Also, they have to learn not only to be citizens of Andhra but to be citizens of India; the life of the nation is their life. An elite has to be formed which has an adequate understanding of all great national affairs or problems and be able to represent Andhra in the councils of the nation and in every activity and undertaking of national interest calling for the support and participation of her peoples. There is still a wider field in which India will need the services of men of ability and character from all parts of the country, the international field. For she stands already as a considerable international figure and this will grow as time goes on into vast proportions; she is likely in time to take her place as one of the preponderant States whose voices will be strongest and their lead and their action determinative of the world's future. For all this she needs men whose training as well as their talent, genius and force of character is of the first order. In all these fields your University can be of supreme service and do a work of immeasurable importance.

In this hour, in the second year of its liberation the nation has to awaken to many more very considerable problems, to vast possibilities opening before her but also to dangers and difficulties that may, if not wisely dealt with, become formidable. There is a disordered world-situation left by the war, full of risks and sufferings and shortages and threatening another catastrophe which can only be solved by the united effort of the peoples and can only be truly met by an effort at world-union such as was conceived at San Francisco but has not till now been very successful in the practice; still the effort has to be continued and new devices found which will make easier the difficult transition from the perilous divisions of the past and present to a harmonious world-order; for otherwise there can be no escape from continuous calamity and collapse. There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. There is a question whether she may prosper more harmlessly in the outward life yet lose altogether her richly massed and firmly held spiritual experience and knowledge. It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. There are indeed other numerous and difficult problems that face this country or will very soon face it. No doubt we will

win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny.

December 1948

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest,*
CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 498-504)



‘YOUR EXTRAORDINARY VICE-CHANCELLOR’¹

“YOUR extraordinary Vice-Chancellor”, said Rajaji once, addressing the Andhra University Convocation. “Extraordinary” — that is the right word. Dr. C. R. Reddy has long worn the mantle of the Vice-Chancellorship of the Andhra University, he has certainly worn it with ease and distinction, and every year has but enhanced the ease and the distinction. Nevertheless, it doesn't seem quite to circumscribe his person or symbolise the peculiar force of his personality. You hear from time to time somebody or other saying: “You see, Reddy's real forte is in politics: *There* he would have achieved wonders, he would have gate-crashed the Everest of achievement.” But when C. R. Reddy actually played a rather prominent part in our provincial and national politics — between 1921 and 1926 and again between 1930 and 1936, two almost equal periods, though in two different planes — people used to say with a knowing wink, a wistful air, or a sneering gesture: “Oh, C. R. Reddy! He's really cut out for leadership in education. The acerbities and asceticisms of politics are *not* for him.” Human nature, alas, is no simple formula. It revels in seeming dichotomies, in baffling contradictions. To generalise — to assume the physician — to pronounce the symptoms — to prescribe the cure — these are fa-tally easy. Gandhiji was a saint, he had no place in politics; Srinivasa Iyengar was a supersubtle lawyer, he ought never to have plunged into the political whirlpool; Sarojini Naidu was a gifted poetess, and why must she exchange “the flowery fields of poesy for the dry dust of politics”? “Must — must — why must?” asks a character in one of the novels of Mrs. Virginia Woolf. Who are we to say “must” or “mustn't” to unpredictable, incommensurable man? We should learn elementary humility —

1. This was originally written in February 1949.

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless —

and take men as they are and try to understand them. Each individual is *sui generis*. He is evolved by the loom of Time for a particular purpose. Is it any use regretting that Shelley was not Keats, or that C. R. Reddy is not C. R.? Keats was a pure poet, Shelley was a poet and politician both — but is that a sufficient reason for the derogation of Shelley?

Ramalinga Reddy was born in the village of Cattamanchi in the Chittoor District on the 10th December 1880. After a brilliant academic career at the Madras Christian College, he proceeded to England with a Government of India scholarship, and joined St. John's College, Cambridge. . . .

It was the right atmosphere for Ramalinga Reddy. His brilliant mind, under the impact of the intellectual warmth of Cambridge, put forth petal by petal, and soon blossomed in its full splendour. An eager student of history, he was charmed by the human pageant, but he was intrigued as well, and he might have often mused like Eliot —

Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed.
In memory only, reconsidered passion . . .

Ramalinga Reddy fully participated in the social and intellectual life of Cambridge, made many fruitful contacts with men like Keynes and Squire and Philip Price that ripened in due course into lifelong friendships, and laid deep the foundations of that amazing scholarship, dispersed yet deep, unpredictable yet accurate, — which has awed, delighted and tantalised us for a generation and more. He forged too the marvellous instrument of his dialectic — shining as burnished steel and also agile and sharp as steel — that has well-nigh proved the unattainable ideal of his admirers and the utter despair of his antagonists in debate. He made friends with the Powys brothers and their sister Gertrude, and he was occasionally the guest of their father, the Rector of Montacute. On one occasion he spotted an unusual flower, and they promptly called it after his name. Llewelyn (Lulu) Powys and John (Jack) Cowper Powys, Louis Wilkinson (Marlow) and C. R. Reddy, — it must have been a singular group of dare-devil intellectuals.

A few months ago, Mrs. Llewelyn Powys (Alyse Gregory) wrote to me: "Louis Wilkinson was *delighted* to hear of Dr. Reddy and remembers him with so much pleasure, and all the exciting talks they had, and his brilliant mind. My sister-in-law — Miss Gertrude Powys — says that he used to study with great concentration an engraving that hung on the wall while prayers were going on . . . She says they used often to talk of Dr. Reddy." What would we not give now for a record of those conversations, those sinuous spirals of reasoning, those blinding Himalayas of dialectic. "God omnipotent and eternal!" exclaimed C. R. Reddy once; "Indeed! If God is omnipotent, hasn't He the freedom and the power to will and commit suicide? How is he necessarily eternal then?" Dr. McTaggart, to whom Reddy's conundrum was posed, could only shrug his shoulders and shake his head in despair. Or, may be, there were debating thrills in the Union, — and it must have been a treat to watch young Reddy, his eyes twinkling with mischief, his tongue precipitating verbal thunders or emitting flashes of devastating wit. Or, again, there were election excitements, as when he made the main speech for the evening, with not a minute's previous notice, in support of Dadabhai Naoroji's candidature for the Commons — and such an audacious and splendid speech too. No wonder C. R. Reddy was elected, by right and virtue of his exceptional gifts, both Vice-President of the Union and Secretary of the Liberal Club.

Having secured First Class in History tripos, C. R. Reddy toured America before returning to India. It was an educative tour, for after all America was needed to redress the balance of England, the New to balance the Old. Back in India at last, in 1908 he succeeded the great Sri Aurobindo as Vice-Principal of the Baroda College. A further round-the-world tour took him to Britain and the continent of Europe, to America and Canada, to Japan and China, to the Philippines and Malaya. He was now rich in knowledge and experience; he had assimilated the best from the West and the East; he was, so it seemed, more than amply qualified to teach and to organise teaching, to lay down broad educational policies and to carry them into effect. And a field for the play of his extraordinary faculties seemed now to open out before him — and Mysore's lure was irresistible. Principal of Maharaja's College between 1916 and 1918, and Inspector-General of Education before the age of forty, — and so the future stretched out before him in a vague endless vista of infinite possibilities. His lectures on European History were inspiring flights that made his students experience a sense of participation in the swelling events of the past. His discourses on University Reform were almost as epoch-making as the Sadler Committee's Recommendations. Where, then, was the boundary that would limit C. R. Reddy's future?

But India in 1920 was on the eve of momentous happenings, and the future of a single individual, however talented and however eminent in his own way, was rather irrelevant in the larger national context. The age of compromises, the 'nonage' of Indian politics, was over; the age of absolutes, the great Heroic Age — as C. R.

Reddy himself tellingly named it — the Gandhian Age, had begun. Education was a minor side issue — hardly an issue — compared to the life-and-death issue of national emancipation. Conflicting and contradictory slogans rent the air. The Montford Reforms were to be worked, — they were to be wrecked; and so cooperation and non-cooperation came to a furious grapple, and the pulses of the nation beat at feverish pitch. C. R. Reddy, responding obscurely to the compulsion of the moment, but unfortunately misinterpreting its meaning, resigned his Inspector-Generalship, and joined the Justice Party in the Madras Legislative Council. A fresh start in life? — yet not altogether, for as early as 1908, while in Baroda, he had made contacts with Sri Aurobindo, Subodh Mallik, Keshavrao Jadhav and K. G. Deshpande, determined nationalists all of them. The fire had slumbered, but had by no means been extinguished. And now suddenly fanned into a flame, it glowed indeed — but alas! in the winding corridors of the Justice Party. It was more a false than a fresh start! Presently, the Congress passed, to quote Mr. A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, from the chrysalis stage of non-cooperation to the butterfly stage of swarajism, and a number of Congressmen, including the redoubtable S. Satyamurti, entered the Council. In 1924, after the new elections, C. R. Reddy cut away from the Justice Party and organised the United Nationalist Party, and in the coming months, as one of the leaders of the Opposition, correctly and eloquently interpreted within the Council Chamber the real feeling in the country, the scalding sense of exasperation, and no less the fiery determination to strive, to fight, to come through the ordeal unscathed. A series of pitched battles took place, and C. R. Reddy more than held his own, even against such formidable debaters like the Rajah of Panagal and Ramaswami Mudaliar. “Plucked birds”, he nicknamed the reconstituted Ministry; and as for the Third Minister, — why, he was neither a flying nor a singing bird. “Simply because time passes,” he told the Council once, “memory should not also pass with it.” On another occasion he succinctly declared: “Dyarchy is not a disease peculiar to Madras. It is an All India disease.”

Soon after the Andhra University Act was placed on the Statute Book, C. R. Reddy accepted the offer of the foundation Vice-Chancellorship of the new University. Mr. Iswara Dutt records a conversation in which C. R. Reddy is revealed as by no means over-enthusiastic about this third start in his career. Located at first at Bezawada (“Blazewada”, C. R. Reddy once called it), the new University taxed all the resources of its Vice-Chancellor, his knowledge and his experience, his vision and his executive ability, the power of his eloquence and the reserves of his personality. C. R. Reddy was thus lost — almost lost — in the serpentine coils of administration, the enunciations of policy, the drafting of the University Code and the Standing Orders, the recruitment of the personnel, the supervision of the Affiliated Colleges; and he was also if only for a time, caught in the cyclone of wordy warfare, the “Battle of the Sites”, Rajahmundry, Vizagapattinam, Anantapur, Bezawada — they hotly canvassed their respective claims; and the remedy came at last in the

irrevocable choice of Waltair Uplands, on all accounts a jewel of a site for a teaching University.

In the meantime, the wider arena of national politics was seething with excitement. The Simon Commission had come and gone. The Independence-wallahs — Srinivasa Iyengar, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose — were waxing stronger every day. The Calcutta Congress of 1928, and still more the Lahore Congress of 1929, emphasised the balance-sheet of disillusion and the aggressive mood of impatience in the country. Lahore declared for Complete Independence, and once again Gandhiji gathered into his thin sure hands the invisible controlling threads of the vast national organisation. There was a stir everywhere. Gandhiji started his now celebrated Dandi march to manufacture contraband salt. A pinch of contraband salt became the symbol of defiance to the established authority. The cries of Satyagraha filled the air with unprecedented fury. “The women were splendid.” Gone was the purdah, gone was their agelong timidity, and the women too defied the bureaucracy. And the bureaucracy acted. Repression negotiated lower depths than ever before. Lathi charges were the order of the day. British Indian prisons became the nerve-cells of freedom. C. R. Reddy painfully observing it all from the vantage spot of academic aloofness, could stand it no longer. He resigned his Vice-Chancellorship in a spirited letter to the Governor, a letter which, Mr. Khasa Subba Rau justly describes as “a great classic in the country’s patriotic literature”.

For months Satyagraha and repression fought a war of attrition — till at last Lord Irwin was compelled to cry halt and reach an understanding with Mahatma Gandhi. The “semi-naked fakir” had won, and he proceeded to London as the sole plenipotentiary of the Congress to the Second Round Table Conference. His return, the new Governor-General, Lord Arlington, the frayed nerves of the people — the inevitable happened: the ingredients fused into gunpowder potency, and another convulsion shook the country. C. R. Reddy, at once within and without Satyagraha Movement, espoused the nationalist cause in a series of statements and speeches, noted alike for their clarity, their remorseless logic, their controlled passion, their timely appositeness. In a material sense, of course, the Movement fizzled out — and yet it was but a Pyrrhic victory for the bureaucracy, it was but the last, or the last but one, flicker of the candle before the final extinguishment. At Ranchi, some Congress leaders decided upon a reorientation of policy. Gandhiji too realised that a change in tactics was necessary, and blessed the parliamentarians. The Government of India Act of 1935 was now an accomplished fact, and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru wailed Cassandra-like, “If we don’t work it, it will work us.” The immediate future was an ominous question-mark that men vainly sought to read and answer.

In 1936, C. R. Reddy resumed the stewardship of the Andhra University, and he has been in the saddle since. In 1937, however, he was nominated to the Upper House, along with the Vice-Chancellors of the Madras and Annamalai Universities. Rajaji, Rajan and Prakasam for the Treasury Benches, and Srinivasa Sastri, C. R.

Reddy and Sir K. V. Reddy for the Opposition — to name but a few — made parliamentary democracy a real and exciting adventure. Wit and repartee, humour and sarcasm, — unpredictable, unpremeditated, — gave “life” to the proceedings, and set a high standard in debate. On one occasion, C. R. Reddy was speaking on a motion of Sir K. V. Reddy’s. The Prime Minister interjected, “I do not know if my Hon. Friend, Sir K. V. Reddy, would desire me to rise again and reply.” C. R. Reddy at once remarked, “I am not Sir K. V. Reddy yet.” And Sir K. V. Reddy added, “Thank you for the compliment.” On another occasion, in the course of his comments on the budget, C. R. Reddy said jokingly, “He (C. Rajagopalachariar) has added a humorous touch by appealing to the romantic authority in finance, the most romantic of authorities, Mr. Micawber!” When somebody pointed out a flaw in his figures, C. R. Reddy agreeably retorted: “I am not talking arithmetic. I am talking politics.”

During World War II C. R. Reddy, like most others, could hardly follow the gyrations and involutions in Congress policy. He felt strongly that the Allies should be enabled to win the War, lest irremediable disaster should overwhelm humanity. He gave support to the war effort, received a Knighthood which he returned later, and he contributed to the columns of the *Twentieth Century*, the *Madras Mail* and other papers reasoned appraisements of the shifting political situation — appraisements which, in the given context of political longrange bombardment between the Congress and the League, and the seemingly Olympian unconcern of the bureaucracy, had no chance of a hearing. For the rest, C. R. Reddy’s energies were claimed by the wartime transplantation of the Andhra University from Waltair to Guntur, the organisation of new departments of study and research, and the shift back, soon after the War, to Waltair.

It was during the War, however, on the 10th December 1940, that his friends and admirers organised his *shashtipurti* (60th birthday) celebrations at the University Campus at Waltair. A bronze bust of C. R. Reddy, bringing out, in Maharaja Dr. Vikrama Deo’s words, “the wonderful force and beauty of expression” characteristic of the man, was unveiled, a public meeting was held, and a commemoration volume was released. Speaking on the occasion, Sir C. V. Raman said:

Dr. Reddy, by his personality and his example, has been able, as perhaps no Indian with the exception of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, to instill into a body of scholars that idealism for which he himself stands. And so long as that idealism, that love of truth, impels the University, no one need fear for its future.

Mr. C. H. Masterman called Dr. Reddy “the best beggar I know . . . He does not beg for himself but for a good cause, and that makes all the difference.” From the congratulatory messages read on the occasion, two or three sentences may be quoted here. While Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar referred to Reddy as “a brilliant

scholar, a logical and realistic thinker and a person of ripe culture", Mr. S. Srinivasa Iyengar expressed his warmest admiration of Reddy's "great and brilliant abilities, of his gift of telling expression, of his rare charm as a conversationalist and of the distinguished good work which he has done as an educationist and as a public man. His conspicuous services to the Andhra University are unique and will, I am sure, be long remembered with gratitude." And Sir M. Venkatasubba Rao said that Reddy's "philanthropy, which has taken a most unobtrusive form, shows his self-sacrifice. His championship of unpopular views attests to his courage of conviction." A fine set of bouquets worthy of Reddy and the occasion.

We now return to our original question: Politician or Educationist, what is he? C. R. Reddy is neither, in the absurd narrow sense of the terms, but he is something that integrally includes both, and yet excels both; in a word, he is a humanist. To politics C. R. Reddy brought, as a Woodrow Wilson or Gokhale brought, a certain academic accuracy and austerity, a background of historical knowledge and the steady wisdom that comes from such knowledge. To education, especially University education, he brought, as a Curzon or a Malaviya brought, the fervour, the boldness, the energy, and the tireless drive of politics. C. R. Reddy's achievement in the two fields of politics and education, while it is no doubt less sensational in the one part and less strictly conventional in the other, is quite authentic and purposive in its own way. "A Niagara unharnessed," said my friend K. S. Venkataramai, describing C. R. Reddy in the context of renascent India; rather is C. R. Reddy a Niagara uncomfortably and incompletely harnessed for a limited constructive purpose, — and there it is wise to leave the matter.

The humanist indeed transcends the politician and the educationist, and so his quintessential humanity is C. R. Reddy's most engaging and disarming quality. To talk to him, to listen to him, — put tactful leading questions which will provoke him to answer — to ply him with Boswellian ineptitude in order to stint him into Johnsonian outbursts — to prod him cunningly, to lead him on to exercise his illuminating wit on a variety of problems; these are the ways, the only ways, in which one can contact and keep even a temporary hold on C. R. Reddy's amazing personality. He is not old, but he thinks he is; at least he wants us to think he is — "I think I am growing old," he said the other day, and added, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, "at any rate, I am not growing younger!" Be that as it may, there is no diminution whatever in the vigour of his mind, in the versatility of his interests, in the sheer vivacity and phosphorescent brilliance of his talk. He is the great, the supreme epigrammatist in our public life. If Rajaji sways audiences with his parables, C. R. Reddy electrifies them with his epigrams. "Appointments result in attachments, while disappointments lead to detachments," he said once, summing up party loyal-ties in the Justice Party. On another occasion he said, "The Staff Selection Board has been described as neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring, but rotten red herring; if so, why do Hon. Ministers swallow it?" When stones fell into a meeting at Egmore as C. R. Reddy was addressing

it, he promptly declared, “This is the Justice Party ushering in the Stone Age in our politics?” Today, C. R. Reddy concocts as fine epigrams as ever, and phrases, more phosphorescent than ever before, fly from the anvil of his mind to be niched in our memory for ever. Jinnah is the “Coriolanus of Indian politics” — and where can we come across an apter summing up of that Titan energy, that demonic will, that career compounded of glory and pestilence? “Sanskrit, a dead language?”, C. R. Reddy recently exclaimed. “It is a dead language only to those who are dead to culture.” Or, for prolonged spells, “The Rajahmundry Arts College buildings are nearer archaeology than currency. . . The College has suffered from a standstill agreement extending over fifty years, and it is high time that its accession to modern educational organisation is effected.” “. . . The changeover from Utopia to History is not only the right course but the only one that gives us a chance of survival. . . . We have to be a fact and not a freak or a fancy. . .”

Echoes from Sanskrit and Telugu, from Tamil and Kannada, from history and legend, from mythology and philosophy, all swish in the air, there is an animation in the eyes, there is a vividness in the whole aspect, and the man is tremendously, truly, extraordinarily, alive. A kind generous gesture, a deprecatory annihilating epigram, a profound illuminating comment, a breathless incantatory recital, they are all in the day’s game; and after an hour in C. R. Reddy’s company, you return with your faculties refreshed, your mind enriched, your sensibilities quickened and deepened. And that is why C. R. Reddy the man — the sterling Humanist — is greater than the politician and the educationist and the man-of-letters; that is why Rajaji finds him “extraordinary”; and that is why his friends, so many of them, admire and love him.

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

(Introduction to *Essays and Addresses of C. R. Reddy* edited by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, published by Andhra University Press, Vishakapatnam, 1966, reprinted 1997.)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTER TO SIR C. R. REDDY 15 JULY 1948

SRI AUROBINDO ASRAM.
PONDICHERRY.

July 15, 1948

To
Sir C. R. Reddy
Vice-Chancellor
Andhra University — Waltair

I have been unable to give an early answer to your letter of the 28th June, 1948 which reached me rather late owing to accidental causes. This was due to some hesitation arising from my position as head of the Ashram at Pondicherry. I am not a Sannyasi and my Yoga does not turn away from life; but still I have always followed the rule of not accepting titles, honours or distinctions from any Government or public institution and have rejected or stood back from even the highest when offered to me. But after long consideration I have felt that the distinction which the Andhra University proposes to confer upon me is not of the same character and need not fall within this rule. In any case I do not feel that I can disregard the choice made by the Andhra University in selecting my name for this distinction, and even if things were otherwise, I would have felt that I must accept this as an exceptional case and I could not disregard the choice by an institution like yours of my name for this prize. I authorise you therefore to consider my name for this award and if the University confirms its choice of me, my acceptance of your National Prize. One difficulty remains; you know perhaps that I have been living in entire retirement, appearing in public only on the occasion of the four Darshans on which I receive the inmates of my Ashram and visitors from all parts of India. Otherwise I do not go out of the rooms in which I live and still less ever leave the Ashram or Pondicherry. This makes it impossible for me to go to Waltair to receive the distinction conferred upon me. I would have therefore to ask for an exception to be made in this matter in my case.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, CWSA, Vol. 36,
pp. 504-05)*

**GOVERNOR OF MADRAS, KRISHNA KUMARSINHJI'S
LETTER TO SRI AUROBINDO
30 OCTOBER 1948**

Confidential
[Seal of the
Governor of
Madras]

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Guindy,
30th October 1948

Dear Shri Aurobindo Ghosh

As Chancellor of the Andhra University I have great pleasure in informing you that the Syndicate of the University has resolved to present to you the 'Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize' for this year and I would like now to offer the same to you. I sincerely trust that you will be prepared to accept this offer.

With kind regards. I am looking forward to your darshan.

Yours sincerely

Krishna Kumarsinhji

Shri Aurobindo Ghosh
Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry



**SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTER
TO THE GOVERNOR OF MADRAS,
CHANCELLOR OF THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY
[6 NOVEMBER 1948]**

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry

[6 November 1948]

To

H.E. The Governor of Madras
Chancellor of the Andhra University

I am in receipt of your letter of 30th October informing me that the Syndicate of the Andhra University has resolved to present to me the "Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize" for this year. I have received with much gratification your offer of this distinction bestowed on me by your University and I am glad to intimate to you my acceptance. I understand from what you say about Darshan that you will personally come to Pondicherry for this purpose and I look forward with much pleasure to seeing and meeting you.

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, CWSA, Vol. 36,
pp. 505-06)*



**C. R. REDDY'S LETTER TO NOLINI KANTA GUPTA
6 NOVEMBER 1948**

C. R. Reddy
VICE-CHANCELLOR

[Seal of the Andhra University]

ANDHRA UNIVERSITY
Maharanipeta P.O.,
Vizag Dist.

Dated 6th November 48

My dear Sri Nalini Kanta Gupta,

I hope that by now the Master has signified his kindly assent to the offer of award made by His Excellency the Governor-Chancellor. All that I can say is the University has received the crown of honour from sacred hands.

I have already written to you about the date by which, if at all possible, the gracious and inspiring message should reach me.

The actual conferment will be at the Convocation which is to be held on 11th December. I shall deliver the citation of presentation myself.

The Syndicate has resolved that I should go in deputation to Pondicherry and personally present to the Master the Bronze Medallion and the cheque for Rs. 1,116. I beg to know of the date and time that would suit the Master.

I shall be held up for a week after the Convocation, dealing with consequential business. So, any time from the 20th December onwards to the 25th would suit my small convenience. But in this matter the Master's pleasure is our law.

Please let me have a very early reply.

Yours sincerely

C. R. Reddy

P.S. Though it is only the Vice-Chancellor that is deputed to make this offering, a number of Syndicate members and others connected with the University have expressed their desire to accompany me and pay their deep respects to the Master on the occasion. Naturally I cannot give my consent until permission is received. You may kindly let me know His pleasure on this point also.

**GOVERNOR OF MADRAS'S LETTER
TO SRI AUROBINDO
8 NOVEMBER 1948**

[Seal of the
Governor of
Madras]

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Guindy,
8th November 1948

Dr. C. R. Reddy National Prize — Andhra University.

Dear Shri Aurobindo Ghosh,

Thank you very much indeed for your letter dated November 6th accepting the Dr. C. R. Reddy National Prize. It is a source of great gratification both to myself and to the Andhra University that you have agreed to accept the prize.

To my very great regret I find myself unable to go to Pondicherry in the near future and since the prize has to be awarded by the time of the University Convocation early next month, the Vice-Chancellor Dr. C. R. Reddy will be proceeding to Pondicherry to present the prize to you.

I hope to be able to come to Pondicherry and have your Darshan some time as early as possible.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Krishna Kumarsinhji



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTER TO C. R. REDDY 5 DECEMBER 1948

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Dec 5, 1948

To
Shree C. R. Reddy
Vice-chancellor, Andhra University

I am sending herewith the message. But it has developed to an excessive length nearer to half-an-hour's reading than to the minimum five minutes. I hope that the theme which, I am told, is still somewhat controversial, will not be thought for that reason ill-suited to the occasion and that the length of time required will not be found unmanageable. I have felt some scruples on these two points and would be glad to be reassured that it is otherwise.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 506)



VICE-CHANCELLOR C. R. REDDY'S GLOWING TRIBUTE

MR. CHANCELLOR, our object in founding the National Prize was to bring about association between the members of the University and the inspiring personalities of contemporary India — they that make history and will live in history as permanent lights that lead us through the encircling gloom. If that was our object, we have reached the summit of realisation today by the kindly acceptance of this offering of ours by Sri Aurobindo. We are not awarding; we are making an offering. If it is due to the eminent merit in Humanities of Sri Aurobindo that we are paying him this tribute, his acceptance of it is the climax of the good fortune of the Andhra University and its blessing.

Amongst the Saviours of Humanity

In all humility of devotion, I hail Sri Aurobindo as the sole sufficing genius of the age. He is more than the hero of a nation. He is amongst the Saviours of humanity, who belong to all ages and all nations, the Sanatanas, who leaven our existence with their eternal presence, whether we are aware of it or not.

The Rishi tradition is the most glorious and priceless feature of Hindu culture. Its origin is lost in mystic antiquity, but its flow has never ceased. It will continue its sublime course till it mingles itself with eternity. We had Rishis in the Vedic era. And then a succession of Seers, of whom Gautama Siddhartha, the fairest flower and fulfilment of humanity, towers to the highest heaven, and the Sages of the Upanishads, Mahavira, Nanak, Ramdas, the inspirer of Shivaji, and in our own times, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi, and he to whom we are today presenting our National Prize, Sri Aurobindo.

A great Frenchman has hailed Sri Aurobindo as the last of our Rishis. Really, he is the most recent, for in this world of death and sorrow, Rishis are an undying race of bliss. And they pulsate every now and again with far-flashing revelations like those wonderful stars which astronomers call the Light-houses of the Celestial Regions.

Sri Aurobindo excels in the range and compass of his genius. He is a poet, dramatist, philosopher, critic, interpreter and commentator of the Vedas, the Gita, and all the transcendent lore and legend of India, and he is something higher than these, the Saint who has realised his oneness with the Universal Spirit, and has fathomed the depths and brought up treasures of transcendent value and brilliance. But these many aspects of Sri Aurobindo possess an organic unity of thought, impulse and purpose. They all reflect in their several phases the light of eternity that is in him.

I am not going to narrate the life of Sri Aurobindo, as chronologically lived. Our Professor, Mr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's splendid biography of Sri Aurobindo is there for all to read. A book written in a style of superlative charm and power, and

one which could without exaggeration be regarded as a masterpiece in English literature. Perhaps I may recall by way of pardonable vanity and the petty desire to shine in Sri Aurobindo's reflected light, that we are both Cambridge men, he very much my senior, and that I succeeded him as the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College. I had the honour of knowing him, though scantily, in his Purva-Ashrama. We had a number of friends in common. Mr. A. B. Clark, the Principal of the Baroda College, remarked to me, "So you met Aurobindo Ghose. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond." And he added, "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions." Clark was a materialist of materialists. I have never been able to understand how that worldly but delightful person could have glimpsed the truth, then latent, about Aurobindo. But then does not the lightning's blinding flash, which lasts but a moment, leap forth from the dark black bosom of the cloud? The Alipore Jail, where he was consigned to solitude and meditation for a year, marks a turning-point in Sri Aurobindo's career. The British Government had bound his body and liberated his soul. They did not mean it, but the best things that we do are, not infrequently, done unwittingly, spontaneously. Body enslaved, soul set free, that was the paradox of his incarceration. It was there that his first mystic experiences and direct perception of the Eternal Truths, which according to our Sphota theory are ever present, floating as it were in the space that envelops the Universe, occurred. Beginning to realise himself he retired to Pondicherry in 1910. Can a Rishi ever retire? He may retire in body; very often the retirement of the body is the prelude to the soul ascending the heights of heaven and ranging over the entire globe. His physical being is in Pondicherry; but his influence, can we set limits to it in space or in time? His Ashram, one of the beacon-lights of the world, attracts the devout and the serious-minded without distinction of race and country. Judged by temporal standards he is seventy-six years old, but really time cannot touch him, or earth and its impurities. His soul is like a star and dwells apart.

Unison of Literature, Metaphysics and Sadhana of Realisation

In Sri Aurobindo, literature, metaphysics, and the Sadhana of realisation, are a spiral ascending from Earth to Heaven in mutual support and unison. In the superb summary of Mr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "the Seer has fronted reality; the Poet has hymned his 'Gloried Fields of trance', the Philosopher has sought to interpret the vision in terms of reason; the Yogi has formulated a method, a multiform technique, for achieving the desired change in consciousness; the sociologist has thrown out significant hints in regard to the organisation of tomorrow's world; and the creative critic has sensed the rhythms of the 'future poetry' and described how the 'new' poet will ride on the wings of an elemental spirituality and articulate the ineluctable rhythms of the Spirit."

As a poet Sri Aurobindo ranks high. In that most difficult of all forms of prosody, the Blank Verse, which under inartistic hands has a fatal tendency to become prose, he has a place all his own, which is among the highest. "Urvasie", and "Love and Death", and "Savitri", a legend and a symbol, are in charm and beauty without a parallel in English Literature. "Ahana" and "Dawn over Ilion" are masterpieces in Hexameter, a classical metre difficult to transplant in modern soils. "Savitri" is rising and growing, and has not yet reached the full flush of her grace and beauty, and when it does, it will have given a new colouring, a new life and attraction to the immortal legend of the Mahabharata.

In many of his works of criticism, interpretations of the Veda and the Gita, he has combined vast research with the intuition of a poet, the reflection of a philosopher and the vision of a Rishi. He has a sentence that will serve to inspire the United Nations Organisation and give it spiritual ground and hope — "Evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards, and must one day realise." It is a fine phrase "complex oneness" and a far-reaching ray or hope and comfort though today we are all overwhelmed by the complexity and do not seem to be nearing oneness except under the devastating might of the Atom Bomb.

Sri Aurobindo's faith in the sure but slow evolution of human unity in harmonious diversity is too robust to be dwarfed or defeated by hard, stubborn facts. Rather it is a faith that is out to conquer fact and remould it nearer to the heart's desire. He is of the race of prophets who see the present as but a transitory moment that should not be allowed to overcome the optimism of man.

Prophet of the Life Divine

It is not as a man of letters or of philosophy, that Sri Aurobindo reaches his unique eminence; but it is as a Yogi who has caught the light and reflects it in blissful abundance. He is the Prophet of the Life Divine, to him it is an experience and not mere idea. This experience could be shared by others. The nature of his spiritual quest, which led to his great conquest, he thus described in a letter to C. R. Das who defended him in the Alipore trial — "I see more and more manifestly that man cannot get out of the futile cycle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself to a new foundation. How could our present instruments, intellect, life, mind, body, be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge, and some mastery of the secret."

He presents his gospel in a book that is a landmark in the history of human thought and aspiration, "The Life Divine", which Sir Francis Younghusband has acclaimed as the "greatest book published in my generation". Pythagoras spoke of the Music of the Heavens. Here is the Music of Humanity, no longer still sad,

ascending to Heaven. Sri Aurobindo believes that we shall evolve into a higher stage of being; and this evolution will enable us to overcome the limitations and miseries of our present existence and lead us to a world whose course is equable and pure — a life of harmony and bliss. This process of evolution is actual. It is operating steadily here and now, and will not stop short of fulfilling itself. In due course, Man will attain the New Life, in which pains and sorrows will have no existence and death no sting.

Sri Aurobindo relieves our despair by the certainty of this advent. In the world of death, he, the Immortal, gives us the assurance of Immortality. The world has need of Thee, Sri Aurobindo, and that is why Thou art with us still.

Mr. Chancellor, I now request you, on behalf of the Andhra University, to be so good as to make the offering of this National Prize, with which it is my unmerited good fortune to have my name linked, *in absentia* to Sri Aurobindo. I doubt, though, if the term, *in absentia*, is properly applicable. For though Sri Aurobindo leads a life of rigorous seclusion, rarely seeing people or being seen by people, yet thousands of devotees in all parts of the world feel him as a real presence. He is not of the earth and does not mix with the earth, but heaven envelops us all. So, Mr. Chancellor, honour the University, and if you don't think it impertinent of me to say so, honour yourself by awarding the Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize to Sri Aurobindo.

C. R. REDDY

(*Mother India*, 19 February, 1949)



CHAMPAKLAL'S DIARY NOTE ON C. R. REDDY'S MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO

C. R. REDDY saw Sri Aurobindo on the 20th of December, 1948, to present the award of Andhra University. That day Mother came at 8.30 a.m. and told me that she was going to come to Sri Aurobindo's room at 9.45 to prepare things. C. R. Reddy came in at 10.58 a.m. and was there for half an hour.

Afterwards Mother said of him: "He is a nice man. He understands things." She had said the same thing the previous evening, when she first met him.

He gave to Sri Aurobindo a gold medal and a sum of Rs. 1,116. Mother gave the medal to me for safe-keeping and sent the cash to be put in the box in which only money offered to Sri Aurobindo was kept.

(Champaklal Speaks edited by M. P. Pandit and revised by Roshan, 2002, p. 145)



C. R. REDDY'S LETTER TO THE MOTHER 22 DECEMBER 1948

C. R. Reddy

No. 2, Taylor's Road,
Kilpauk P.O.,
Madras-10.

22nd December 1948

Esteemed and Holy Mother,

I reached home this morning at 6.30 A.M. and immediately telegraphed my safe arrival and deep obligation to you, Sri Aurobindo, and all, for your infinite kindness to me during my recent visit.

The 'Hindu' and the 'Mail' and the 'Indian Express' have all published my Press Communique on the tender of the National Prize to the Master and his gracious acceptance thereof.

I am very, very sorry to have to report to you that my dear daughter's pains and sufferings have been worse during the last two and a half days, and are

exceedingly, tragically trying to my feelings. May we all beseech your Grace, to improve her condition and render her free from these agonising pains and sufferings. Pray excuse the liberty of this request, made by an afflicted heart to the Great Mother.

With my pranams to yourself and Sri Aurobindo,

Ever yours devotedly

(C. R. REDDY)



C. R. REDDY'S LETTER TO THE MOTHER 9 SEPTEMBER 1949

C. RAMALINGA REDDY
VICE-CHANCELLOR, ANDHRA UNIVERSITY,
WALTAIR

9.9.49

My dear Mother,

Herewith a small coin of my life, minted in Your Ashram, for the gracious acceptance of Yourself and the master as a token and tribute of my devotion.

Ever Thine

C. R. Reddy



THE ASHRAM OF SRI AUROBINDO

AN IMPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION

[Dr. Reddy had the pleasure, last December, of taking to Sri Aurobindo the Prize awarded to the Master by Andhra University. We welcome this article of his, in which he records with remarkable sensitivity and charm his personal response to the Ashram's way of life and to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo.]

THROUGH a series of unpremeditated events, a power beyond me drew me last December to Sri Aurobindo and the Holy Mother at their Pondicherry Ashram. I spent a few days there in an atmosphere of inspired bliss. Probably I was beside myself most of the time. Something higher gripped me. Most reluctantly I left the place. Fondly I dwell in memory on the unmerited but wonderful reception I was accorded through causeless grace of the Master and the ineffable tenderness of the Mother.

I do not wish to dwell on this occasion on matters pertaining to inner life. The theme of this paper is the objective nature and significance of the Ashram and the thoughts it evoked in me. It has a significance not only for the Hindus but for entire humanity. There is nothing specially Hindu in Sri Aurobindo's teachings and discipline. The soul is not Hindu. God is not Hindu. They are Universals. The origin of a particular creed may be traced to a particular height with localisation in time and in geography, but the Ganges and sister rivers of like power for holiness all flow into the same ocean of eternity.

The teachings and discipline of the Ashram have had their source in the mystic heights of Vedic culture, but God is one; man is one. The truths of the soul transcend limitations of body, race, time and space. They have universal, eternal application.

In the Ashram there are pious men and pious women, who by birth belong to various faiths; naturally Hindus mostly, because of the attraction of neighbourhood and of inherited culture. There are Christians, Zoroastrians, Muslims and members of other creeds. But in conviction and in life, these many have been fused into one. Therefore, the faith acquired in the Ashram — a faith which does not negative reason — is a common possession of all. In the discipline they have adopted for the growth and fruition of their lives, they are one. It is the unity of harmony, not of mechanical uniformity and monotony, that makes for the orchestral swell of a heavenly music.

Misguided Questions About Sri Aurobindo

It is a pity that the nature of Sri Aurobindo Ashram is not universally understood. Where it is not understood, it cannot be appreciated. We have had a few critics, who, in my opinion, have not understood and therefore could not appreciate.

One of them wondered how Sri Aurobindo, a Yogi and a Sanyasi, (apparently synonymous terms to him), could have sent his famous message to the Andhra University, when at the recent Convocation, it did itself the honour of conferring its National Prize on him for Eminent Merit in Humanities. The “eminent” should have been “supreme”. He argued: “Aurobindo has renounced the world. Why then does he want to sponsor the idea of linguistic provinces and other affairs? Is this all C. R. Reddy’s forgery?” Apparently his idea is that Sri Aurobindo should have nothing to do with the world, as according to him, he had renounced it. After divorce one should not visit his wife!

Another critic, writing more recently, could not understand why Sri Aurobindo, the mystic, leads a mysterious life at Pondicherry, giving darshan to people only on a few selected occasions, and refusing to undergo publicity. He is a Star, no doubt; but should he not be a Cinema-Star? He even insinuates that the Mother is everything there and the Master almost nothing.

I do not wish to answer point by point. In his preface to his *Pro Vita Sua*, Cardinal Newman ably exposed the inadequacy of point by point replies in dealing with controversies relating to the field of the Soul and Spirit. What is required is explaining, so far as this could be done by language and by human thought which have their limitations, the nature of the life lived and involved. If that cannot explain and convince, nothing else would. Where that fails, logic cannot succeed.

This is not the first time that Sri Aurobindo delivered messages of secular import. He gave a prescient reading of the future when he declared that the liberation of India and of a good bit of the world were contingent on the Allies triumphing over Hitler and his Asuric hordes. He always has been on the side of Suras, the powers of Light, in their battle with Asuras, the powers of darkness. The light he gives is a steady one and permanent. He does not create confusion by hasty opportunism and momentary tactics of a spectacular kind.

The Confusion Between Sanyasi and Rishi

At the root of the misconception that I am trying to dispel is the fallacy that he is a Sanyasi, who has given up the world and therefore, has no right to re-enter it. There is a confusion here between Sanyasi and Rishi. What the critic has said may or may not be true of a Sanyasi but it is not true of a Rishi. Sri Aurobindo is a Rishi.

Renunciation, final, absolute, is not possible for the compassionate. They may renounce this or that which is not compatible with perfect illumination or power, but they cannot give up the struggling, sorrow-ridden world without stretching a helping healing hand. The tenderhearted with pity in their souls and power in their hands, cannot be indifferent to the fate of human beings. The Sanyasi may feel that, to be care-free, one has to give up all care for others. That is not the way of the Rishi; nor of a Bodhisatwa, nor of the Master and the Mother at the Pondicherry

Ashram. If Nirvana is to be entered, it must be *after* the Mission of Compassion has been fulfilled and not before. And so it is that our saviours possess this trinity of grace — Wisdom, Power and Compassion. They are with us and for us. They look upon this hard earth as the stepping stone to Heaven, and not as its summary, irreconcilable contradiction which must be denounced and renounced.

The Sanyasi that discards clothes and the world is foreign to the Vedic spirit. Renunciation of the world is a creed of later growth and perhaps belongs to times when our race had become less virile and had to undergo defeat, despair and despondency. The Rishis were not Sanyasis. Anything but that. They were seers who saw, felt and transmitted the truths they came into contact with — truths eternal, ever-existent, neither made nor unmade by gods. By their spiritual discipline, a natural process and no magic, they sought for and acquired illumination and with it power. Knowledge is power; spiritual knowledge no less than scientific. They lived in the world, and for the world, they retreated to woods and lonely places. Retreat is not renunciation. Though they retired to forests, they had colonies there, peopled not only with men but with women. They grew the most beautiful flowers and the most charming Sakuntalas. They took part in the politics of the day and not infrequently played leading roles. Vashistha guided the Solar dynasties. Vishwamitra was a disturbing factor in his time. If they sought after spiritual illumination and power, it was not to enjoy solitary bliss on the top of inaccessible heights. It was not for attaining Kaivalya or Nirvana; but to be here with us and for us, to help us to improve, and to inflict punishment in case we proved too foolish or too obstinate. Their ideal was more the Bodhisatwa than the Buddha. The ancient Ashrams of the Vashisthas and Vishwamitras, of the Bhrigus and the Angirases, were brimful of a life of the world which, however, was not worldly; a life on earth that was not earthy, but directed to the good of humanity and its uplift to the stature and status of the bright gods. They welcomed disciples and they received all persons that deserved to be received by their merit. Jabali was of low illegitimate birth but he was a Satya Kama, a lover of truth and was therefore reckoned a Vipra.

Nor were the studies in Ashrams confined to spiritual lore and sacred mysteries. The disciples had to fetch wood not only to feed the sacred fires but the kitchen fires also for feeding the inmates. They brought flowers for worship. Archery and the art of war were fostered. Vishwamitra taught Sri Rama and Lakshmana the use of potent weapons. Agnivasa was the guru of Drona, the Brahmin, who taught the Kauravas and Pandavas without forfeiting his Brahminhood. They trained Kshatriyas in war and weapons so that they might protect our dharma from the aggression of Asuric hordes. Fighting for a righteous cause was not considered to be a degradation of our moral or spiritual nature. The very avatars of gods during their sojourn on earth made blood flow in rivers and swam through them to the eternal gratitude of our race and its devotion.

There was nothing anaemic about the Aryan culture at its best and purest. It is to the immortal credit of Sri Aurobindo that he has tried to re-establish on earth after the lapse of many decadent centuries the true creed and the genuine discipline of the Vedas.

How Sri Aurobindo Unlocked the Secret of the Vedas

In the education of Sri Aurobindo western classics played a leading part. He was a first rate scholar in Greek. Greek and the civilisation of Greece, are twin sisters of Bhasha and ancient Aryanism. Greek seems to have given Sri Aurobindo the key that unlocked the Veda to our generation.

Sri Aurobindo confesses that he does not know why there has been a mystery at the core of every religion; but it is a fact. We may not be able to explain the why and wherefore thereof, but in all religions there seems to be in the depths at the very centre a mystery. In the religion of the Greeks, there was the Eleusinian mystery, to quote but one instance. It is this idea that seems to have led Sri Aurobindo to search for and discover the key to the Vedas.

He had noticed, as all had done, the very close resemblance between the religions of Hesiod, Homer and our Vedas. There was nothing gloomy in either religion. The religion of Hellas teemed with strong Gods and lovely Goddesses who mingled freely with men and women and even entered into matrimonial relationship with them, begetting heroes and heroines, just as they did in Aryavarta in the twilight dawn of history. Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Athene and Aphrodite — are not all these the doubles of the Devas of the Vedic Pantheon? Gods could be defeated by men. The innate spiritual omnipotence of man was thus recognised and symbolised. There was not the same sharp and hopeless separation between heaven and earth as there has been since. Men and women having the blood of Gods and Goddesses in their veins were radiant, powerful and full of hope and joy. Wherever they trod flowers bloomed. They enjoyed life whether in earth or in heaven without fear of thereby forfeiting their right to the highest Swarga or the place to which good beings ascend.

And yet at the core of this bright and breezy religion of the Greeks, there was something deeper, a mystery hidden from the human eye but made clear to the initiates. This mystery was not celebrated as a joyous popular festival but as something solemn, awesome, to be held in secret and far from the madding crowd.

And a further correspondence between Vedic and Hellenic metaphysics: the gods of Greece were subject to an impersonal law and destiny more potent than themselves. Great as they were, there was something greater, more potent. Similarly with us, there was a law of destiny and of Karma supreme over all beings — including the gods. “Even Shiva cannot escape the consequences of his karma.”

Sri Aurobindo, an accomplished scholar in Greek and one who was steeped in the lore of our ancient Vedic culture, struck on the idea that in our case also there

must have been a mystery embodied in the Vedas. There was. He discovered it and revealed it to the world.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is in a sense factual. Even in its sublimest flights, it is based on fact, experience and personal realisation, and on seeing like a seer or Rishi. It rises like a pillar of cloud to heaven but it rises from the earth wafted on wings of Sadhana.

Broadly speaking there have been two types of Vedic interpretation, ritualistic and naturalistic. According to the former, by performing the Yagnas and other rites with the appropriate hymns or Mantras, we compel the Gods to give us cattle, horses, and material and other boons that we desire. Even Brahma is obliged, if the Tapas is properly performed, to grant boons, however formidable or even dangerous.

The Naturalistic school, of which Yaska may be regarded as the founder, sees in the Vedic Usha, Vritra, Indra, Agni, Aswins and the other Gods and Goddesses, phenomena of nature personified.

There is a third school, the school of Sri Aurobindo which sees in the Vedic Hymns very real and sublime spiritual truths. When the Rishis performed Yagnas and prayed to Indra for "Go" or "Aswa", it was not for the paltry purpose of getting a few cows and a few horses. The Vedic mountain did not labour to produce such silly mice. So Go and Aswa must refer to something greater and of far greater significance to man's life and his progress. Sri Aurobindo proves with wonderful clarity and logic — his spirituality is so inseparably united with reason — that Govu means illumination such as comes from the rays of the sun and Aswa meant not horse but Power. And what for did our Rishis desire acquisition of Illumination and of Power? Not for looking at themselves in a mirror and sitting and brooding over their own beauty like a silly girl; and not to let power remain a bare possession without fruitful application. It was for helping the world and for using them as stages in their yet further progress to the rank and region of the Devas, that they sought Light and they sought Power, sought Omniscience and Omnipotence.

And now we can in some small measure understand the nature of this extraordinary Ashram in which life and the joy of life are mingled in the happy union with spirituality and spiritual progress. It is dug out of the Vedas and planted in Pondicherry.

The Wonderful Mother and the Harmonious Regime

And the wonderful Mother, the presiding genius, and the great Master, the inspiring soul: here we have in perceptible symbol Purusha and Prakriti, giving life, light and joy around.

Early morning the Ashramites assemble in the street overlooked by the balcony from which the gracious Mother gives Darshan; remaining for a while moving about, smiling, looking bright, radiant, a ray of divinity like Usha. If anybody thought that

a Holy Mother should cultivate ascetic frigidity and a perpetual scowl as evidence of her spirituality, he would be mistaken. She is not an ascetic. She plays tennis! The Devas are always bright. At this assembly there is a large concourse of men, women and children with bhakti in their hearts and love, light and joy in their looks and talk and behaviour. Nothing gloomy. It is the dawn that dispels the darkness.

At a later hour, the Mother presides like Flora, the Goddess of Flowers, with huge baskets laden with colour and perfume placed before her. Men, women and children, bathed in happy reverence and joyous veneration advance to salute her and receive from her benedictions and flowers. Then the different people foregather in their different circles to talk over the great truths that count; or each retires to his place to meditate and to cultivate psychical discipline and practise sadhana. Sadhana is the way to realise and experience, to perceive, to see and become a seer. This Ashram is no 'dry as dust' world. It is a world apart from the world, but existing in it and for it like the Ashrams of our Vedic Rishis. The men and women of the colony have their meals mostly in common. Starvation is not regarded as an essential process for developing spirituality. The food is simple. It is cooked by the women Ashramites. There is enough nourishment and perfect hygiene. And the women find in this service an aid to their Soul's progress.

There is a dairy where I saw some fine cattle. That is the source of their milk supply.

There is a garden, and the vegetable garden there is one of the best I have seen; and I am not quite a bad judge of gardens and vegetable gardens.

There is a bakery and wholesome bread is assured. Also a laundry and a small soap factory.

Intellectual nourishment is not neglected either. There is a first class printing press equipped with the latest monotype and other machines. And books to read in plenty and a very fine library and a variety of periodicals.

Shabbiness in dress and manners and crude, vulgar conduct are not cultivated as arts leading to the soul's perfection. Said the great Kalidas: "Shareeram Khalu Dharma Sadhanam" and so the disciples go about dressed in decent clothes, clean, simple and becoming. A guest house is maintained where European conveniences could be had. I hope this will not be regarded as a double transgression of holiness and nationalism.

But in many respects what impressed me most were the educational institutions maintained by the Ashram and the ancient spirit of strength and joy that pervades them. The Mother, the embodiment of grace, light and tenderness, ordered an exhibition of games and physical exercises by the boys and girls of the Ashram Schools. I said to myself, "If all the schools were like this, won't India be unassailable by internal foes or external?" The parades were excellent. The exercises were gone through not merely efficiently but cheerfully. The girls were dressed in pants and tight-fittings jackets. They performed hazardous exercises like vaulting. Though

there was risk of accident to limb, if not to life, they advanced cool, calm, and resolute with bright looks and confident smiles, and went through the exercises without a single hitch or a single failure. Our Sanyasi critics may be aghast that the Mother, who is all grace and tenderness, should have organised our girls, as it were, into a corps of yogic Amazons. But the girls don't lack the charm and grace of their sex. She told me that it was the Calcutta killings and the bestial abominations perpetrated on our helpless women and children that made her think of organising the students in her schools, boys and girls, into a corps capable of self-defence. At the root is the great Vedic idea that, without a strong body, you cannot have a strong soul, undaunted in danger and ready to perform the great task, the root principle of all Dharma, of defending the weak and helpless.

The Nation's Need and the Master's Work

The second criticism is: Why then does Sri Aurobindo shun the world? Why does he not come out and go about? Could we get a more prescient leader or a more powerful? I reply: What is wrong in Sri Aurobindo remaining in seclusion at Pondicherry? Retreat into the "tapovanam" was a frequent way of seeking the right atmosphere for spiritual exercises, concentration and penance. Religious leaders have found in seclusion a potent help for mental and spiritual efficiency and advancement. If the Rishi is spending his time and energy for helping the progress of the world and for equipping himself with the means of achieving that object, what business is it of ours to find fault? For such presumption involves the idea that we are better fitted to tell the Seer what means he should adopt than the Seer himself. I suppose this presumption is due to ignorance more than impertinence. Could not Sri Aurobindo be trusted to know how and by what methods he could carry out his great mission and acquire the needed illumination and power? I for one do not feel myself confident to tell the Master what school he should attend and what lessons he should learn.

Personally, and without meaning to lay down the law for one whose rule I feel I have to accept with implicit obedience, I see no reason why Sri Aurobindo should not, now that India is no longer a dependency, tread our soil once again with his hallowed feet and inspire the millions with his radiant personality. I see no reason. This does not mean that there is no reason. That is for the Master to decide. But Madras and all the cities in India and more specially the stricken provinces of Bengal and the Punjab would like to have his healing touch and his invigorating presence. But it is not for me to prescribe the ways and means. I know that the Master is promoting these and other humanitarian causes not merely in India but all over the globe in his own way and through agencies he deems the best and methods he deems most potent. So I leave it at that, believing where I cannot see.

After four days spent at this contemporary reproduction of the ancient Vedic

Ashram, I left Pondicherry to return to Madras. But did I leave? Or was it only my body that left?

C. R. REDDY

(Reprinted from the September 3, 1949 issue of *Mother India*)



C. R. REDDY'S TELEGRAM TO THE MOTHER

EXPRESS

MOTHER
ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

DEEPLY GRIEVED BY THE PASSING AWAY OF SRI AUROBINDO. ONE OF THE GREATEST LIGHTS OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN EXTINGUISHED BUT IT WILL CONTINUE TO SHINE BY REFLECTION FROM YOU AND THE DISCIPLES

C. R. REDDY



**C. R. REDDY'S LETTER TO THE MOTHER
5 DECEMBER 1950**

University of Mysore

Pro-Chancellor C. R. Reddy

West Lake
Yelwal Road
Mysore

Tel. No. 885

Tel. Add.: Pro-Chancellor

5th December, 1950

Dear Revered Mother,

I was stunned to hear this morning the radio announcement of the setting of the Sri Aurobindo Sun — stunned and staggered. There is a gloom in my soul and also on the world. Persons of Sri Aurobindo type appear but rarely in our midst. They come with a mission and they depart when they feel that their mission has been fulfilled or that they had arranged for the mission to continue through their disciples.

Agaram Rangiah, a Mysorean, who paid his respects to the master and you during the recent Darshan, told me that Sri Aurobindo was not looking quite well and that in consequence, the auspicious function had to be hurried through. But there was no anxiety on the score of Sri Aurobindo's health.

Well, one of the great lights of the modern world has suffered extinction or is it only obscuration? But won't the light continue to be reflected under your direction by the many mirrors moulded and polished by the Master's hand? I am confident that his teachings and the lesson of his life will continue to be spread by you and the disciples. Truth is eternal. It is caught and transmitted by the Rishis of whom Sri Aurobindo is one and as illustrious as any figuring in our ancient myth or legend. He is an immortal. His body has gone, but his soul remains.

...

How sad, and yet in a way how consoling and inspiring, to think that you sent me through Agaram Rangiah, some flowers, symbols of your blessings and benedictional.

Believe me Mother,

Your sincere devotee.

C. R. Reddy

**NOLINI KANTA GUPTA'S LETTER TO C. R. REDDY
8 DECEMBER 1950**

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Telegram
Aurobindo — Pondicherry

Pondicherry
8-12-1950

To
Shree C. R. Reddy

Dear friend,

Mother has received your telegram and your kind letter. She says Sri Aurobindo is alive as before although not in material body — the body is being kept as long as it lasts. Mother continues Sri Aurobindo's work. She sends you her blessings.

We would have liked Sri Aurobindo to be in our midst in his material body, but if he chose otherwise, let his will be done.

Nolini Kanta Gupta



**C. R. REDDY'S LETTER TO NOLINI KANTA GUPTA
12 DECEMBER 1950**

C. RAMALINGA REDDY,
PRO-CHANCELLOR,
MYSORE UNIVERSITY

My dear Gupta,

Very many thanks for your wonderfully spiritual and inspiring letter written under the direction of the Mother.

I enclose a copy of the letter which I addressed to a gentleman in Mysore.

Please remember me to Amruth, Satya Karma, Narayana Reddy and others.
How is H. V. Krishna?

With all kind regards,

Yours very sincerely,

C. R. Reddy



**C. R. REDDY'S LETTER
TO K. S. NARAYANASWAMY
12 DECEMBER 1950**

C. RAMALINGA REDDY,
PRO-CHANCELLOR,
MYSORE UNIVERSITY

WEST LAKE
YELWAL ROAD
MYSORE

December 12, 1950

Dear Sir,

Very many thanks for your kind letter of 10 December asking me to speak at a meeting to be held as a mark of respect and honour to Shri Aurobindo.

I am sorry it is not possible for me to accept your invitation.

I have just heard from the Ashram. The Ashram people feel that Shri Aurobindo is not really dead but is still with them, though in another form. The Sanathanas never die. It is we that sometimes become dead to them. They are immortal; and we are the mortals.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Signature) C. R. Reddy

To,
Sri K. S. Narayanaswamy,
Secretary, The Mysore Institute of Public Affairs,
"Chethana"
Laxmivilas Agrahar,
Mysore.



THE LAST PHASE¹

Silence augmenteth grief, writing increaseth rage,
Stal'd are my thoughts, which lov'd and lost the wonder of our age:
Yet quicken'd now with fire, though dead with frost ere now,
Enrag'd I write I know not what; dead, quick, I know not how.
Hard-hearted minds relent, and regiour's tears abound,
And envy strangely rues his end, in whom no fault she found.
Knowledge her light hath lost; valour hath slain her knight.
Sidney is dead; dead is my friend; dead is the world's delight.

— Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke

THE twenty-fourth February 1951 began indeed like any other day, yet soon it darkened, and the cloud lingered the whole day, and for days afterwards. “C. R. Reddy is dead. . . . C. R. Reddy is dead”: the words tom-tom inside the mind still, and the agony persists. Why had C. R. Reddy to die at such an inopportune moment? Why had he to die at all? Vain, vain are all regrets, and worse than vain are these infantile questions. When, in December 1949, all but stunned by the death of my own father, then just seventy, I wrote to Dr. Reddy, I received from him one of those ambrosial letters in which wisdom and generosity of understanding are doubled with a marvellous beauty of phrase and memorability in utterance. In the course of the letter Dr. Reddy observed, as it were parenthetically, “I am nearing seventy myself. . . .” As I read the words I could not help experiencing a start, for Truth can be startling at times; the terrible implication behind the words was not to be escaped, nor could I then escape it; but even so, little did I realise that the words were accurately prophetic and that Dr. Reddy, in writing as he did, was really glimpsing the date of his own journey's end.

When Dr. Reddy decided, in September 1949, to accept the offer of the Pro-Chancellorship of the Mysore University, I, like many others, was frankly puzzled, and like them I too wondered why he was doing it. I know that Dr. Reddy loved the Andhra University with a love bordering on unreasoning infatuation, — why then was he withdrawing from the scene of his arduous and achievements, why was he resolutely detaching himself from the institution second to none in this country which he had fostered with so much love and devotion? I caught him once in a wistful mood, it was late in March 1949; “I am sad, sad beyond words,” he said, “my stars are setting one by one.” The immediate reference was to the resignation and impending departure of one of the stalwart professors of the University. I had to say something, and I said, “That, Sir, is the way of the heavens, and not alone the

1. This section was originally written in March 1951.

way of the world; a star sets, but only to rise elsewhere; a star sets, and another soon rises in its place.” He quickly answered, “That may be poetry or philosophy or frivolity, but that does not satisfy me.” Dr. Reddy’s was thus an absolute and possessive love, and even when the intellect reasoned and understood, the heart refused the usual palliatives and preferred to suffer in silence. It is the same old tragedy of loving, “not wisely, but too well”.

In December 1948 — if not even earlier — Dr. Reddy began planning for the Silver Jubilee of the Andhra University. He would be completing his seventh term as Vice-Chancellor in May 1951 and the Silver Jubilee would fall on the 26th April; when the celebrations were over he would retire, carrying the splendid taste of the fulfilment of his life’s endeavours to “Padma Prabhasa”, his home in Chittoor. Such were his plans, such his hopes. Taking possession of his new residence in the Campus in March 1949, he threw himself with zest into the task of furnishing the building and even effecting structural alterations in it. The layout of the garden claimed his particular attention. “I shall perhaps end my days here” he said more than once, and added, not without pride, “I shall end my days here, here where my stars shine.” And he was perfectly sincere.

Why then did Dr. Reddy take that apparently inexplicable decision in September 1949?

It is difficult to formulate a satisfactory answer. One answer is that Dr. Reddy never did really leave the Andhra University. At the party arranged in the Faculty Club on the eve of his departure, I ventured to say that Dr. Reddy’s “leaving” the Andhra University was like Mahatma Gandhi’s ceasing to be even a four-anna member of the Congress. Later, when we were by ourselves, I told him that Mysore like Satyabhama would maintain the Parijata tree, but Andhra like Rukmini would gather the flowers. “You are naughty,” he said, and changed the topic. Another answer that has been hazarded is that it was not Dr. Reddy who left the Andhra University, it was the Andhra University that left Dr. Reddy. But both the answers, however they may each hold a distinctive fraction of the truth, are nevertheless wrong. The clue to the mystery must be sought rather in the far backgrounds of C. R. Reddy’s career in Mysore, the buried memories of a meridian glory now lost in the shades of night, the obscure infinities of achievement and failure, and, above all, in the categorical imperatives of the human heart. A full explanation, even if I have found it, — which I don’t think I have! — cannot be elaborated here. But what can reasonably be attempted is to give a hesitant thumbnail sketch of the ‘Last Phase’ of C. R. Reddy’s extraordinary career in this world peopled largely by little minds and timid hearts.

The ‘Last Phase’ of a great career is akin to the afterglow of the setting Sun. But each phase, and certainly the last, has also its own individual dramatic vicissitudes, and its own formal symmetry and completeness. “C. R. Reddy: the Last Phase” — as we view it in retrospect, we mark its indistinct beginnings, its noon-bright intense

commotions, the hazy lull of the afternoon's decline, the surge of sudden splendour in the evening, and the final irretrievable plunge in the vast illimitable Sea.

Independence, so long fought for and so ardently sought, came to us at last on August 15, 1947. Conscious of his obligations to the new India just starting on her difficult career, Dr. Reddy relinquished his Knighthood, and in his Independence Day message both cast long lingering glances at the remote Past and peered anxiously into the uncertain Future:

What is the significance of her 4,500 years of history, so much of it still undisclosed?

How little we really know about India. A vague picture rises before our mind's eye: jungles teeming with elephants; tigers and crocodiles; fabulously rich princes, and soulsearing poverty; emaciated holy men; magicians climbing the air on unsuspected ropes; the imperturbable self-sure British ruler, contrasting so strangely with the Christ-like figure of Gandhi, or the challenging intensity of the Mohammedan leader, Jinnah; the marble shimmer of the moonlit Taj Mahal, which most people would vote the loveliest building in the world; snow-clad Himalayas piercing the sky; the Ganges, every drop of its holy flood sanctified to the millions who do it homage.

To this haphazard travelogue, the current news has added some disquieting details. Can India, now separated into two sovereign nations, Pakistan and Hindustan, ever again become one? Can she, with all her varied peoples, multiple tongues, castes, ancient and competing religions, ever be successfully federated into an effective whole?

There was guarded elation everywhere; but the elation was mixed up with a certain discomfiture as well. Freedom had come, but it was after all, as Sri Aurobindo reminded us, a fissured freedom. Besides, there were vague apprehensions round the corner, and anxiety sat heavy in our hearts. The news from the two Punjabs presently confirmed our worst fears. It was not civil strife as it had been understood before. This was different; this was Hell; this was mass murder and revolting bestiality. Refugees in their tens of thousands — in their millions — ran their humiliating races across the ambiguous middle line dividing the two Punjabs. The Government of India, caught napping yet once again, bestirred themselves; much was done, but the best proved pitifully inadequate to meet the situation. The Refugee Camps piled up filth, and bred the venom of gigantic disillusion; and responsible officials nosed squalor from a respectable distance and turned away in despair. Dr. Reddy was moved to the depths, and did what he could to collect a tidy sum for the Sardar Patel Refugee Fund. Addressing a meeting at the time of the Divali Celebrations, Dr. Reddy feelingly pointed out that our comparative ease and security

in the South should not make us blind to the indescribable sufferings of our brothers and sisters in the North-West; and he even thought that our heroic efforts to introduce Prohibition could have been postponed, and some of the money we were throwing away might have been diverted to the alleviation of the terrible misery of the victims of the Partition.

But events in Kashmir and Hyderabad quickly pushed other matters into the background. As regards Hyderabad, Dr. Reddy made a fervent appeal to the Nizam to place his trust in “a democracy, arithmetical and not algebraical”; and he also threw out the suggestion that, being a trilingual state, it might with advantage be reconstituted as a confederation, with Telengana, Karnataka and Maharashtra enjoying autonomous powers. Of course, all wisdom and friendly advice, from wherever they came, were quite lost upon the Nizam and his fanatical advisers. The surgical Police Action had to be; and Sardar Patel had the satisfaction of solving the Hyderabad problem without much fuss and with little bloodshed. The cancer of the stomach that might have proved fatal had been cured in time; and India was saved.

On the other hand, Kashmir is on the international *tapis* still, and there would appear to be no early or easy way out of the Serbonian bog which has somehow come into being. The “Partition of Kashmir” has been canvassed more than once in influential circles in Britain. Dr. Reddy felt extremely anxious about our position in Kashmir and aired his views often both in private and in public. The idea of one more partition exasperated him, and he wrote:

Partition seems to be a passion with the Anglo-Saxons. They partitioned Ireland; they partitioned India; they partitioned Bengal and the Punjab; and they have partitioned Palestine on paper. They will try to partition Kashmir. If Congress leaders swallow this, as they did in a moment of generous idealism accept the division of India, they will be committing yet another blunder no less tragic.

And Dr. Reddy always held that India had been unwise to take the matter to the Security Council. “If a ruffian enters my house,” he told me once, “I would throw him out first and then report the matter to the Police. To run to the Police leaving the ruffian in my house is both weakness and idiocy.” He pleaded again and again for a leadership that was virile and a statesmanship that was realistic. To the very last he suffered because he sensed the dangers ahead with greater vividness than many men in power, and he also realised that it was ever the prophet’s destiny to play Cassandra in vain. In one of his last letters to me dated the 11th November 1950, Dr. Reddy wrote:

Just now I am worried over the situation of the country. Partition, to which our Leaders agreed for the sake of peace — incidentally I may remark I never did and was for fighting it out — has resulted in the most terrible problems on our

frontiers, problems which take the most inhuman and bestial shapes. To the communal danger, external and internal. is now being added the communistic, external and internal. In a country like ours with its pent-up caste and social hatreds, revenge by itself will be an adequate motive for communistic recruitment and the desire to settle ancient accounts. Our Foreign Policy also has been too much in the clouds to serve the real needs and purpose of the country. So, just now, I am in a rather depressed mood.

At the same time, Dr. Reddy held fast to the view that the Union Cabinet under Pandit Nehru was really a cabinet of national concentration, not a mere party junta. Dr. Reddy often compared the Nehru Cabinet to Gladstone's first ministry, and described it more than once as a ministry of all talents "under the lead of a master with a fervid heart and grand vision". Dr. Reddy's speech when he unveiled the portrait of Pandit Nehru at the Madras Cosmopolitan Club was pitched in the right key, and while not ignoring the difficulties inherent in the national situation, the speech radiated goodwill and appreciation and concluded by wishing the Union Cabinet "all the strength and all the wisdom and all the disciplined unity of crew and passengers required to navigate our ship in the troubled seas on which she has been launched".

On one matter, however, Dr. Reddy felt strongly. [The Sikh populace] had been literally uprooted in the Punjab, and the Sikhs were naturally in a mood of violent resentment; the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu organisations like the R.S.S. had been cold-shouldered by the Congress, and they too nursed resentment in silence; the Andhras had long asked for a Province of their own, and asked in vain, and they were likewise in no jubilant mood. It pained Dr. Reddy that the Congress should refuse even to understand the other fellow's point of view. He reminded the Dhar Committee that, at the time of the Muslim onslaught, only three communities in India had given fight to the invader — the Sikhs, the Marathas, and the Andhra-Karnatakas; all else had "fallen like nine pins" before the enemy. It was thus not at all surprising that these three sturdy peoples — the Sikhs, the Marathas and the Andhras — should now be anxious as regards their future, and claim for a place under the sun. Dr. Reddy felt sorry that "the ethical lash" should be so often laid on "the raw back of the Sikh community". "They have suffered enough," he declared, "without our adding reproaches and the insult and injury of public moral flagellation. While His Excellency Mr. Jinnah never lets down his followers or castigates them, we follow different ethics. Our ethics may be quite noble, but it violates too provokingly the natural impulse to hold that blood is thicker than water." What Dr. Reddy was afraid of was that at a time when complete unity of thought and action was necessary, Congress was encouraging a situation that might militate against the desired unity.

Then came the worst, the most heart-rending tragedy of all, the brutal assassina-

tion of Mahatma Gandhi on his way to prayer by a Hindu fanatic. Gandhiji fell, as Socrates and Christ and Lincoln had fallen before him, because like them he was in advance of his times, he preached and lived an ethical ideal for which the world was not ready, and a martyrdom such as his was required to drive some semblance of sanity into a mad and maddened world. Presiding over the commemoration ceremony held in the Andhra University Campus, Dr. Reddy pointed out the significance of the immersion of the ashes in holy Prayag. Gandhiji's had been a composite personality. Politics, ethics and spirituality were the three delicate strands that made that great and unique fabric of personality. Wasn't it, then, appropriate that the ashes of Gandhiji should be immersed in hallowed Triveni? Ganges, broad and disturbed and muddy, symbolised the hurly-burly of politics; the serene and deep blue waters of the Jumna symbolised the abiding values of Gandhiji's ethics; and the invisible but not less potent Saraswati symbolised Gandhiji's spirituality, the strength he had always derived from his "inner voice". One still nurtured the faith that the power that had led India to freedom if not to unity would complete the work and see the emergence in the fullness of time of a great and united India taking her proper place in a world freed from fear and the threat of atomic wars.

In July 1948, Dr. Reddy flew to Britain to attend the Conference of Empire Universities. He was now able to renew old contacts, and acquaint himself with the new developments in university life and university organisation in England. He was with Mr. Philip Price, and met Sir John Squire, both friends from his Cambridge days, and when he returned to Waltair after an absence of a couple of months, it was at once evident that he had undergone a rejuvenation in his spirit, for the light of new ideas shone in his eyes and he seemed to be imbued with a new hope and to be inspired by a new vision. What was it? He wouldn't explain, and perhaps he couldn't; but the eyes wore a telltale look, and there was no doubt he had returned all the better for the journey. Perhaps, the evidence he had found regarding the capacity of the British people to face facts and to triumph over adverse circumstances had filled his heart with wonder, and also with hope. "Character does it," he told me soon after his return, "I left my purse in taxi-cabs twice, and twice it came back to me. We in India talk too much Vedanta, and practise it too little. That is the difference between Britain and India." But he hoped that India too would rise to meet her onerous responsibilities, and become a nation with sterling character like Britain. Human nature was about the same everywhere; it wasn't divine in one place, and infernal in another. What was needed was right leadership, and an integrated national system of education that would turn out men of trained intelligence, men of character and integrity, men who would reshape India nearer our heart's desire. Right leadership would organise sound education — both education for the masses and education for an elite drawn from the masses — and such education would in its turn make farsighted leadership possible. Leadership in education was thus the clue to national salvation.

The impact of post-war Britain was but one of the two determining forces

behind Dr. Reddy during the last phase of his career. Another, a more prepotent, inspiration came from Dr. Reddy's renewed contact with Sri Aurobindo whom he had succeeded as Vice-Principal of the Baroda College forty years earlier. When the adjudication committee decided to offer the Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize for the Humanities to Sri Aurobindo, Dr. Reddy wrote to him asking whether he would accept the offer, thereby conferring a grace on the Andhra University as also on the Founder of the National Prize. Sri Aurobindo graciously agreed, and history was made. On December 11, 1948, at the Andhra University Convocation, the presentation was made, and Dr. Reddy's address was nobly tuned to the occasion. "In all humility of devotion," Dr. Reddy said, "I hail Sri Aurobindo as the sole sufficing genius of the age." He later visited the Ashram at Pondicherry, and had long interviews with the Mother as well as the Master. The article he wrote for *Mother India* on the work of the Ashram was a fine piece of writing, and went far to dispel current misconceptions regarding the Ashram and the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. What particularly attracted Dr. Reddy to Sri Aurobindo was the fact that Aurobindonian spirituality meant no easy or cowardly escape from life, but rather a more integral and intimate contact with life, and a multiple effort to purify and transform it. The Master seemed to offer the sole workable solution of man's obstreperous ills, and Dr. Reddy's head and heart responded readily to the Power and the Personality that was Sri Aurobindo.

In January 1949, on the urgent invitation of the Maharaja's Government, Dr. Reddy proceeded to Mysore to survey and report on the educational landscape of the State. One asked oneself: Was the wheel coming full circle, after all? Over a generation ago, Mysore had seen Reddy in the full plenitude of his powers. He was the resplendent Sun rising on the southern horizon. His intellect dazzled, his humour sparkled, and his witty sallies raced in every direction like sparks from the forge. He was learned, he was wise. His heart warmed and many knew the strength of his affections. He was unconventional, and he damned the consequences. He dared to think for himself, and dared too to make his thinking the basis of his actions. "It is my ambition to be the Voltaire of this country," he said once; "I shall of course fail, but it would be worth the trial." The roles of professor, poet, critic, debater, epigrammatist, and conversationalist fitted him by turns and all to perfection, or at any rate to a very high degree of competency. Both young and old were drawn to him, yet didn't quite know where they were with him. If the young were fascinated, the old were shocked and scandalised. His lectures on University Reform fused passion and prophecy, and revealed alike his firsthand knowledge of conditions in India and abroad and his clearheaded appraisal of the needs of renascent India. As Inspector-General of Education, he passed orders which bore the impress of his idealism, but gave no small disquiet to the Diwan. Throw open all schools to the "depressed classes"! What next? Surely Ramalinga Reddy was embarking on strange, even dangerous, courses. Excitement ran high, and public opinion was sharply

divided. An intestine struggle was waged between Reddy and the great Diwan, Visvesvarayya. It was something of a Homeric contest, and Titan met Titan, and steel met steel. The late Yuvaraja of Mysore was Reddy's especial friend and admirer; Visvesvarayya himself had no doubt whatsoever regarding Reddy's integrity. But wasn't Reddy too sure of his position, too impetuous, too intractable? The partisans of reform and reaction joined in the legislature, and Reddy's own eloquent and well-reasoned speeches, whether in immaculate English or in mellifluous Sanskritised Kannada, almost carried all before them. A point was reached presently when Reddy realised that it was no use carrying on the war with reaction any further or any longer. He had already packed much achievement into a few years. He had taught, he had reorganised secondary education, he had brought into being the University of Mysore. In that particular environment, in that queer context in space and time, there was little more that Reddy could do. He had come to the end of the tether as it were, — he could only break away. He therefore took the decision to withdraw from Mysore, but not before the late Yuvaraja had extracted a promise from him that he would go back should ever the call come again in peremptory fashion. Thirty years later, when the former Yuvaraja's son was the new Maharaja, when among the Maharaja's Ministers were some of Reddy's lifelong friends, admirers and even ex-pupils, the call did come in real earnest at last, and so Dr. Reddy went back to Mysore in January 1949.

A major bereavement notwithstanding, Dr. Reddy applied himself to the formidable task that faced him in Mysore, and after a careful personal examination of the problem in all its aspects presented his Report to Mysore's Chief Minister. It was a weighty and comprehensive document, and its principal merit was that it viewed education from pre-primary to the University stage as a single, interrelated and integrally organised whole, and not as a patchwork of odds and ends. The opening sentences struck the keynote of the entire Report:

There is a change from the British period. Independence naturally carries with it responsibility for our security. This involves up-to-date preparedness from the point of view of Defence Organisations, Industries and Communications, and Education.

This vigour and idealism and this fierce consciousness of the national urgency were the creative force behind the main conclusions in the Report. Fortright and lucid and clear, the Report harboured no hesitations and compromises, no self-deceptions and attitudinisations; rather was it a comprehensive blueprint for organising education to meet the pressing needs of a developing democracy that had just commenced on its career of independent existence. Many of Dr. Reddy's particular recommendations were no doubt open to criticism, and were in fact criticised strongly in many quarters; but that did not in any way affect the value of his scheme taken as a whole or the

weight of the arguments adduced by him in its support. By a coincidence, the Report of the Radhakrishnan Commission on Indian University Education was published almost immediately after the Reddy Report, and hence educational reform in the future must largely and liberally draw upon these two important documents.

At the conclusion of the labours, Dr. Reddy returned to Waltair, and it looked as though the Mysore excursion was over for good; but there were also persistent rumours that perhaps Dr. Reddy might allow himself to be persuaded to go to Mysore again, this time on something like a permanent basis. On the other hand, Dr. Reddy's meticulous attention to the details of University administration in Waltair — of which there was ample evidence during the middle months of 1949 — seemed emphatically to belie the reports. In the meantime, the forge that was Reddy's mind was continually active, and in his utterances, private or public, there was no diminution whatever of the usual resilience, vivacity and brilliance. He made a trip to Delhi, gave a typical Reddian address at Nagpur, and delivered to packed appreciative houses the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri Endowment lectures at Madras. In the lectures, Dr. Reddy's wit, learning, perspicacity and wisdom were fused in the right proportion, and in the result these lectures were among the finest he had delivered during his long and great career as a platform speaker. The subject was "Democracy", considered no doubt in relation to conditions in presentday India. Not since the late Mr. S. Srinivasa Iyengar gave his lectures on "Problems of Democracy in India" under the same foundation a decade ago has there been a more acute or more valuable analysis of the theory and practice of democracy with reference to Indian conditions. The lectures came at an opportune moment, and accordingly received wide publicity in Delhi and Bombay and not alone in Madras, a fact which evoked this spicy comment from Dr. Reddy: "What food for thought and what stimulus to stupidity!" The many vagaries and the diverting varieties of democracy in the Indian subcontinent offer endless scope for entertaining exegesis; but Dr. Reddy's lectures gave, in addition to the entertainment which was of a high order, much wise instruction as well. Dr. Reddy had by now attained the status of an elder statesman, and both on account of his age and his deep knowledge of affairs and uncanny perception of the laws of historical causation he was entitled to speak out, to admonish, or to offer constructive criticism regarding Government's policies and actions. It is gratifying to note that the University of Madras has now published these lectures in the form of a handy book.

The old rumours suddenly started anew, and by September 1949 it was clear to the meanest intelligence that there was something behind the rumours. Then came the authentic announcement that Dr. Reddy had been offered the post of Pro-Chancellorship of the Mysore University and that he had accepted the offer. He had resisted the pressure from his Mysore friends as long as he could, but he had had to give way at last. By signing his Report on Education in the Mysore State he had unwittingly signed and sealed and delivered himself to Mysore. Mysore and Andhra

were linked by destiny, and the destined link was Reddy. But for Mysore, he would not have been in Waltair as Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University; and but for the phenomenal progress of the Andhra University, he would not have received the peremptory summons to go to Mysore. That was how Dr. Reddy viewed the unexpected turn of affairs, and that was why he felt he had no escape from his fate. But the summons from Mysore opened to his vision a great tableland of opportunity to charge against and conquer. And should he fail, — but why should he? Dr. Reddy felt young again in spirit, his eyes glistened with hope, he charged, — but the race was quickly run.

Before leaving for Mysore to take up his new duties as Pro-Chancellor of the University and Educational Adviser to the Government, Dr. Reddy presided over the provincial Congress of Social Work held in October 1949 at Coimbatore. Apart from the usual Reddian features, the address was remarkable for the especial stress it laid on what he aptly called the philosophy of society. "Society," he declared, "is at the root of the State itself. Society is the fundamental principle of which the State is an organ and an agent for giving it protection." The enunciation of this philosophy of society came opportunely at a time when we were apt to assume that politics was both the centre and circumference of human life. Further, the good health moral and material of a society would largely depend upon the unselfish service forthcoming from its members; and such service was necessarily grounded on spirituality. Dr. Reddy equated spirituality, not with particular religions and creeds, but "with the spirit of humanity, our sense of oneness, our sympathy with the weak and the helpless." It was an important contribution to the current of vital ideas of our time, and Dr. Reddy returned to the theme in the Address he delivered before the Andhra University Convocation in December. After reading the Address in the papers, Mr. Rajagopalachari, then Governor-General of India, wrote to Dr. Reddy, "Permit me to express my warm appreciation of your Address at the Andhra University. I was delighted to read it, every word of which I most cordially endorse. It was both a brilliant and valuable address."

I called on Dr. Reddy on the morning of the day he was due to leave for Mysore. He was vacating the Vice-Chancellor's Lodge, he was leaving the University Campus, he was leaving Waltair. He had just finished his breakfast, and he gave nearly an hour to me. He talked freely — the talk ranged on a variety of topics — but it was evident that a tenuous film of suppressed sadness covered his otherwise dauntless and penetrating eyes. I told myself that I would meet him again elsewhere — at Mysore or at Chittoor — in Bangalore or Madras — when happily the constraint was no more. During the next twelve or thirteen months we corresponded a good deal, and Dr. Reddy was ever far more prompt than myself whose indolence was inexcusable; but in the flesh we were destined to meet no more. His first letters from Mysore wore a touch of melancholy, almost causeless melancholy:

Came here (Chittoor) for Pongal — found it a frost — no life, no joy.

The mood of melancholy continues, growing deeper and darker. There seems to be no end and no cure for it. I suppose the shadows are gathering. I am not sorry; I am not dismayed.

But there were other notes as well. “You must live by Aurobindo,” he wrote on the 28th January 1950, “and perhaps you will make others live.” Having read my article on “Andhra University: From Dr. Reddy to Dr. Krishna”, he wrote promptly, “I am very glad you gave full support to V. S. K. That is more to the point and purpose than *pithru pooja*.” Generosity of understanding and appreciation there always was, and a phrase — a word — would come making the labour of a month more than worth one’s while. Whenever he read something by me somewhere — were it no more than a review or even a “self-obituary” — he wrote at once and the letter carried a load of appreciation which, however undeserved, was most welcome. “What a wonderful painter you are!” he wrote, after reading the second edition of my biography of Sri Aurobindo; “You have brought out all the myriad rays and colours of the great luminary and blended them into the harmony of a sublime figure.” And there was a postscript in his own round beautiful hand: “Cheap editions are best; for we want the light of Pondicherry to spread all over the world.” Nor did he forget, even in a casual note, to make enquiries about one’s family, or about mutual friends; the references were brief but very much to the point, and where they were more elaborate one felt that Reddy’s head and heart had together inspired the hand of the painter:

How fortunate to have had the Roys with you. Wonderful couple. Ellen such an attractive personality, so generous and so noble. M. N. one of the finest intellectuals of our day, a man of large romantic experience, wide reading and of deep thought and reflection. . . You are mistaken in thinking that office would have fitted him or even me, a lesser light. Office is a bushel under which lights are choked to extinction. Better to have influence than position. When you have a position, you are not likely to have ideal influence. Roy is sowing with lavish hand seeds of new thought all round and everyday. I doubt if our soil suits.

The sting is in the tail, and it was characteristic of Dr. Reddy that, although a master of the spoken and the written word, he didn’t — he couldn’t really — set great store on words. But the Puck in him would transform frustration itself into gossamer iridescence:

However they are words. History is built of deeds. “In the beginning the word was with God.” In a mood of damn fool idiocy it made the mistake of

descending to the earth and it has ever since been creating more confusion than understanding — more smoke than light.

There were, besides, Dr. Reddy's public utterances, and some of them achieved a wide sweep and a contemporaneous urgency. The article on "Basic Conflicts in Indian Politics", which appeared in the Republic Inauguration Supplement of the *Hindu*, was in a class apart, for it correctly and courageously diagnosed our political ills and even hinted at the right remedies. Party politics in India, especially in the Provinces, gave room for grave misgivings. In his speech at Vizagapattinam while launching Scindia's *S. S. Jalaprakash*, Dr. Reddy had said:

We have communal strifes, intercaste dissensions, provincial jealousies and unrealistic ideologies of Governments and parties chasing the mirage and falling into ditches, the sudden rise of a large number of politico-economic and politico-social groups, all of which tend to unsettle the country. Some of the parties and their policies have no roots in our history; they are not growths from within but grafts from without; imitations, not originals; echoes not voices; more aping than aiming.

In the *Hindu* article likewise he deplored the fact that parties in India are "riven with personal jealousies and unscrupulous methods". Many techniques of accommodation and adjustment needed to be mastered, but above all there was the paramount need to build character and swear by it:

England gets on without a Constitution because of her character. Character can prevail with or without a Constitution, or even in spite of it. No Constitution can prevail without character.

I may also quote a sentence from one of his last letters, for it comes pat in this context: "It is impossible to devise any Constitution which would be knave-proof and fool-proof; and we are well supplied with both species!"

Soon after the assumption of his duties at Mysore, Dr. Reddy had written to me in November 1949, "Work here is heavy, and it is one which I have to attend to myself in person. So I expect there will be a halt for other pursuits for the next few months at the least." The main work was the complicated and delicate business of reorganisation of education in the Mysore State. Here he faced numerous difficulties, both expected and unexpected, but he persevered. His secretaries and stenographers were kept continually and fruitfully busy. While all this was as it were behind the scenes, Reddy the thinker, scholar, student of men and affairs, and verbal craftsman stepped outside from time to time and met the gaze, at once delighted and astonished, of his numerous friends and admirers. On the 30th January 1950, he inaugurated

with a moving speech the “sapthaka” organised by the Mahatma Gandhi Seva Sangh at Mysore. A few days later, he sent a long and truly statesmanlike message to the Akhila Andhra Praja Parishat held at Sattenapalle. Adverting to the indefinite postponement of the formation of the Andhra Province, Dr. Reddy said:

We have approached the problem more through sentiment and emotion than reason and realism. We have shown frantic eagerness and frantic haste which weakened us in the negotiations. We loved so much that we lost so much. Now that the Central Government has forced us to reflect and review, and given us unlimited time in which to effect agreed or decreed solutions, we ought to sit down in a calm and cool atmosphere and take up the detailed examination of every aspect of the problem.

On the 12th July 1950, in the course of his spicy Welcome Address at the Inauguration of the International Student Service Seminar at Mysore, Dr. Reddy entered a timely protest against our usual attitude of promiscuous beggary:

It is no doubt a good thing to be a beneficiary. But self-respect and dignity should lead us to be supporters as well. We may be poor; but we need not be paupers. We should contribute what we can and to the measure we can, and not make a stock in trade of poverty And furthermore the widow's mite is no less precious morally than the millionaire's thousands.

The Independence Day celebrations at the Maharaja's College Union on the 15th August 1950 evoked from Dr. Reddy another seasoned pronouncement on the diverse facts of the political scene in India and the world. There were more questions than answers, more apprehensions than hopes, in this particular address but its main purpose was to make the student audience think for themselves and resolutely resist the inroads of complacency and lethargy. It was an unflattering and clearheaded survey of the political situation, and it had all the sadness and seriousness of a half-vanquished hope and a will half-paralysed by mounting disillusion.

“The shadows are gathering,” he had written in January 1950; they were gathering indeed. On September 27 Dr. Reddy fell ill and for a couple of months he was confined to his house. There had been an operation, for a big abscess had formed, and wouldn't subside; and the healing took time. But he warned me, “I don't want my physiology to be broadcast.” By the middle of November, bandaging had been discontinued and he had managed to shake himself out of the hands of the doctors. He invited me to spend a few days with him either at Mysore or at Chittoor (“I personally prefer Chittoor”) and he seemed to be his dear old brave self again. The passing of Sri Aurobindo on the 5th December must have affected him profoundly, but he snatched the time to send me a word of consolation: “I am sure you must be

feeling it keenly. But you have the satisfaction — or is it only consolation? — of making his life widely and permanently known by your splendid biography.” I suppose I didn’t acknowledge the letter at once, as I should have done, but I didn’t miss his radio talk on Ramakrishna Paramahansa broadcast from Mysore on the 18th January 1951. I wrote to him the next day, and he replied with a long letter — his last to me — enclosing the full text of his talk. The talk on Ramakrishna was Dr. Reddy’s last important public speech, and how very appropriate that he should have taken so great a theme and dealt with it so wisely. As ever with him, Dr. Reddy gave an original but also a satisfying turn to his assessment of Sri Ramakrishna’s role in our renaissance. The Paramahansa’s spirituality was a link with other defensive bastions, — like Sikhism and Aryasamaj, — thrown up by resurgent Hinduism; “only with him the movement was from the individual to society and humanity, while with the other two prophets, the movement was from society to the individual . . . The origins differ, but there is a confluence of the two movements, all discharging themselves into our Sanatana Dharma, or Ocean of Eternalism.”

All through his life, and more especially during the last years, Dr. Reddy felt irresistibly attracted to the *philosophia perennis* underlying our immortal epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. “If I had my way,” he said once half-jocularly in the Academic Council of the Andhra University, “I would make a study of the *Mahabharata* obligatory on all students.” The habiliments, techniques and disciplines of Western civilisation covered his body and penetrated upto the surface levels of his mind: but his soul they left unaffected. His soul’s craving for the nectar of Indian spirituality wouldn’t or couldn’t — be stifled. He returned to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* again and again like a far-wandering bird returning to its nest. While addressing the Gandhi Seva Sangh in Mysore he declared rather in categorical terms:

I was very interested to note that readings from our sacred literature like the *Mahabharata*, and popular poetry like Yaksha Ganas, are an important feature of your activities. Some talk of the Indian masses not being educated. I have always dissented from this view. One may not be literate like a university man, but may be as educated. We can learn by the ear. Can there be anything better than the lore of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* for improving our character, elevating our ideas and making our lives better? Our masses, the village folk, men and women, steeped in our ancient lore, are educated. They may not be literate, but they are educated.

He started writing commentaries on the *Ramayana* (in English) and the *Mahabharata* (in Telugu). Had he lived to complete them, they would certainly have taken their place among the classics of our time. But that was not to be. Towards the end of January he decided to undergo a major operation, and he accordingly left for Madras

early in February and entered a nursing home. After the operation he seemed to be rallying together, but presently there were complications. He had the best medical assistance, and his grand-niece, a doctor herself, was constantly in attendance. On the morning of the 24th February it was clear he was sinking. Uraemia had set in, and could not be brought under control. But till the very last he retained complete consciousness, and when he felt that his end was near he scribbled on a piece of paper "No hope, be brave," and passed it on to the relations and friends watching over him. And so Dr. Reddy passed away even as he had lived, bravely and with no regrets. The pitcher has thus crashed near the very fountain's edge, and all that is now left is a memory of other days now irretrievably lost in the darkness of the Night. Death came to Dr. Reddy when he was still at the height of his intellectual powers, when he was still labouring up the hills to storm new heights of achievement. He had always a horror of senility and stupidity; and as he died fighting disease and in full intellectual armour, his death was itself a victory and quite became the great gifts he brought to this world. "I am not sorry, I am not dismayed" — those were his words a year before he actually succumbed; and need we doubt that when the preordained moment came he was neither sorry nor dismayed?

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