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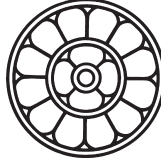
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXV

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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RENEWAL

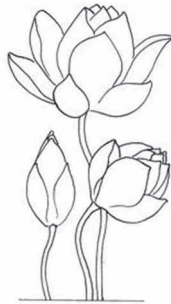
When the heart tires and the throb stills recalling
 Things that were once and again can be never,
When the bow falls and the drawn string is broken,
 Hands that were clasped, yet for ever are parted,

When the soul passes to new births and bodies,
 Lands never seen and meetings with new faces,
Is the bow raised and the fall'n arrow fitted,
 Acts that were vain rewedded to the Fate-curve?

To the lives sundered can Time bring rejoining,
 Love that was slain be reborn with the body?
In the mind null, from the heart's chords rejected,
 Lost to the sense, but the spirit remembers!

Sri Aurobindo

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 580)



A THEORY OF THE HUMAN BEING

It is a superstition of modern thought that the march of knowledge has in all its parts progressed always in a line of forward progress deviating from it, no doubt, in certain periods of obscurity, but always returning and in the sum constituting everywhere an advance and nowhere a retrogression. Like all superstitions this belief is founded on bad and imperfect observation flowering into a logical fallacy. Our observation is necessarily imperfect because we have at our disposal the historical data and literary records of only a few millenniums and beyond only dissected and insufficient indices which leave gigantic room for the hardly-fettered activity of the mind's two chief helpers and misleaders, inference and conjecture. Our observation is bad because, prepossessed by the fixed idea of a brief & recent emergence from immemorial barbarism, imagining Plato to have blossomed in a few centuries out of a stock only a little more advanced than the South Sea islander, we refuse to seek in the records that still remain of a lost superior knowledge their natural and coherent significance; we twist them rather into the image of our own thoughts or confine them within the still narrow limits of what we ourselves know and understand. The logical fallacy we land in as the goal of our bad observation is the erroneous conception that because we are more advanced than certain ancient peoples in our own especial lines of success, as the physical sciences, therefore necessarily we are also more advanced in other lines where we are still infants and have only recently begun to observe and experiment, as the science of psychology and the knowledge of our subjective existence and of mental forces. Hence we have developed the exact contrary of the old superstition that the movement of man is always backward to retrogression. While our forefathers believed that the more ancient might on the whole be trusted as more authoritative, because nearer to the gods, and the less ancient less authoritative because nearer to man's ultimate degeneracy, we believe on the contrary that the more ancient is always on the whole more untrue because nearer to the unlettered and unenquiring savage, the more modern the more true because held as opinion by the lettered and instructed citizen of Paris or Berlin. Neither position can be accepted. Verification by experience & experiment is the only standard of truth, not antiquity, not modernity. Some of the ideas of the ancients or even of the savage now scouted by us may be lost truths or statements of valid experience from which we have turned or become oblivious; many of the notions of the modern schoolmen will certainly in the future be scouted as erroneous and superstitious.

Among the ancient documents held by the ancients to be deep mines of profound and fertile truth but to us forgetful and blind of their meaning the Veda & Upanishads rank among the very highest.

SRI AUROBINDO

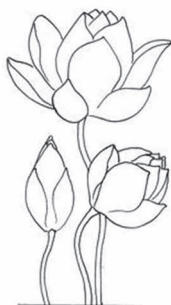
(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 380-81)

THE MARBLES OF TIME

INSTITUTIONS, empires, civilisations are the marbles of Time. Time, sitting in his banqueting hall of the Ages, where prophets and kings are the spice of his banquet, drinking the red wine of life and death, while on the marble floor at his feet are strewn like flowers the images of the same stars that shone on the pride of Nahusha, the tapasya of Dhruv and the splendours of Yayati, that saw Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib and the Egyptian Pharaohs, Pompey's head hewn off on the sands of Egypt and Caesar bleeding at Pompey's sculptured feet, Napoleon's mighty legions thundering victorious at the bidding of that god of war on the field of Austerlitz and Napoleon's panic legions fleeing disordered with pursuit and butchery behind them from that last field of Waterloo, — Time, the Kala Purusha, drunk with the fumes of death and the tears and laughter of mortals, sits and plays there with his marbles. There are marbles there of all kinds, marbles of all colours, and some are dull and grey, some glorious with hearts of many colours, some white and pure as a dove's wings, — but he plays with them all equally and equally he thrusts them all away when he has done with them. Sometimes even, in his drunkenness, he hurls them out of his window or lifts his mace and deals blows here and there smashing into fragments the bright and brittle globes, and he laughs as they smash and crumble. So Time, the god, sits and plays for ever with his marbles.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 379)



**‘IN THEE, BY THEE, FOR THEE WE LIVE AND THY
LAW IS THE SUPREME MASTER OF OUR LIFE’**

March 19, 1914

O LORD, eternal Teacher, Thou whom we can neither name nor understand, but whom we want to realise more and more at every moment, enlighten our intelligence, illumine our hearts, transfigure our consciousness; may everyone awaken to the true life, flee from egoism and its train of sorrow and anguish, and take refuge in Thy divine and pure Love, source of all peace and all happiness. My heart so full of Thee seems to expand into infinity and my intelligence, all illumined with Thy Presence, shines like the purest diamond. Thou art the wonderful magician, he who transfigures all things, from ugliness brings forth beauty, from darkness light, from the mud clear water, from ignorance knowledge and from egoism goodness.

In Thee, by Thee, for Thee we live and Thy law is the supreme master of our life.

May Thy will be done in every place, may Thy peace reign upon all the earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 103)



THE FIRST EFFECT OF THE SUPERMIND

[The question which introduces this talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo's aphorism: "Sin is that which was once in its place, persisting now it is out of place; there is no other sinfulness."]

What are the very first things that the Supramental Force intends to drive out, or is trying to drive out, so that everything may be in its place, individually and cosmically?

DRIVE OUT? But will it "drive out" anything? If we accept Sri Aurobindo's idea, it will put each thing in its place, that's all.

One thing must necessarily cease, and that is the distortion, that is to say, the veil of falsehood upon Truth, because that is what is responsible for everything we see here. If this is removed, things will be completely different, completely. They will be what we feel them to be when we come out of this consciousness. When one comes out of this consciousness and enters into the Truth-consciousness, the difference is such that one wonders how there can be anything like suffering and misery and death and all that. There is a kind of astonishment in the sense that one does not understand how it can happen — when one has really tipped over to the other side. But this experience is usually associated with the experience of the unreality of the world as we know it, whereas Sri Aurobindo says that this perception of the unreality of the world is not necessary in order to live in the supramental consciousness — it is only the unreality of Falsehood, not the unreality of the world. That is to say, the world has a reality of its own, independent of Falsehood.

I suppose that is the first effect of the Supermind — the first effect in the individual, because it will begin with the individual.

It is probable that this state of new consciousness will have to become a constant state. But then a problem arises: how can one remain in contact with the world as it is in its deformation? Because I have noticed one thing: when this state is very strong in me, very strong, so strong that it is able to resist anything that comes to bombard it from outside, then when I say something, people do not understand at all, not at all; so this state inevitably does away with a useful contact.

Taking only the earth, for example, how could there be a little supramental creation, a nucleus of supramental action and radiation upon earth? Is it possible? One can conceive very well of a nucleus of superhuman creation and of supermen, that is to say, men who were men and who through evolution and transformation (in the true sense of the word) have succeeded in manifesting the supramental forces; but their origin is human and since their origin is human there is necessarily a

contact; even if everything is transformed, even if the organs are transformed into centres of force, there remains nonetheless something human, like a colouring. It is these beings, according to the traditions, who will discover the secret of direct supramental creation, without passing through the process of ordinary Nature, and it is through them that the truly supramental beings will take birth, the ones who must necessarily live in a supramental world. But then how would the contact be made between these beings and the ordinary world? How is one to conceive of the transformation of Nature, a transformation sufficient to bring about the supramental creation upon earth? I do not know.

Naturally, for such a thing to happen, a considerably long time is needed, this we know; and there will probably be stages, steps, things which will appear, things which for the moment we do not know or do not conceive, and they will change the conditions of the earth — but that means seeing some thousands of years ahead.

There remains the problem: is it possible to make use of this notion of space, I mean the space on the terrestrial globe?¹ Is it possible to find a spot where one could create the embryo or seed of the future supramental world? The plan came in all the details, but it is a plan which in its spirit and consciousness does not at all conform to what is possible on earth at present; yet in its most material manifestation, it was based on terrestrial conditions. It is the concept of an ideal town which would be the nucleus of an ideal country, a town which would have contacts, purely superficial and extremely limited in their effect, with the outside world. One would therefore already have to conceive — but this is possible — of a power sufficiently strong to be at the same time a protection against aggression or ill-will (this would not be the most difficult protection to obtain) and against infiltration and admixtures. But if necessary, one can conceive of that. From the social point of view, from the point of view of organisation, from the point of view of the inner life, these are not problems. The problem is the relation with what is not supramentalised, to prevent the infiltration, the admixture: that is to say, to prevent the nucleus from falling back into an inferior creation — it is a problem about the period of transition.

All those who have given thought to the problem have always imagined something unknown to the rest of humanity, like a gorge in the Himalayas, for example, a place unknown to the rest of the world. But this is not a solution; it is not a solution at all.

No, the only solution is an occult power, but this already implies that before anything can be done, a certain number of individuals must have reached a great perfection of realisation. But one can conceive that if this can be done, one can have a spot which is in the midst of the outside world and yet isolated (without any contacts, you see), a spot where everything would be exactly in its place — as an

1. Later, when asked about the meaning of this phrase, the Mother laughed and said: "I said that of the other side! — the side where the notion of space is not so concrete."

example. Each thing is exactly in its place, each person exactly in his place, each movement exactly in its place — and in its place in an ascending progressive movement, without any relapse, that is to say, quite the contrary to what happens in ordinary life. Naturally, this presupposes a kind of perfection, this presupposes a kind of unity, this presupposes that the different aspects of the Supreme can be manifested and, of course, an exceptional beauty, a total harmony and a power strong enough to command obedience from the forces of Nature. For example, even if this spot were surrounded by forces of destruction, they would not have the power to act; the protection would be sufficient. All this requires the utmost perfection in the individuals who would be the organisers of such a thing.

(*Silence*)

Indeed, nobody knows how the first men were formed, the first mental realisation. One does not know whether they were isolated individuals or groups, whether this happened in the midst of others or in isolation. I do not know. But there may be an analogy with the future case of the supramental creation. It is not difficult to conceive that in the solitude of the Himalayas or in the solitude of a virgin forest an individual would begin to create around him his little supramental world. It is easy to conceive. But the same thing would be necessary: he would have to have reached such a perfection that his power would act automatically to prevent intrusion, so that automatically his world would be protected; that is to say, all contrary or foreign elements would be prevented from approaching.

Stories of the kind have been told, of people who lived in an ideal solitude. It is not impossible at all to conceive that. When one is in contact with this Power, at the moment it is in you, you see quite well that it is child's play; it is even possible to change certain things, to exert an influence on surrounding vibrations and forms, which automatically begin to be supramentalised. All that is possible, but it is on an individual scale. Whereas, take the example of what is happening here, the individual dwelling at the very centre of all this chaos: there lies the difficulty! Does it not follow from this very fact that it is impossible to reach a kind of perfection in the realisation? But then too, the other example, that of the solitary in the forest, does not at all prove that the rest of mankind will be able to follow; whereas what is happening here is already a much more radiating action. This is what must happen at a given moment, this must happen inevitably. But the problem remains: can this happen at the same time or before the other thing is realised — at the same time or before the individual, the one individual is supramentalised?

Evidently, the realisation under the conditions of community or the group is much more complete, integral, total and probably more perfect than any individual realisation, which is always, *necessarily*, on the external, material plane, absolutely limited, because it is only one mode of being, one mode of manifestation, one

microscopic set of vibrations that is touched.

But from the point of view of the easiness of the work, I believe there is no comparison.

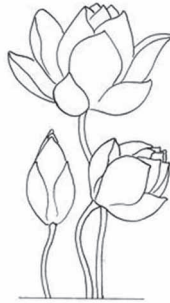
(Silence)

The problem remains. All people like Buddha and the others, had *first* realised and then entered into contact with the world: well, this is very simple. But with regard to what I have in view, is it not an indispensable condition, for the realisation to be total, that one remains in the world?

18 July 1961

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother — III, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 383-87)



**“TREE OF TIME” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

How do you find these fourteen lines? What sort of blank verse are they? And do they possess characteristics which might allow one to call them a blank verse sonnet?

I am a tree of time, a swaying shadow,
 one sole
With ~~just one~~ branch lit by eternity — [1]
All of me dark save this song-fruitful hand.
There the large splendour tunes my blood and makes
 ~~up~~flower
Fragments of deathless ecstasy outflower; [2]
And I but live in these few fingers that trace
On life’s uncoloured air a burning cry
From God-abysses to God-pinnacles.

vast

Some day the buried ~~sky~~ which holds me rooted [3]
 with

In dreamful kinship to the height of heaven [4]
~~Will~~ will

Shall wake: then through each quivering nerve shall course [5]
No feeble brightness self-consumed in joy
Like the brief passions of earth, but nectar-flame —
A Force drunk with its own infinitude.

[Amal’s questions:]

- [4] I suppose “to” would be a little confusing?
- [5] Should there be one “will” and one “shall”? But where and where?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

- [1] [Sri Aurobindo crossed out “just one”]
- [2] [Sri Aurobindo crossed out “upflower”]
- [3] [Sri Aurobindo crossed out “sky”]
- [4] [Sri Aurobindo crossed out “with”]
- [5] “Will wake” won’t do — “shall” is needed. With “course” “will” is possible.

These lines are very good and this time you have got a true movement of blank verse; but I don't think I would call it a sonnet. Rhyme structure is essential to a sonnet. But, all the same, the sonnet tendency and the limitation to fourteen lines has given a "building" to the lines which much enhances their value.

23 October 1934

* * *

TREE OF TIME

I am a tree of time, a swaying shadow,
 With one sole branch lit by eternity —
 All of me dark save this song-fruitful hand.
 There the large splendour tunes my blood and makes
 Fragments of deathless ecstasy outflower;
 And I but live in these few fingers that trace
 On life's uncoloured air a burning cry
 From God-abysses to God-pinnacles.

Some day the buried vast which holds me rooted
 In dreamful kinship to the height of heaven
 Shall wake: then through each quivering nerve shall course
 No feeble brightness self-consumed in joy
 Like the brief passions of earth, but nectar-flame —
 A Force drunk with its own infinitude.

[On 29 January 1962 Amal explained in a letter how "Tree of Time" took shape:]

... The account you have given of the Tagore Celebration seems really a glimpse of the New Age, though how of all people I became its first dawn-streak is a mystery — unless Sri Aurobindo had already planned it all when he gave K. D. Sethna the new name "Amal Kiran" meaning "The clear ray"!

I must, however, remark that the clear ray got so far-reaching a passage because you proved a most helpful medium — a true luminiferous ether.

You haven't mentioned what poem of mine was read out right along with Tagore's. Was it "Tree of Time" — one of the two loves of Miss [*Patricia*] Benton? If it was, may I mention how it got written? I was standing on my little terrace

adjoining the two rooms where I stayed for nearly 10 years — the room which had been occupied by Purani for some time before me and which Sri Aurobindo himself had stayed in for several years still earlier and along the floor of which he had dug out a path by his 8-hours-a-day walking, the path to the Supermind. Following this path, as I often did (though without even getting anywhere near Overmind), I came out to the terrace early one morning. In the big garden of the house opposite mine across the road there was and still is a tree with long-stretching branches. The whole tree was in shadow but one high branch had caught the morning sun. Immediately I felt a little shock in the heart and knew that somewhere in the depths, where matter and mind, shape and significance, pattern in time and truth in eternity are one, I was that tree and its momentary appearance in the Indian dawn symbolised not only the poet in me but also a poem to come.

In the course of the day 14 lines grew out of that seed-shock. I sent them up to Sri Aurobindo. . . . [*Sri Aurobindo's*] comment [*see above*] exhilarated me a great deal and I felt that Joyce Kilmer wasn't quite right when he ended his own sweet but rather school-boyish poem on a tree with the often-quoted couplet:

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

I thought that if one didn't foolishly set about making poems by oneself but tried to let God make them through one, there was no reason why God shouldn't be the author not only of a tree but also of “poetree”!

All this was a pretty long time ago — to be precise on October 23, 1934. I never could have dreamt that over 17 years later my lines would trace in New York

On life's uncoloured air a burning cry
From God-abysses to God-pinnacles.

For your interest and Miss Benton's I may quote the tree-poem written in the early years of my second homecoming to Pondicherry in the middle fifties — I mean the middle fifties of our century and not of the possible centenarian that I may turn out!

It was composed in a mood of spiritual finality and soon after its composition I read it out to the Mother and she seemed to accept and confirm its inner decision. Here are the lines — the same number as in “Tree of Time”:

NO RETURN

I stand here for all time, rooted in God.
 A thousand heart-gropes find each root their goal.
 I am caught by a depth and a warmth of eternal Love,
 Love that by being eternity is true earth,
 The rock-grip of a bliss that cannot end.
 Here is my Country, my Creatrix, my World's Core.
 To the old out-scattered life there is no return.

But my fixed tree is a branching magnificence:
 Everywhere spread huge arms that pierce all space,
 Nothing the sweep of the universe can give
 Eludes; but now from a stainless height I search
 Earth's distances of lost divinity.
 Here is the Abroad, the All-Mother, the World's Edge.
 To the low rush, the blind grasp there is no return.

I shall be glad to get Miss Benton's books, including her *Cradle of the Sun*. I'll send her my own books and I'll send them also to Miss Randolph.

* * *

[*"No Return"* was written on 27 May 1954. In Amal's book *The Sun and the Rainbow* we read: "The Mother went through the poem most attentively and seemed to accept it as a very important declaration for the writer. On finishing her perusal, she looked up with a smile, at once tender and calm, and said: 'Bon!' ('Good!')"]

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

There is no process for it [getting the psychic in front]. It comes like the other things — you have to aspire for it and it can only happen when you are sufficiently advanced.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1098)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of April 2012)

Chapter XII

Taming the Wild Elephant

“Thy Grace can make a chatterer out of the dumb; can make the lame cross the mountain.”

Srimadbhagavadgita Dhyanam

THE fifth and the youngest child of Dr. K. D. Ghose, Barindra Kumar and his elder sister Sarojini lived with their mother Swarnalata Devi at Rohini, not far from Deoghur, the home of the latter’s illustrious father Rishi Raj Narayan Bose. They visited the Rishi’s home from time to time.

Once Swarnalata Devi was an epitome of charm, dignity and loving affection towards all their acquaintances while Dr. K. D. Ghose was a legend for his magnanimity and ungrudging service to the people — the downtrodden in particular — wherever he was posted as a medical officer. Unfortunately however, Swarnalata Devi began to show signs of mental disorder within a few years of their marriage and despite all the efforts of her husband to cure her of it the process reached an irreversible state soon after Barindra was born in England. Dr. Ghose arranged for her to live in a spacious and elegant bungalow at Rohini along with their two youngest children until pecuniary strain obliged him to shift them to a relatively less attractive residence.

The two children had a harrowing experience in their mother’s custody. Shut out from any genial neighbourhood or friends to play with and often severely punished for a small or no mistake of theirs, this seems to have been the gloomiest phase of their life. Sarojini offered some resistance to the harshness meted out to her, but not to Barindra Kumar, called Barin in short, apparently shy and timorous at that phase of his life.

One day while he and his sister were playing outside their residence, a tough-looking visitor sporting a beard approached them. The children ran into the house and the stranger pursued them with arms extended. They ran from wall to wall till they were overpowered. Holding them in his embrace, the stranger overwhelmed them with gifts of toys and biscuits.

This Hound of Heaven was none other than Dr. Ghose. That was the children's only meeting with their loving father — and quite brief too — as long as they lived under their mother's 'care'.

Dr. Ghose, naturally anxious for the education and welfare of these two younger offspring succeeded through negotiations to persuade Swarnalata Devi to part with Sarojini. But that only resulted in Barin feeling deserted under an unpredictable mother's fearsome possessiveness, with no chance of learning even the alphabet till the age of ten and nobody to play with.

However the situation ended in a dramatic way. Recounts Barin:

One morning I was playing alone on the eastern verandah of our house when I saw a corpulent man in an overcoat stepping into the compound. I was surprised, for nobody ever dared to come to our house for the terror of the famously mad Mem Sahib had spread. She chased out any unfamiliar visitor shouting and brandishing a sword. Any intruder would flee for dear life.¹

This gentleman, however, managed to talk to Swarnalata Devi. He offered her sufficient money in lieu of her letting Barin accompany him to Kolkata and live with his father. Though this strategy had worked for Sarojini who used to often incur her mother's displeasure, it proved futile in Barin's case. Luckily the gentleman was able to whisper to Barin and obtain his consent to escape when the chance came. He located Barin's bedroom and advised him to keep the door facing the verandah open. But the gentleman stood aghast to learn that the boy's arms and legs were tied to the bedstead at night! He hit upon another plan and asked the boy to remain prepared for a bit of adventure. He promised to whisk him away and land him in the most loving lap of one Ranga-Ma.

An adventure indeed it was! Records Barin:

It was a winter morning. The sun, like a large plate of gold, had just appeared on the horizon. My mother stood on the verandah and went on muttering her soliloquy. I was enjoying the warmth of the sunlight sitting a bit away from her.

I heard some rustling of feet at the westward turn of the verandah. Suddenly a hefty fellow, looking like a ruffian, sprang up before Mother. "Mem Sahib, would you like to have a flower?" he asked and throwing before her a bouquet, caught hold of both my arms and began running, dragging me along. From nowhere appeared ten or twelve young men and they followed us raising a hullabaloo. Mother went in, brought out her sword and pursued the gang. Thorny bushes bruised and scratched my legs, but my kidnapper could not afford a moment necessary to lift me into his arms.

Beyond his mother's reach awaited the kind gentleman who had met him earlier as well as a palanquin with its bearers ready for take off. Far from being unhappy, Barin's only refrain was, "I hope she will not be able to reclaim me, will she?"

The rescue party dispersed and the gentleman led Barin by train to Kolkata and left him with Ranga-Ma, a charming, youthful and affectionate lady in whom Barin at last found a cocoon of love and security. Sarojini was already there.

We learn from the autobiography of a noted Bengali author, Prabodh Kumar Sanyal² that Ranga-Ma was a child widow and was "wonderfully beautiful" even in her old age when Sanyal saw him. From the memoirs of a compatriot of Barin, Abinash Bhattacharya, we learn that her full name was Manorama Devi.³ Barin indeed came to look upon her as his true mother and throughout in his autobiography he refers to her as 'mother'. Even after the most tumultuous political phase of his life, his eleven years of exile and internment in the infamous Cellular Jail of the Andamans, one of the first things he did was to seek her out.⁴

Hailing obviously from a cultured background, she was reasonably educated. We do not know the story behind Dr. Ghose and the lady coming in contact with each other, but she was extremely devoted to Dr. Ghose and took great care of his two children. One morning Barin saw her crying inconsolably. She informed the boy of her ominous dream: Dr. Ghose told her that he was departing. She opened her eyes and saw him standing near her bed. As she anxiously tried to touch him, the apparition disappeared.

A few hours later some unknown Englishmen entered their lounge where Barin was playing and, ascertaining his identity, told him, "Inform your mother that Dr. Ghose is no more."

"My mother, who stood behind the screen, trembling, collapsed," writes Barin.⁵

Though Dr. Ghose in his will had amply provided for the maintenance of Swarnalata Devi, he had authorised Ranga-Ma to act as the guardian of Barin and Sarojini with generous provision for discharging her duty. But thanks to some of Dr. Ghose's jealous relatives, Ranga-Ma was deprived of her due. The children had to leave for Deoghur, their maternal grandfather's house.

Struggling against odds Barin passed his matriculation examination from Deoghur school and for a while studied in the colleges at Patna and Dhaka, but gave up. Of his several experiments with enterprises for earning a living, the last was a small tea-stall in front of the college at Patna. Once again it was his unfailing support, Ranga-Ma, who not only financed him through the sale-proceeds of her house for setting this up but also worked untiringly to sustain this little establishment. But it failed. Barin's efforts to obtain some financial help from his two well-established brothers, Benoy Bhusan and Manmohan for either rejuvenating it or starting something new did not succeed.

Thus Baroda became his destination. He recollects:

The shy retiring poet-brother that I used to see every Puja vacation in Deoghur became intimately known to me only after I visited Baroda in 1902. That was the year when the plague broke out in terrible virulence in Patna and after winding up my tea-shop there I boarded the Madras Mail for the capital of Gaekwad's dominion. One fine morning I took a rickshaw at Baroda railway station and with my cheap canvas valise and travel-stained clothes appeared before the red brick-built two-storied building of Khaserao Jadhav, Naib-Suba (Chief Collector) of Navsari in Gujarat.

The butler of the house met me at the door and dubiously ushered me into the fine drawing room near the portico. He was hard put to believe me and take such a loafer in dirty clothes as the brother of the great Ghose Saheb of the Maharaja Sahib of Baroda. He disappeared somewhere upstairs to announce my arrival. Almost immediately after Sri Aurobindo came hurriedly down the grand staircase and spirited me away to a bathroom before his friends could find his youngest brother in that sorry plight. After a refreshing bath with new clothes borrowed from him and a shirt too long at the sleeves, I came out — a shy callow juvenile youth and had to meet Khaserao at the table — the wittiest tormentor in Baroda society. Khaserao's house was a sweet nest of repose and culture after my arduous and sordid life at B. Ghose's tea stall . . .

A rather big hall, facing the lawn, beyond which ran the main street from the railway station to Lakshmi Vilas palace, two rooms on its right and a covered inner courtyard, with a dining room on one side and servants' quarters on the other, this was how the house was built. The same number of rooms was repeated upstairs, of which the hall was Sri Aurobindo's study. A table, a sofa, a number of chairs, all heaped pell-mell with books and a revolving book-case groaning under their weight — all thinly covered with dust; a quiet small unassuming man buried there for hours in a trance of thought and very often writing page after page of poetry that was the habitual picture I became accustomed to.⁶

Barin had travelled to Baroda with the sole motive of getting some financial help from Sri Aurobindo to launch yet another venture for earning money. He knew Sri Aurobindo's nature very well. He wrote much later:

Aurobindo is and has always been generous and loving, only his restrained movements seldom make it visible except to a deep observer. Once Dinendra Kumar Roy was looking for an opportunity to ask for money which he needed badly. He found Aurobindo writing out a money-order (form) to his sister. Dinendra took the opportunity to ask for some money for himself for sending to his family. Aurobindo smiled and emptying his purse of its meagre contents, said, "Oh, you better send it, mine can wait." In spite of repeated and earnest

persuasion he could not be made to fill up his unfinished money-order form, saying, "It can certainly wait, your need is more urgent than mine."⁷

In this context it may be relevant to refer to an incident recorded by Patkar:

One day a poor student approached Sri Aurobindo for help. Without asking him any question he quietly went to the table and gave a handful of rupees to him out of the amount lying in his tray without counting how much he gave him. The student went away quite satisfied and told me this incident. I spoke to my sister about this. She already knew his ways and she said to me, "We have got a Sadhu in our house; he is God's good man and he deserves to be worshipped. Nobody can equal him in his saintly behaviour." Since that time my respect for him which was already great — became greater and I began to worship him like God.⁸

Barin was intrigued that this incorrigibly generous brother of his kept quiet whenever he spoke to him about his business project and hinted at his need for finance. "My brother had never any attachment to money. But he was not prepared to pour out for an enterprise he did not like," observed Barin in this regard. Obviously Sri Aurobindo saw a radically different project awaiting Barin's involvement.

Barin spent his time gardening, hunting birds on the outskirts of the city, reading and writing. "The clean, calm and sweet days at Baroda had brought me uninterrupted contentment. Enough leisure, quietude, continuous happiness without any anxiety, exciting hunting spree, the pure joy of writing poetry and novel and satisfying my urge for farming in my small garden" became his routine. He also practised the esraj.⁹

He had become friendly with the Jadhav brothers, the owners of their residence. A good deal of time was devoted to planchette — in which Sri Aurobindo participated — calling the spirits of departed ones and putting questions to them. What the medium scribbled was supposed to be answers from the spirits invoked. How trustworthy were they? Much later, while correcting some wrong statements on the early phase of his life, Sri Aurobindo said (in the third person):

The writing was done as an experiment as well as an amusement and nothing else. . . . Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writing at Baroda in a very brilliant and beautiful English style and remarkable for certain predictions which came true and statements of fact which also proved to be true although unknown to the persons concerned or anyone else present: there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon's subsequent unexpected departure from India, and, again, of the first suppression of the national movement and the greatness of Tilak's attitude amidst the storm; this prediction

was given in Tilak's own presence when he visited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and happened to enter first when the writing was in progress. Sri Aurobindo was very much struck and interested and he decided to find out by practising this kind of writing himself what there was behind it. . . . His final conclusion was that though there are sometimes phenomena which point to the intervention of beings of another plane, not always or often of a high order, the mass of such writings comes from a dramatising element in the subconscious mind; sometimes a brilliant vein in the subliminal is struck and then predictions of the future and statements of things known in the present and past come up, but otherwise these writings have not a great value.¹⁰

By and by Barin was exposed to one of the several streams of Sri Aurobindo's action that had been underway for some time, but in extreme secrecy: the action towards the country's emancipation from the colonial yoke. In Barin's own imagery, like an elephant tamed sent into the forest to catch other elephants, he was directed to proceed to Bengal for recruiting youths into a secret revolutionary group.

However, subsequent developments showed that he had been only half-tamed.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Atma Katha* (Bengali); Papyrus, Kolkata. More or less literally translated from Bengali by the present author. Barindra Kumar's reminiscences not within quotes too are from the same book.
2. Prabodh Kumar Sanyal: *Banaspatir Baithak* (Bengali); Sahitya Samstha, Kolkata.
3. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya: "Purano Katha" in *Masik Basumati*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Atma Katha*.
6. Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Patkar Papers; Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research.
9. Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Atma Katha*.
10. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 65.

NANTEUIL AND SRI SMRITI

ONE of the most beautiful houses in the Ashram is Nanteuil, a large, French colonial style house in a compound just opposite the Playground on Rue Saint Louis. Like many of the old Ashram houses it has a history richly packed with anecdotes and marked in the collective memory of the Ashram by the Mother's numerous visits. Nanteuil House was purchased on 8 February 1939 from M. Pierre Girod and Mme. Geneviève Marie Berchon de Fontaine Goubert Girod, the adopted daughter of Mme. Marie Adèle Berthe de la Barre de Nanteuil and wife of M. Pierre Girod. It seems that the name Nanteuil House dates from this period. Local legend has it that it was previously known as *Raja Veedu* because a princess used to live there.

Early Residents

After its purchase in 1939, it became the home of Margaret Wilson, the daughter of the American President Woodrow Wilson. In 1936 she had found a copy of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* in the New York City Public Library and, inspired by what she had read, she wrote to Sri Aurobindo, communicating her desire to practise the Integral Yoga. Although she corresponded with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it was not until October 1938 that she came to Pondicherry. On 5 November 1938 Sri Aurobindo gave her the name Nishtha, which meant "one-pointed, fixed and steady concentration, devotion and faith in the single aim, the Divine and the Divine Realisation". [*Mother India*, January 2000]

Nishtha settled into her life at the Ashram and her spacious apartment on the first floor of Nanteuil House. We know from Rishabhchand that she kept her rooms spotlessly clean and that "she loved gardening — this was a legacy from her mother — and took the management of the garden of her house into her own hands, but her failing health soon obliged her to give it up". [*Mother India*, February 2000] There are photographs of Nishtha in the company of Udar, Mona, and Gauri Pinto — and, of course, Ambu. Because World War II was going on at the time and Nishtha was from a prominent American family, the Mother was concerned for her safety and asked Ambu to choose a room in the house, stay there, and guard the outside staircase that led up to Nishtha's rooms. Ambu chose the east corner room on the ground floor and lived there until his death in 1993.

Ambu was a passionate collector. He acquired things for his collection using the "beg, borrow, buy, or bully" means to convince someone to part with an object he set his eyes on. Often he asked the Mother to give him an empty scent bottle which he added to his huge collection of jars and bottles! Once in a while, he offered to pay for a pretty thing which had been offered to the Mother and which

she occasionally sent to the Embroidery Department for sale. His collection of bronzes, glassware, wood carvings, *puja* articles, matchbox labels, cards, and souvenirs from various countries now form a part of the *sadhaks'* collection at Sri Smriti.

After Nishtha passed away in February 1944, the upstairs rooms lay vacant for several years except for a few months, when they were occupied by Ali Hyderi, son of Sir Akbar Hyderi, one-time Dewan of Hyderabad. Ali, his wife Alice, and their daughter Bilkis had come as visitors to the Ashram. In June 1950, Sanat and Chaundona Banerji came to live at Nanteuil. As Chaundona related, the Mother took them upstairs and showed them all the rooms, the verandah, and the terrace. She even pointed to the second-floor terrace and told them they could have a first-class view of Pondicherry from up there. Chaundona also reports that the Mother had used the empty flat to rehearse her drama *Elle* which was staged on 1 December 1949. [*Mother India*, July 1993]

The Mother at Nanteuil

The Mother visited Chaundona at the flat in Nanteuil on her birthday, which fell just three months after she and Sanat had joined the Ashram. Chaundona played her guitar for the Mother, who at once said that she should play for the next 1st December programme. The very next day the Mother came again to Nanteuil and wrote something for Chaundona to play and Anu to dance, choosing the musical pieces to be played, and offering also many suggestions and advice for the performance. The two practised daily and the Mother would drop in sometimes to see how they were progressing. [*Mother India*, February 1984] In the February 1951 issue of the *Bulletin*, photographs of the performance appear along with the following text:

December 1st 1950 Programme

A solo performance, an interpretation of music in dance.

- a) Beauty makes herself ready for life upon earth,
seeing to all details. Nothing is neglected to reach perfection.
I am ready!
- b) Ready? But I am waiting for something.
Waiting . . . Waiting . . . Will it come? The joy of life is coming
little by little from inside. Now it is come!
- c) I have found what I was looking for. It is here in everything.
I have found it below; I have found it above; I have found it
here and there . . . everywhere.

The Mother also visited other parts of Nanteuil, most famously the table tennis halls on the ground floor. The main house has a verandah with three large doors which open on to the garden. This verandah and the large hall next to it are both used for table tennis. Before the Ashram bought the house, these rooms were the scene for parties and dances! [Information culled from a project on Nanteuil by children of the Ashram School] Udar has recounted that the Mother used to visit various table tennis locations but she most often played at Nanteuil. When anyone played against the Mother, they tried to return the ball in such a way that she could hit it easily and well. This required considerable skill and control and was of great value in the players' training. One day during a table tennis match, the Mother explained to them that the game of table tennis was invented by the Chinese and was called "Ping Pong":

First a Mandarin on one side hit the ball as we do now but in such a way as to make it easy for the Mandarin on the other side to return it. This was Ping. The receiver then made a courtly bow and returned it the same way — Pong. Then the first one bowed and returned it and so on. A very courtly game indeed and quite in character with their high culture, and entirely different from the Western concept of the game where one is determined to defeat an opponent.

[Udar, 2009, p. 150]

We know from notations in Champaklal's and the Mother's diaries that she went to Nanteuil for table tennis matches on 19 and 22 June and on 18 July 1947. On 25 July she seems to have played a game against the Pondicherry Governor, Monsieur Baron, and his wife.

We also learn that the Mother sometimes gave interviews to people, like the Governor of Pondicherry, in the garden at Nanteuil. She chose to sit either under the Psychological Perfection [*champa*] tree or the Pipal tree that was located in the north-west corner of the garden. Comfortable chairs and a low table with a flower vase were arranged for the interview. [School Project on Nanteuil]

The Mother visited *sadhaks* who lived at Nanteuil. Gangadhar, who joined the Ashram in 1933, related how the Mother once visited his room at Nanteuil. He was staying in a tiny room, actually a sort of broom closet or storeroom, off a narrow passage in the southern part of the house. The passage was so narrow that if he opened his door, it was nearly blocked. The Mother, Pavitra, and Chinmayee went through this passage on their way to visit a *sadhika*, whose birthday it was. Gangadhar had prepared his room, keeping a light and some incense burning behind the closed door. When told that Gangadhar lived there, the Mother looked into his room, commented that it was very small and asked how he could stay there. When he told her he quite liked the room and that there was no difficulty in staying there, the Mother gave him her blessings and left. She apparently said that he was one of those rare *sadhaks* who never gave her any problem! [*The Golden Chain*, November 2002 and August 2003]

From Past to Present

Nanteuil has been home to several other *sadhaks* over the years. In one corner of the compound there was an outhouse, a type of storeroom used by the furniture department. It had formerly been the servants' quarters when Prince Ali lived at Nanteuil. This room was given to Dr. Satyendra, who was one of Sri Aurobindo's attendants after the accident in 1938. Later Taraben got this room. Bibha used to live on the ground floor of the big house, but when the house required major repairs, she had to move out. She was later given a room in the outhouse, and when the Mother decided to have a room built on the terrace of the outhouse, Bibha moved upstairs. Kala had for a time occupied Bibha's old room in the big house. In 1944, at the age of twenty and after completing her B.A., Priti joined the Ashram. She was given the ground floor to the right side of the entrance. Her brother Manoj and her sister Arati moved to Nanteuil in 1951, and in 1956 the Mother visited their rooms. Later on, in 1962, the Mother asked that a separate room be constructed above the ground-floor kitchen for Priti's sister Tapati. Other rooms at Nanteuil are currently occupied by Sushila, Moon, and Ravi.

Also at Nanteuil was a garage where the Mother's Plymouth car used to be parked. It was converted into an office for The Golden Chain Fraternity, the alumni association for ex-students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). Its entrance is on the Rue de la Compagnie. This association started in 2003 and maintains contacts with ex-students. Its name is taken from a talk which Nolini-da gave to the final-year students of the Higher Course in October 1976:

Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's Love, Her Presence is there always.

The Golden Chain also brings out a magazine under the same name which is sent to all former students who care to receive it. The office has now been shifted to another building a little further to the south.

As one enters Nanteuil, one notices the statue of Athene which stands almost like a sentry at the entrance to the compound. Athene was the Greek goddess of

wisdom and war, who was born fully armed from the head of her father Zeus. The statue was specially made out of clay for a 1st December presentation of Sri Aurobindo's poem *Iliad*. When the programme was over, it was put away. Later it was fired in the kiln used by the students in the the clay modelling class. Now it stands under the shade of a small sandalwood tree at Nanteuil.

Many Ashramites have happy memories of time spent at Nanteuil. Some remember the Mother playing table tennis, others recall her daily visits for drama practice. Yet others remember climbing the trees to steal the mangoes! Gauri Pinto has lovingly preserved some of her childhood memories in pictures which show her running through the garden at Nanteuil and posing with her parents, Ambu, and Nishtha. Yes, Nanteuil truly is a place with many memories.

Sri Smriti: the Mother's Museum at Nanteuil

The idea of having a museum in the Ashram, housing the beautiful collection of the Mother, had come up several times. When the Mother went to open the Sri Aurobindo Library in 1954, she walked through all the rooms. On reaching the terrace, she looked around and said that if she had another large and beautiful building nearby, she could keep all her beautiful things in it.

In 1989 the first floor at Nanteuil fell vacant. Dyuman, one of the Trustees of the Ashram, remembered the Mother's wish. It was decided to use this place for the Mother's museum and it was called Sri Smriti, "in memory of the highest".

As soon as the decision for starting the Mother's museum was taken, Champaklal, who had lovingly and meticulously guarded many articles used by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and Dyuman, who was in charge of the Mother's stores and the safe-keeping of the Ashram's treasures, started giving articles to Sri Smriti, at the same time passing along the history of many of these pieces.

Jayantilal and Krishnalal were responsible overall and they guided Vasudev and me regarding how to set up the museum and conserve and preserve the collection. Old furniture was dug out from the stores; curtains were made to block out direct light; broken pieces were put together with care; and generally a lot of cleaning was necessary to give the displayed items a presentable, neat look. Much effort went into learning the correct methods of conservation and preservation, mostly from books but also from an intuitive guidance. Each article required its own specialised method, even for basic cleaning.

Sometimes there were surprises during the work. While cleaning a large Japanese lacquer box, we noticed a nice patch of colour. The box's lid was completely covered with a thick layer of dust that had settled there over the years. As it was slowly cleaned by hand with wet, soft muslin cloth, the layers of dust were removed, and inch by inch the design on the lid was revealed. Gold, silver, copper, brass and mother-of-pearl made up a unique embossed dragon motif adorning the cover! This

was just one example of the many surprises that awaited us.

Regarding the collection, the furniture used previously by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was primarily given from the Ashram stores. As readers of Champaklal's books will know, he saved everything used or touched by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So from a tiny rose thorn to paper cuttings to pens, dusters, *dhotis*, signed photos, combs, pins, blotters, dishes — all these and many other personal and gifted items were given by him to Sri Smriti. He was very relieved and happy that the things which he had lovingly kept were at last being housed properly and with care. Most of the articles he gave had written notes with them and other history he provided whenever we asked him for details.

There are many interesting stories around the collection at Sri Smriti. One such story begins with the arrival of a small bookcase used by Sri Aurobindo. We wondered what to put inside the case and requested the Archives and Research Library for some autographed books. Space on the shelves then got filled with pens, blotters, and paperweights used by Sri Aurobindo. When the typewriter used by him while writing for the *Arya* was received, a search for copies of the *Arya* began. At last all seven bound volumes of the *Arya* were given by Champaklal directly from Sri Aurobindo's room!

Another story involves a low-seat, high-back chair that has a unique history. Purani had a chair that had been used by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. He brought this chair with him when he came to stay in Pondicherry and offered it to Sri Aurobindo, who used it for a while, until 1926–27. After the Mother was given the charge of the Ashram, she used to sit on this chair, which was placed in the Meditation Hall where the large painting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother now hangs, and meditate with some of the disciples, who had their fixed places on either side of the chair. Jayantilal remembered that Krishnalal had done a painting of this chair depicting its arrangement for the Mother's meditation *darshan*, and now Sri Smriti houses both the chair and the painting.

Some other precious articles that led us to find out their histories include a lotus-shaped footstool made for the Mother's 80th birthday. We then located and received the extra long knife specially made at Harpagon Workshop for cutting the huge cake prepared for that day and a large number of photographs of the Mother taken as part of the celebrations. Similarly, the arrival of Sri Aurobindo's typewriter led us to acquire copies of some sheets actually typed by him. And when we received Sri Aurobindo's bed, we began a search for one of the mattresses used by him. Champaklal not only gave us the mattress but also provided a pillow, pillow slips, and a bedcover — everything bearing the touch of Sri Aurobindo's body.

The Working of Sri Smriti

Sri Smriti has not only gathered, housed, and displayed various articles but has also collected important Ashram history through its acquisitions. As soon as we receive an item, we give it an acquisition number. Then we record it in our catalogue with such details as the date, from whom it was acquired, a physical description and its current condition, plus whatever history is available. At times some visitors give us extra details regarding a particular item. We try to confirm the authenticity and add the information to the catalogue. We also photograph each item as we receive it. Often we take a photograph to capture the condition 'as is' and then take more photographs subsequent to cleaning and repairing. All these details become part of the catalogue and preservation records.

Next comes the cleaning, and the repairing if it is required. The item is then placed for display or stored appropriately. Practically the whole collection gets a thorough cleaning and airing once a year. Many conservation experts who have visited Sri Smriti are surprised that it is generally free from cockroaches, silver fish, and other insects so harmful to any museum collection. The reason is a general cleanliness and the personal attention of the Ashramites who do their work with care, love, and a sense of beauty as emphasised by the Mother in our everyday life.

Once in a while we have helped outside centres by repairing and conserving personal articles of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that are in their possession. We provide them with all the details of the work we have done and suggestions for future preservation. Some individuals, residing either in the Ashram or elsewhere, offer the precious gifts which they have received from the Mother for safe-keeping and preservation at Sri Smriti. In this way, Sri Smriti serves as a place where people feel comfortable in giving their dearest possessions.

Visitors to Sri Smriti pass through its four rooms, delighting in the many treasures on view. There are clothes worn by the Mother, including some beautiful saris embroidered by *sadhikas*, stationery, books, and some items given to her by her father, her grandmother, her friends, and *sadhaks*. There are rare and historic articles like a pen given to her by Sri Aurobindo and a typewriter presented to her in Japan by the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Sri Aurobindo's articles include furniture used by him before 1946; pens, paperweights, blotters, and an ancient typewriter that he used when writing for the *Arya*; his *dhotis*, *chaddars*, towels, and napkins; and a metal trunk with which he came to Pondicherry from Calcutta in 1910. One room contains the Mother's Japanese collection, which has some rare objects which the Mother had brought with her from Japan in 1920. Many of these — lacquer, ceramic, and bamboo objects — are unusual pieces of Japanese art. This collection also has rare dolls, fine stationery, exquisite chinaware, and lacquer pieces offered to her by her friends and devotees.

Also on display are articles offered to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo by *sadhaks*

as well as devotees from outside. Those offered by Ashramites are generally crafted, painted, or embroidered by hand. Many of these use recycled material. Artefacts offered by devotees are mostly beautiful objects of art as well as lovingly presented personal gifts.

House for Mementos

In *Champaklal Speaks* there is a charming story that perhaps foretells the origin of Sri Smriti. Champaklal relates an incident from 1923, when he had just begun his work with the Mother. She had lit a candle in order to seal a letter she had written, and kept the matchstick to one side while using the wax. When she was done, she gave him the matchstick to throw away. He asked if he could keep it. Here is the Mother's answer as Champaklal recorded it:

Mother looked at me and smiled. Affectionately she said: "You can, surely. But you see, you will require a whole house to keep things like this." Again she smiled. Then she placed the matchstick in my palm, pressing it gently.

A few years ago, when Champaklal's cupboards were being cleaned out, several large glass jars were found. They contained used matchsticks and the ashes from mosquito coils that had been lit in Sri Aurobindo's rooms and then lovingly collected and saved by Champaklal. These mementos were given to Sri Smriti and are a reminder of how we must care for and protect our precious heritage received from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

SUNANDA PODDAR

Of course the ego and the vital with its claims and desires is always the main obstacle to the emergence of the psychic. For they make one live, act, do sadhana even for one's own sake and psychicisation means to live, act and do sadhana for the sake of the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1099)

VISITS RELIVED

(Reminiscences of the Mother and the Ashram based on personal notes and letters)

In my younger days I was a devotee of Lord Sri Krishna. I had also a great love and admiration for Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. My father also admired the great spiritual giants *viz.* Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramateerth, Sri Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo. My elder brother, my dear Babuanna, however, had great faith in Sri Aurobindo. Though my father and brother longed to visit Pondicherry, they could not do so for one reason or the other.

On the 9th of July 1959 I received telegraphic instructions to immediately proceed to Ranchi in what was then Bihar to fetch lac insects for propagating lac in the North Kanara forests of Karnataka. On reaching Ranchi I was given to understand that the insects were not available. So, I left for Calcutta by the night train. On reaching the city on the 14th morning, straight away I proceeded to Dakshineswara to fulfil my long-cherished childhood aspiration of paying homage to Swami Ramakrishna. After taking a bath in the Holy Ganges, I had the Darshan of the Mother Mahakali, and then went to Bhagawan Ramakrishna's drawing room, where the Bhagawan used to rest on his *charpai*. It was an old wooden cot, covered with tied ropes and *patties*. I offered my *pranams*. A long wish was at last fulfilled! From there I went and offererd *namaskaras* to Sri Vivekananda at Belur. I left by the night train.

When I reached Haliyal, my service headquarters, my elder brother, a keen devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, began pestering me about going to Pondicherry, which I had been postponing for years. So, repeatedly pressed by him, I decided to go to Pondy. Within a week of my returning from Dakshineswara, I and my elder brother left for Pondicherry *via* Villupuram by train on the 28th July 1959, my younger brother Vasantha joining us at Bangalore. We reached Pondy early morning on the 30th July 1959.

On reaching Pondy, we rushed to the Ashram to have the Balcony Darshan of the Mother at 6.30 a.m. The first sight of the Mother had a magnetic effect on us. We had another Balcony Darshan of the Mother the next day. Those days Balcony Darshans were held every day, when the Mother appeared on the balcony above the garage of the Ashram.

We used to stand on the road facing the balcony, looking up for the Mother's appearance. She used to slowly come to the balcony from the door behind, and stand for some time holding the railing. She would look at all those assembled, from one end of the street to the other. Then she would look up towards the sky, praying

for the divine blessings for us. After about 5-10 minutes she would slowly withdraw. People used to come from far-off places for this Darshan.

We were planning to return home on the 31st July, when we surprisingly came to know that the Mother would see everybody the next day *i.e.* on the 1st August, it being the Prosperity Day. What a luck and a boon! We stayed back for her personal blessings.

The next day we entered the front gate of the Ashram, went up the wooden staircase situated at the left side of the reception room, and waited in the moving queue for our turn to see the Mother. As we entered, we saw the Mother sitting on a chair in all her splendour. We offered *pranams* by bowing down at her holy feet and looking up into her eyes. She also looked into our eyes. We were initiated through that one magnetic searching look into the depths of our souls. Aeons of spiritual searches for ultimate Gurus had come to a realisation in this life! What a divine assurance, grace and blessing! After the *pranams*, our legs had become too heavy to get up from our leaning posture! We came out dazed and in a stupor — an experience we never had before!

We were lodged in the Park Guest House of the Ashram, where wooden *charpais* with tied coir ropes were provided for visitors in large sleeping halls. These halls were said to be formerly used as charcoal storage godowns prior to the Ashram taking over the campus. Visitors were charged Rs. 3/- per cot per day then. The Dining Hall charges were between Rs. 3/- and Rs. 5/- per day.

After seeing the Mother, my faith in her and Sri Aurobindo was rooted firmly; and I, then onwards, fully accepted them as my Gurus. I started reading all the available literature on them. I enrolled myself as a subscriber to the three Ashram magazines *viz.* the *Bulletin*, *Mother India* and *The Advent*, and since then the membership for the first two have continued till today. Sri Vasantarao Kulkarni, a resident Ashram devotee from our home-place, guided us and took us around the Ashram. It is interesting to record that the subscription receipts for the *Bulletin* magazine were then signed by the Mother. We returned home the next day.

From 1960 onwards I went on sending offerings to the Mother, though very meagre, through Postal Money Orders, starting with Rs. 2/-. It was a pleasant surprise to see the M.O. acknowledgements being personally signed by the Mother! Since then 50 postal receipts signed by the Mother are with me, dating from 1960 to 1969. Only on four occasions did her managers (K. Amrita, and one by Counouma) sign the M.O. receipts.

* * *

1960 was a great year, on account of the 29th February being celebrated as the first leap year anniversary of the descent of the Supramental on the earth. The ceiling of the Meditation Hall (in front of the Secretary's room) was covered with silvery

metal sheets. (These sheets are still in existence even after 50 years.) The walls were decorated with golden coloured silk cloth on all sides. A decorated chair was installed at the far end of this hall for the Mother to sit and bless the visitors. The entrance at the main gate was looking heavenly with various flowering potted plants which were kept all along upto the entrance to this hall.

That day, there was meditation around the Samadhi at 10 a.m. with the music of the organ played by the Mother. In the afternoon at 4 p.m. the Mother gave Darshan to all the devotees and visitors, who went in a queue to her. The Mother looked divine in her celestial beauty with her head covered with a silk scarf. She was very active and agile, and kept her eyes on all of us coming in a line to receive her blessings. The queue was moving steadily. When my turn came I bowed down before the Mother, kept my head on her sacred feet and looked up into her eyes. She also looked into my eyes and put great force into my being. On her nodding that the blessing was over, I stood up, received a gold-plated medallion and the message card, which contained her marvellous experience and narration of the supramental force entering in her and on the earth on the 29th February, 1956. This experience was made public for the first time that day by the Mother, though it had already been privately circulated amongst a few in the Ashram. The Mother declared on this day, "Henceforth the 29th of February, the Golden Day, will be the day of the Lord." What a great and rare message to all of us and to the world!

Next day was a Prosperity Day. We again went to the Mother with other disciples and had a lucky second Darshan. During this visit we came in contact with M. P. Pandit-ji through Vasantarao Kulkarni. The latter later donated his estate at Matapur, near Hubli, to the Mother. Henceforth Pandit-ji became instrumental in arranging all our personal Darshans of the Mother, for which we remain ever grateful to him. Around this time we also came close to Dyuman-ji, who used to give us blessed napkins on the Sunday preceding a Darshan Day.

(To be continued)

S. G. NEGINHAL

If desire is rejected and no longer governs the thought, feeling or action and there is a steady aspiration of an entirely sincere self-giving, the psychic usually after a time opens of itself.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1099)

YAJÑA (यज्ञः) — THE BASIS OF LIFE

(A student's talk to his fellow students*)

(Continued from the issue of April 2012)

The Origin of Creation — The Origin of the Law of Yajña

YAJÑA as described in the Vedas, later taken up again in the Gita by Sri Krishna and now revealed to us by Sri Aurobindo clears up the misinterpretations that have occurred through the ages because of the human tendency of forgetfulness and an incapacity to retain it in its purest form.

The yajña was given by Prajapati, the Lord of all creatures, to us when he created us — as Gita says —

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्टा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः। अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोद्भस्विष्टकामधुक् ॥

With sacrifice the Lord of creatures of old created creatures and said, By this shall you bring forth (fruits of offspring), let this be your milker of desires.

अत्राद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः। यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः॥
कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम्। तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम्॥

From food creatures come into being, from rain is the birth of food, from sacrifice comes into being the rain, sacrifice is born of work; work know to be born of Brahman, Brahman is born of the Immutable; therefore is all-pervading Brahman established in the sacrifice.

All creatures do or are compelled to participate in the giant universal yajña, the process of a give and take and an exchange, a growing by fostering each other. This is an inevitable law followed in Nature as the divine action and all existence is continually giving out either voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously from its stock, be it physically, mentally or vitally. For this is the Truth of the nature, no individual whose ego sense makes him think that he has his own separate and independent existence without anything to do with his envioning existence can actually exist. None can exist separate and independently of this world around him without participating and contributing to this Law of sacrifice.

* At the Higher Course of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

The Triguna Yajña

Each yajña can be performed by the three gunas where the individual acts from the consciousness of these three gunas. As the Gita says, there are three types of yajñas —
 the tamasic yajña
 the rajasic yajña
 the sattwic yajña.

These three types of yajñas are like yajñas done on three different levels of consciousness. Each of these three yajñas corresponds to the properties of one of the three gunas. The tamoguna corresponds to ignorance or an inertia, the rajoguna increases with egoism and ambition and the sattwic guna is where there is light, knowledge and consciousness.

Tamasic and rajasic gunas are not to be seen negatively, for they are necessary stepping stones in yoga. But finally one is not to remain bound to any of these gunas but always strive to soar higher and beyond the three gunas and become trigunātita as the Gita suggests. These gunas are qualities of the Prakriti, which is the active and executive force of the Brahman who manifests the Purusha, the static aspect of the Brahman which is equally involved in sustaining and helping the creation to grow. This is the duality that has perplexed many and which, if seen in the right manner, reveals itself in its true form. This duality may seem to present two separate aspects, but they are inseparable. As Sri Aurobindo says,

Wherever there is Prakriti, there is Purusha; wherever there is Purusha, there is Prakriti. Even in his inactivity he holds in himself all her force and energies ready for projection; even in the drive of her action she carries with her all his observing and mandatory consciousness as the whole support and sense of her creative purpose.¹

This Prakriti works within in the limits of the three gunas.

A tamasic yajña is performed in utter ignorance, without any faith and without knowing for whom, why, or sometimes even without knowing how the yajña is to be performed. Such yajña could have serious repercussions, or spoil the fruit of the yajña. The ignorance could be so great that sometimes it is not even done for any fruit, but only as a ritual that has to be maintained. This is almost a dead yajña. A rajasic yajña is totally ego-centred. It is a yajña only in an outer form, but from an inner perspective it defies the very first rule of a selfless sharing in the law of yajña. It is performed only for the gain of fruits, which could be fulfilling physical desires, or gaining occult powers like siddhis, or to gain fame and reputation. Often jealousy

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 114.

and greed are in the heart of this yajña. So it is offered to the lower gods and perverse powers. It is only in the sattwic yajña that some truth behind the yajña appears to emerge, as one starts becoming conscious of the principle of the yajña and of the self to whom the sacrifice has to be offered. It is of course not the last and the highest but the closest to the ideal of yajña.

But most often the sacrifice is done unconsciously, egoistically and without much knowledge and acceptance of the true meaning of yajña. Yajña done in such a manner does not give the result that was primarily its purpose. Instead it yields only a mechanical and natural profit and the individual makes only a slow progress within the limits of a binding ego that pulls him down. Not until the will and a more complete instrument accept a higher law that does not need to be forced anymore, “can there come the deep joy and happy fruitfulness of divine sacrifice.”² The whole process changes from a mechanical ‘give and take’ to a yajña only when the will gladly participates in it without any reserve and hesitation. The knowledge of the Law in the mind and the gladness of the heart and the will should culminate in a new perception

that it is to our own Self and Spirit and the one-Self and Spirit of all that we give. And this is true even when our self-offering is still to our fellow-creatures or to lesser Powers and Principles and not yet to the Supreme.³

Outer Expression and the Inner Yajña

The yajña may proceed in the beginning only by oblations offered to the lower gods for the fulfilment of personal desires, but this too goes to the supreme, the Lord of the Sacrifice, the Purushottama. But that is unknown to the ‘hota’, who is performing the sacrifice. This is because the ‘hota’ is unaware of this fact that his sacrifice is incomplete and of the lower nature. The knowledge of this occult fact does not suffice. True knowledge is only that which becomes a reality in one’s life. It is only when living beyond the ego one sees only the One self in all that is one’s own true self that the yajña becomes complete. The form of the yajña or worship is relatively insignificant, as Sri Aurobindo says,

The worship given may take any shape from the dedication of a leaf or flower, a cup of water, a handful of rice, a loaf of bread, to consecration of all that we possess and the submission of all that we are. Whoever the recipient, whatever the gift, it is the Supreme, the Eternal in things, who receives and accepts it, even if it be rejected or ignored by the immediate recipient.⁴

2. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-02.

The outer form of the worship, prayer, oblation, and sacrifice is never an obstacle to reach the Lord of the sacrifice.

The First Condition of Yajña

As we know one of the most important problems in yoga — one that starts and continues in different forms till the higher levels are reached, hindering our progress but which could also be a ladder to climb higher, — is the ego. In opening the knot of ego and offering ourselves through the yajña, lies the key that leads us to liberation.

We know that ego can't exist by itself, and cannot remain without the support of the existence around it. It might claim to be totally independent and continue to remain in this illusion. But to gain the desired results even from the physical yajña, the ego has to be subordinated and gradually, totally eliminated in order to reach the higher planes of consciousness.

All unity between creatures is in its essence a self-finding, a fusion with that from which we have separated, a discovery of one's self in others.⁵

This unity is not a vital or physical association, a moral, mental or emotional nearness nor is it by sympathy or mutual support, but an inter-fusion that takes away the division between our inner substance and the One true self of which we are a portion. This Law of yajña proceeds towards this unity as

it awakens the consciousness of one common self in the giver and the object of the sacrifice.⁶

An aspiring human love and devotion also culminates in this union when it turns towards the divine,

. . . for there too the highest peak of love points into a heaven of complete mutual self-giving, its summit is the rapturous fusing of two souls into one.⁷

Once there comes an egoless perception of seeing the One self as the true self and the self in all, then the yajña is taking its right direction. Then one follows the triple path of the sacrifice, which will culminate in an integral yajña, or to use a more familiar term — the integral yoga. All life is yoga, and thus all life is yajña. For if we look into the etymology of the word “yoga” the root ‘*yuj*’ means to unite, to join and if that be the purpose of life then the word yajña which comes from the root

5. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

7. *Ibid.*

‘yaj’’, meaning to consecrate, to offer would be its path, its method and the way.

The Triune Path of Sacrifice

The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo is the highest yajña. The highest yajña’s triune path is attained by a complete surrender, and the right way of works guided by the highest and the truest knowledge. It is through the culmination of the yoga of Devotion, the yoga of Works, and the yoga of Knowledge that this yajña can be performed.

Each path has its own detailed way of working itself out with many realisations and spiritual achievements; these are a matter of experience and could only have been explained and elaborated by a yogi like Sri Aurobindo. So let us look at how we can grasp the limitations of the lower nature that we have to overcome in the process of this great sacrifice.

None of the three yogas should be interpreted in the narrow sense. Works are not just our outward actions but all our active and dynamic movements. There is a rising from a lower to a higher consciousness in each of these paths, a movement to greater heights of perfection. The progressive stages that one goes through depend much on the need, form and powers of the individual nature, but still in their essence they are one.

The Yoga of Knowledge

The yoga of Knowledge demands first that all the natural mental activities should be taken up by a higher power,

the soul in us, the psychic being, the priest of the sacrifice, to the divine service . . .⁸

Then there should be brought down,

the Light and Power proper to some new height of consciousness gained by its upward effort into the whole action of the knowledge.⁹

In this manner there is a central change of the consciousness of the individual and results in a direct experience of the Divine in himself and in all things. The expression of one’s fundamental knowledge in the mental nature will be more and more illumined and widened and heightened. The activity still remains in the mind, but that could not be the limit of the perfection of the knowledge. Sri Aurobindo says,

8. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

9. *Ibid.*

There is an ascension still to be made from this height, by which the spiritualised mind will exceed itself and transmute into a supramental power of knowledge.¹⁰

So then have to start the developments and progressions into higher mental planes like the illumind mind, intuitive mind, overmind and so on.

All the works of mind and intellect must be first heightened and widened, then illumined, lifted into the domain of a higher Intelligence, afterwards translated into workings of a greater non-mental Intuition, then again transformed into the dynamic outpourings of the Overmind radiance, and these transfigured into the full light and sovereignty of the supramental Gnosis.¹¹

The Yoga of Devotion

Knowledge illumines us, liberates us, yet is love the deepest and most intense method of union and ascension. We as mental beings give most importance to the thinking mind and its faculty of reason and its approach and way of arriving at truth, of which we most often suppose it can't be otherwise. This nature of the mental faculty is used to suppress or keep the movements of the heart in control by the reason and the mental will and intelligence. Until knowledge is heightened to a vaster experience it cannot correlate with the heart which can be a seat of a profound presence. Intellect sees only the vital emotions similar to the animal's, governed by egoistic passion and blind instinctive life-impulses with its imperfections and perversions and sordid degradations. But the soul of man is not there but hidden in a luminous cave within us.

Love is the central aspect around which in different layers of consciousness the yoga rises gradually from personal to ethical, moral, communal and further broadening itself beyond the widest ego-sense to a Divine love, joy and beauty. The mental, vital and the physical have no longer to insist on their rash will, demands and desires and not try to follow their own limited path but open themselves to a higher power. This power, an inner flame, an inner reality, otherwise felt only in its rare influences,

is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the Sadhana.¹²

Its chief character is divine love, which it always seeks and turns towards; Sri Aurobindo compares it to a sunflower that turns always towards the sun. In its initial

10. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

growth earthly love, affection, compassion, goodwill, benevolence and gratitude support it, and give it a refinement, gentleness and strength to further purify itself while rising higher. But it knows how mixed are these human movements at their best and at their worst, and stamped with the mark of ego. So as soon as it emerges, it is ready to break out of these imperfect emotional activities and replace them with a greater spiritual truth of love and oneness.

Although it is a divine love for the supreme that we must seek for, this does not exclude all the forms of individual love, but only after they have been purified from any egoistic motive. The mind, vital and the physical must be made into instruments for adoration of the self in all. The best example would be the Rishi Yajñavalkya who said,

“Not for the sake of the wife, . . . but for the sake of the Self is the wife dear to us.”¹³

This adoration is not a complete worship until it is offered to the Highest in all his manifestations. This yoga of Devotion,

in the end makes one the Form and the Formless, and identifies Spirit and Matter.¹⁴

“He who gives to me with a heart of adoration a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a cup of water, I take and enjoy that offering of his devotion, . . .”¹⁵

The Yoga of Works

The yoga of Works has been misinterpreted or ignored since long in Indian spiritual culture.

The experiences in the yoga of Knowledge are so powerful and overwhelmingly convincing that life and action in this world did not seem a reality to the practitioners of the yoga of Knowledge anymore. Shankaracharya could be an example who refers to a renunciation of works in this world of illusion. But works is an important part of the Integral Yajña.

All our actions originate from an egoistic desire for the fruit of our works. This part of yoga demands that the individual act selflessly. But this is only a means and not its aim. All actions can be done from a narrow or enlarged ego-sense or for the sake of the Divine. Action, however small it may be can be consecrated to the

13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

15. *Ibid.*, p.152.

Immutable. Respiration, heart-beat, walking, talking, sleeping, eating, working, all voluntary or involuntary actions should become consciously offered movements done through a desireless consciousness. There are subtle shades that make a difference in this yoga. The level of the attitude and the consciousness in which works are offered determine the quality of the sacrifice of works. As Sri Krishna says to Arjuna,

“By doing works otherwise than for sacrifice, this world of men is in bondage to works; for sacrifice practise works, . . . becoming free from all attachment.”¹⁶

To do some action or work for sacrifice means to do it from a raised and elevated and a higher consciousness. It is not by ceremonial sacrifice that one does the yajña, but works done with the true knowledge give the right direction and meaning to yajña that could rise higher than just fulfilling worldly desires. We fail to do our works from a higher consciousness because we are bound by the Prakriti. And thus our actions are limited to the three gunas of the Prakriti. Once we can rise above the gunas we can do works impersonally. But we must not confuse uninterested action with disinterested action. The doer of disinterested action is trigunātita, but to be uninterested is to do action without any will and thus to fall back into a lower consciousness and do the action in bondage.

It is therefore through the sacrifice of love, works and knowledge with the psychic being as the leader and priest of the sacrifice that life itself can be transformed into its own true spiritual figure.¹⁷

The whole of life should become a conscious offering to the Divine. The Divine's response is certain.

Yajña is the basis of our life and all existence. It carries the concept of a profound truth that degenerated and was lost and restricted to outer forms. This was indeed because of the age. But we must remember that this form lasted all these centuries only because it had something eternal and basic to the law of existence. Otherwise like other empty dogmas peculiar to some time or age soon worn out and rejected, the law of sacrifice would also have perished.

Yajña depends on the attitude and the consciousness from which it is done. The quality of the offering bears the quality of the fruits. Whatever may be the form, a yajña or an offering always rises ultimately to the Supreme, the Lord of the sacrifice. As it has been said, “In yajña all the lower is offered to the higher, and higher is the

16. *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 104.

17. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 148.

fire.” And again, “Yajña is an unreserved acceptance of the Divine in our life and our inner self and spirit.” We must also remember that, “One gives because of the self in everybody everywhere and the giver also is the one self that gives to another self, which is an interchange between the One absolute self.” In the unified view of things, “There is no sacrifice, — unless we can say that the Master of sacrifice is offering the works of his energy in the Jiva to himself in his own cosmic form.”

The complete redemption comes by the descent of the divine Power into the human mind and body and the remoulding of their inner life into the divine image, — what the Vedic seers called the birth of the Son by the sacrifice. It is in fact by a continual sacrifice or offering, a sacrifice of adoration and aspiration, of works, of thought and knowledge, of the mounting flame of the Godward will that we build ourselves into the being of this Infinite.¹⁸

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥

Brahman is the giving, Brahman is the food-offering, by Brahman it is offered into the Brahman-fire, Brahman is that which is to be attained by Samadhi in Brahman-action.¹⁹

(Concluded)

PRANJAL GARG

18. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 21, pp. 571-72.

19. *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 113.

By his way of thinking, feeling, acting, each one emanates vibrations which constitute his own atmosphere and quite naturally attract vibrations of similar nature and quality.

The Mother

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, p.13)

THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of April 2012)

ONE evening I was walking down the road on which Bharat-di lived. Suddenly, hearing from the house in front of Golconde the sound of many people crying, I stood still. A woman came up to me and said that Rajagopal had fallen into a well and died. This man, Rajagopal, used to work at the Pondicherry Electricity Supply Office. He had died very suddenly leaving behind his wife and two small sons. Incidentally, Rajagopal was very well-known to Bharati-di. After hearing everything she went to the dead man's house and showed her sympathy and condolences. She gave fifty rupees and told the dead man's wife to remain calm. She assured her that she would do whatever she could for the family. She informed the Mother and asked for her grace. The Mother gave Rajagopal's wife some work in Sahana-di's tailoring department. All three of them began to receive food from the Ashram. Bharati-di also got all the money that was due to Rajagopal from his office and deposited it in his wife's name. It was arranged for the two boys to go to an outside school without having to pay the fees. In this way, by Bharati-di's efforts, all the responsibilities of a very unfortunate family were taken up and dealt with.

*

Once Bharati-di took a leave of six months and went to France for the treatment of her rheumatism. When she reached her house there, she wrote a beautiful letter to me. She used to always travel by sea. After starting from Madras when she reached Mumbai she received a letter from the Mother. She also received a letter in Italy and another one in France. Bharati-di wrote:

“You know the significance a single letter from her has in our lives. I had given the Mother three addresses of the places where I was going to stop. In all three places I received a letter from her as soon as I reached there. I should have myself written to the Mother, describing all the places I had visited. Look how the Mother caught me. This is between you and me. These three letters took away all the exhaustion which was within me after my journey by sea. I took pictures in many well-known places that I visited. The ship dropped anchor for two or three days at every port. I took the opportunity to get to know the culture of the local people and the natural beauty of the places. My treatment has started and I am very comfortable here. However, I have to put aside my Indian clothes and put on the French ones. Most of my relatives are young. It

seems that it is embarrassing for them if I wear my Asian clothes. I have tried to save their prestige and kept my taste in mind while designing my new clothes. I am well. Love to everyone.”

After a few days Bharati-di’s health got better and she wrote that she was coming back. Pavitra-da called me, all of a sudden, one morning. I went to him and came to know that Bharati-di was arriving by train the next morning. The Mother wanted me to receive her at the station. Early in the morning a car was going to the station to fetch her. The Mother wanted me to go in that car. Seeing that I was a bit hesitant, Amrita-da said, “The Mother wants you to keep up the special relationship you share with Bharati-di. This is a very old relationship. It did not happen all of a sudden.”

I went and fetched Bharati-di in the morning. In the evening I went to see her. The first thing she did was to enquire about the Mother. On hearing that the Mother was well she said in a happy tone that she would very quickly make arrangements to see the Mother. The joy of being with the Mother after six long months was making her impatient. She said that there was such a sweetness in the Mother that it charmed everyone. She added, “Do you know what the trouble is with me when it comes to the Mother? I talk endlessly about myself when I am with her and take up all her time.”

I replied, “The Mother too enjoys listening to your elegant French. After talking to you the Mother herself speaks in that same elegant French with the educated French people. This I have heard from your friend’s son who used to teach us French in the evening.” Bharati-di was very happy when she heard this.

*

One day I received a note from Bharati-di asking me to see her that evening. I went after five o’clock. As soon as she saw me she gave me to read a beautiful little letter written by the Mother. A little surprised, I exclaimed, “Should I read the Mother’s letter to you?”

Bharati-di told me, “Read and see for yourself. You will understand how great she is.”

I went ahead and read it. The Mother had written:¹

Dear Bharati,

What a terrible decision you have taken! Because of your uncontrollable thirst to be with me for a short moment, you want to take a leap into the boundless sea. This is indeed true love. But how will I endure those long days without

1. Translator’s note: This is Pramila-di’s free rendering of what the Mother had written. Bharati-di’s letter, which follows, is similarly Pramila-di’s own reconstruction of what she read.

seeing you when the two of you will go to spend your honeymoon in some faraway country? That will be impossible. This is why I say you need not take out an advertisement in a newspaper to find a worthy companion for yourself. Come alone and see me next Wednesday in the morning at 10 o'clock. I have a little free time on that day and we will still be able to talk to our hearts' content. We will both enjoy ourselves. My love to you. Our relationship has been there through several lives. No one can come between us. We will be together forever.

The Mother

I was flabbergasted on reading this letter. I looked at Bharati-di's face and said, "I couldn't understand anything."

"Why? The Mother's words are very simple," Bharati-di answered. "All right, now you can read my letter. I know, it may be a bit confusing."

I read it. Bharati-di was sweetly addressing the Mother,

Mère Vénérée (Revered Mother),

I have been sitting outside each one of your offices in vain. In every office I have been told that the Mother only opens her doors to receive brides and bridegrooms these days. All the others are forbidden to enter. It has been a long time since I saw you. It seems to me as if I have been living like a thirsty deer in a desert. If I have to follow your rules then I have to give up my ideals. I request you to advise me about what I should do now. If you allow me I will find myself a man who is of my age (above 70 years) by taking out an advertisement in the papers. In the state in which I am now it is impossible for me to follow my ideals. The only desire in my heart is to see you, and I wait for you in a state of restlessness. I bow down to you in all sincerity,

Bharati

I did not laugh at all when I read this. All I said was, "Bharati-di, I have heard from the Mother that you have lived all your life in pure celibacy. It was because the Mother saw this aura of unblemished purity in you that she spoke about it to her trusted and special disciple. Having come to know about this deep relationship that you have with the Mother and the secret behind it, I feel very privileged. Reading these two letters has given me a great joy."

*

Now let me come to Bharati-di's illness. She had already been bedridden for three months. She was not seeing anybody. The only precious company she had was that

of her servant Krishna and the dog she had adopted. I used to go and see her from time to time. One day I felt very sad when I saw her. There was very little blood in her body. She was unable to eat. I wrote about this to the Mother. The Mother was herself unwell then. She sent two big roses for Bharati-di. I sent them to her. She was happy and she wrote, even though it was difficult for her, "The Mother has sent me peace and love through these roses. I have informed the Mother that I will go to Vellore." After this she went to Vellore. Two days before her departure her beloved dog died. She took Krishna with her when she went away. I went to say goodbye to her with two lilies in my hands. I received a letter from Vellore in which she told me that after taking X-rays the doctor had decided that her stomach had to be operated on. She would not live much longer after the operation. She wrote, "Krishna is crying. You are educated. I believe that you will not cry. The lilies you gave me showed your love for me and brought me peace. The doctors want to operate the day after tomorrow. I asked them for these two days. You will have to send the news of my death to various people. I am myself writing to all these people. After I die the hospital administration will post the letters and telegrams that I am writing. The Mother knows everything. Every day she sends her invaluable blessings by car. The numerous roses sent by her are filling my room with her touch of peace and love. Tomorrow a car will come. Why don't you come in that car? I have asked the driver to pick you up. They have given me two rooms here. You can rest in one of the rooms."

The driver asked me to wait near the door of her house at 6:30. I was there at 6:15. The car had left at 6 o'clock. There was no place inside. Nolini-da was surprised to see me in the Ashram. He asked, "Didn't you go to Vellore?" I told him everything frankly. Nolini-da said, "Mother wanted you to go there immediately. Bharati-di had written to the Mother that you should be sent." The Mother made arrangements for me to go the next day at 5 o'clock. When I reached there I saw that she was all dressed up and standing near her door she was admiring the green hills beyond.

I said, "Why did you write all that?"

Bharati-di said, "I was joking. I will be operated on tomorrow. I won't be here for long."

"I will leave after the operation," I said.

"Why? It is a simple operation. Why do you have to stay? I will get well and enjoy your cooking," she said.

I believed her words.

At 5 o'clock in the evening I did my last *pranam* to her, and left her for ever. I did not have the faintest idea that it would be the last time that we were seeing each other. She had tears in her eyes. They had already attached the tubes for blood transfusion and made her lie down on her bed. Perhaps that is why she was in pain. The next day in the morning I told everything to Nolini-da. He said, "At this moment the operation is still going on." That night at 8 o'clock I found out after making a

phone call that Bharat-di was well. The next day in the morning I came to know that Bharat-di had passed away at 9 o'clock that night. We were all deeply pained. On 5th November she had said, in answer to a question from a friend's son, "I don't fear death. I know that no one dies. The soul is immortal." On 7th November at 9 o'clock in the evening Bharati-di attained Nirvana.

One of Mother's devotees came to me to give all the news. He was the son of her friend. From him I heard the explanation given by the Mother. The Mother had said that Bharati-di had come to her on the last night. She had also said, "I was waiting for her all night. When she came to me I asked her, 'Where were you all night?' In answer she had replied, 'I had been to see P.' She was very fond of P. She went within P and gave her whatever she had to give her. I said, 'Now stay with me.' But Bharati did not agree. She said that she wanted to enter into Nirvana. She did not want to come back into the world again. She had a very soft heart. Suffering and difficulties, illness and sorrow she could not bear. How hard I tried to convince her. But Bharati was adamant. I could not keep her. She went into Nirvana for ever."

*

Many people sent letters and telegrams to express their regard and respect for Bharati-di. The king of Cambodia sent a telegram to the Ashram. He wrote a small book on Bharati-di. In that book it was written that she used to earn a very high salary as the Vice-President of the Mahabodhi Society. From the beginning, all that money went as charity to the poor and the miserable. We had no idea about all this. She had made a will before dying. Eight thousand rupees were given to her servant. She had also left three expensive dinner-sets to this servant. All the rest of the money, as well as her fridge and her radio, she had given to the Mother. She had also given some little objects to her dear students as something to remember her by.

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

(Translated by Sunayana Panda from the original Bengali "Ujjwal Ateet")

ADDENDUM

MENTION OF BHARATIDI IN THE MOTHER'S CONVERSATIONS

1

. . . She kept me almost an hour! She told me, “The next time, I won’t chatter.” So this time it was only half an hour! But she has a very pleasant way of saying things. And there is a strange phenomenon, which took place some two or three years ago, I don’t remember now. . . . It was after the consciousness had entirely spread all over the world (all over the earth, in reality), but as if progressively, in the sense that it’s more intense close at hand and less intense farther away. But then, with Bharatidi, it’s not just a physical closeness: it’s a sort of closeness of vibration in a certain domain; and in her, the closeness lay in a certain . . . ironically benevolent observation. And while talking with someone, I don’t know how many times I have caught myself having Bharatidi’s voice and using her words! And in my ingenuousness, I told her, “Do you know, we have such an intimate relationship that at times — very often — when I speak I have your intonation and use your words.” Ah, mon petit, since then . . . But she isn’t a bore! You can spend an hour with her without getting bored, which is remarkable.

November 20, 1965

* * *

2

(A letter from Mother to Bharatidi written about 1963, at a time when Mother was not receiving any disciple, except sometimes people about to marry. Bharatidi, then seventy-three, had written to Mother to ask her if she should marry to be entitled to see her . . .)

O Bharatidi, our dearest friend!

Do not marry, that would be such a great pity for all — for you would have to leave the Ashram, at least during the honeymoon . . .

Let me tell you the truth. If I do not see you, it is because I cannot speak, and worse still, cannot hear, and how could I see you without hearing all the very

interesting things you always have to tell me?

My program is generally five minutes' meditation, sometimes even less — how can I ask you to climb two flights for that?

If you do not mind, let us wait a little until the pressure (not the blood's!) has subsided.

As for me, you know this, I have the great advantage of being with you without need of the physical presence, and your voice often resonates to my inner hearing — and I always answer in silence.

I now add this long written discourse to send you my best wishes for the new year.

With all my tenderness.

Signed: Mother

* * *

3

[*A disciple had gone to see Bharatidi in Vellore.*]

So did you go and see Bharatidi?

Yes, Mother. She is fine, this Bharatidi, what force she has! And what sense of humour — she is really a queen.

Yes.

There's a great nobleness in that woman.

Oh, yes. Did you give her my note?

Yes, tears came to her eyes.

They're going to operate on her tomorrow.

Tomorrow morning.

But I wondered if it was really indispensable. They don't even know if it's cancer.

It's a tumor, which may be cancerous or a simple tumor.

Anyway, she is making arrangements, she has already distributed all her money.

They say that if they don't operate, it will go from bad to worse.

Yes. How old is she?

Over seventy, I think. They're preparing her with blood transfusions. She's physically very weak, emaciated. But she has that energy . . .

She didn't know she had that?

No . . . But it's heartening to see a human being with such dignity . . .

Oh, yes.

. . . and recounting with humour the visit of missionaries and sisters trying to convert her . . .

Is it?

So there are bishops, nuns, and once they came into her room to try and convert her. She tells the story with such humour: "I am not afraid of death, I know we are born more than once!" So the others have nothing left to say.

Yes, she sent me a message through M: "I am not afraid of dying because I know we do not die." It's good.

(long silence)

There was a strange relationship between my mind and hers. . . . When I used to observe things and talk about them, I would have Bharatidi's voice and manner of speaking and seeing! I always wondered why, until I looked: there was a life when we were together, in a single body. That was very long ago.

Strange. It was very interesting . . . All of a sudden, I would speak with her voice: the sound, the words, everything was quite like her.

Yes, she has a lovely mind, really lovely.

Before coming here, she was Buddhist and Communist — fervently Communist.

(silence)

Are they militant Protestants in that hospital?

Oh, yes! There are big signs everywhere in the rooms: “He died for our sins,” and verses from the Bible all over the place.

Oh!

. . .

* * *

4

She’s gone, Bharatidi.

Yes, we’ve been very sad.

I think she wanted to go, because she had arranged everything. The trouble is the place . . . She left during the night [of November 7], and I spent a very, very bad night, that is to say, I suffered a lot. And I didn’t see her; she didn’t come [to Mother], but her thought was there constantly. I don’t know, I didn’t see her. I didn’t see her, I knew she had gone only when I was told.

I feel her thought very strongly.

Oh, very strongly, very strongly, and constantly. And strangely, there’s a sort of insistence on finding . . . (how can I put it?) what happens when one leaves — that’s what surprises me. Constantly, constantly: What happens when one leaves one’s body?

I felt the same thing.

The same thing. But it’s *her thought* that is like that. And very insistent, very insistent — again and again. . . . So what happened? At first, because I hadn’t seen her [after her death], I thought it was her old Buddhism and she had gone into some Nirvana. But then, her thought constantly coming like this: “And what happens when one leaves one’s body?” That’s the strange thing. And it’s *she* who’s putting the question. It’s that thought.

Yes, that very thought came to me very strongly too.

Yes, but that’s it. It’s the whole problem coming like this: what happens when one leaves one’s body? And I kept looking and looking and looking (I spent hours looking) — no Bharatidi. No form: a thought.

For me, it's very strange, I may say that never has a being's disappearance struck me like this one. Why? I don't know.

I may say that I've never been so occupied with someone's departure as I have been with hers — never. And constantly, “But what happens after death? . . .” As if . . . There's only thought and no form: I don't see her at all — not at all. I remember how she was physically, but I don't see her. And constantly the problem: what happens. . . ? Then I remember all my experiences, all the people I've seen die, all my very concrete experiences. . . . And why does it come like this: “What happens after death?” As if there were a sort of preoccupation: “No one will ever know” (I might translate it like this), “no one will ever know what happened to Bharatidi after her death.” And it's *she*, it's *her* thought. I can't say “she”, but her thought. Her thought as if she were telling me (you know how she was!), “No one will ever know what happened to Bharatidi after her death.” Like that, with her irony.

She didn't want to come back to Pondicherry.

No, she didn't.

The last few years (maybe the last two years, I don't know), she felt she was going to be converted. When she saw me, when she was sitting in front of me, she would feel she was going to be converted. And she didn't want that. She wanted to keep her Buddhism, her nihilistic Buddhism, materially expressed as Communism.

When I said goodbye to her, she had magnificent eyes. She looked at me . . . luminous eyes, with such force, such beauty.

She knew she wouldn't see you again.

Oh, those magnificent eyes . . .

She knew she wouldn't see you again.

But I think it's this: her psychic being had become conscious, and her whole mind didn't want to emerge from its conception. I saw that. I saw it: when I held her hand like this, she would have the impression that she was going to be *compelled* to change her conception, and she didn't want to. So she would get up abruptly and go.

She was an indomitable being, Bharatidi.

(*Mother laughs*) Yes, extremely mental. Extremely mental. The vital she had dominated; the physical . . . It was all mental, mental, mental . . . And with a sort of

concentration in her mental being.

She must have had a bad night, it must have been difficult — because here it was very, very difficult, and I didn't know it had to do with her. As soon as I knew, I went and saw there (I knew it in the morning), because it wasn't a good place (but she didn't care, now she's gone out of it). But then her mind, constantly, constantly: "What really happens after death? . . ." And for hours! I would do something else, be busy: for hours it kept coming back. . . . In the end (it lasted the whole day yesterday, and this morning it was still there), this morning I told her, "Listen, Bharatidi, be quiet, and if you are quiet, you will know." Since then, nothing anymore.

A mind so strong, and . . . yes, essentially rebellious.

When she came to see me, it was very interesting. She would come, she was attracted; and she knew it, once she told me, "Yes, I am attracted." She would sit down, take my hand, then I would see her go like this (*gesture of stiffening*), something was going on, going on [in Bharatidi], and then . . . all of a sudden she would get up and go.

She told me one or two words like that, but she didn't want — didn't want to get out of her conception. So then, something strange must have happened to her: "What happens after death? . . ." And it kept coming back like that: "No one will ever know what happened to Bharatidi after her death."

It's curious. But I finally gave her peace. I think she's better now.

She even told me (it was almost a conversation!), "You who know what death is, you don't know what my death is!" (*Mother laughs*) It's true, I don't know! "You don't know what has happened to me and what's happening to me . . . What's happening to me? What?" I must admit it's the first time — it has never happened in my life. It's the first time, the first person like that.

And the contact was only with the mind; I don't know what happened to the rest.

As for me, I was full of her.

Oh! (*Laughing*) Maybe she . . . I told her, "If you like, that whole part of your mind which I like very much can stay in me." I told her, "If you are happy to come, you can." Then I observed to see . . . But it's possible, she may have come. . . . But I told you before, there had always been a contact [with Mother], so it doesn't make much difference. But I think that's it.

I was full of her.

That's it, that's right! (*Laughing*) She divided herself up: communist, a communist death!

Yes, that's it. The psychic being went away peacefully, the mind scattered.

Yes, because it was her, but it was . . . I can't say a "person" (there's no person), but it was inside. It was inside, it wasn't like something outside (that's general). And insistent.

Yes, that's it, she scattered herself.

(silence)

But deep down in Bharatidi, I feel something very painful. A being who suffered a lot, who was very lonely, who would have liked to love but couldn't.

She couldn't.

I feel I know Bharatidi very well.

Ah?

Her revolt, as you say, her independence, and that love she dominated and didn't want to show to anybody . . . When she looked at me, really there was . . . I can't say, there was something in that look, I felt all that.

(long silence)

You remember, you gave her my note where I had written, "My love is with you", so she replied to that (she instantly saw why I had written that), she replied, "I am not afraid of death because I know one doesn't die." It was M who brought her reply back to me the next day.

Yes, she arranged things *deliberately* like that.

Oh, but she got herself operated on in order to die.

Oh, yes, she knew very well. She knew. She found it a convenient way to die.

She's fine.

(silence)

She must have dispersed herself deliberately, and gone inside all those who were close to her, receptive — where there was a receptivity.

She's dispersed herself.

In fact, to give an accurate translation of the vibrations I received (it lasted the whole day), it was, "You think you know" (I am translating), "you think you know what happens after death? . . . Then will you tell me what happened after Bharatidi's

death!” Like that.

Now I understand everything!

She was against individualism, and so . . . She didn’t want it.

Naturally, in the course of all that, I told her once (it was yesterday), I told her (said to her mind: it was her mind — not even the whole mind, now I understand it’s only a piece of it), I told her, “For you it’s like this, but it’s different for everybody.” Afterwards, she quieted down.

Yesterday, it was even very interesting, because I told her, I said to her mind, “Yes, if you like, you can settle in and make use of this instrument [Mother], but you know, you will have to renounce your preferences and prejudices!” She still used to have terrible reactions when she found that people didn’t behave properly with her. So I told her, “All that will have to go!” (*Mother laughs*)

But now she is quiet. Last night I succeeded in quieting her.

I don’t know if that’s what I saw, but the night she left, during the night a scene came to me: I was in a little harbour which seemed sunlit, and then I saw a huge, dark-blue wave coming, and it came as if to engulf the place where I was.

Oh!

A dark-blue wave, very high.

Dark blue is the mind.

(long silence)

(Mother laughs) She’s managed the whole affair quite successfully.

(silence)

But there was in her mental formation a *deep pity* for human suffering, and especially, especially an extraordinary Compassion. Oh, precisely for the suffering of death, for that transition, that moment of transition — the suffering of death. That used to preoccupy her very much. And that’s what was there the whole night of her death; it was a very bad night — bad in the sense that I suffered a lot, and very difficult. Didn’t sleep for one minute.

Then, when I learned she had left, the first thing that came (*gesture of mental vibration*), “Oh, how lonely she must have felt when she died!” And it preoccupied me a lot, until her thought told me, “Now it’s over, we won’t think about it anymore.” She must have had a difficult moment.

She even told me, “You were with me, but it was too deep . . .” It was in the active mind that she was.

But then, she herself said, “No, now it’s over, we won’t think about it anymore.” And all that was without form — she certainly didn’t want there to be a form! I looked for it a good deal, but didn’t find anything.

That’s it, I felt the pressure [of Bharatidi’s mind], I told her, “Very well, I’ll give you refuge, but not to your preferences.”

Very well.

But that dispersed mind, in what way will it continue to be?

Yes, in everyone: it has united. That’s what she did, mentally she didn’t want to continue to exist *individually*. With the psychic, you can’t play jokes of that sort — it went away. But she didn’t concern herself very much with her psychic — it was the belief she didn’t want to believe in, of course! But mentally she dispersed herself (that’s not very difficult).

But it should make a difference in the consciousness of the person into whom she’s come?

Oh, yes, it should. As for me, I told you that the contact already existed, and moreover I did it deliberately, I accepted deliberately, so it can’t make any difference in me; . . . To the extent of the person’s receptive consciousness, it will make a difference. For example (but this is the quite material mind), she knew Pali very well. . . . If there is someone receptive, it will be good. She had a good knowledge of Pali. I’d have been very happy if it had come, but it didn’t. I don’t know where that fragment went. But to be passed on, it would take someone very, very plastic, because that’s already very material.

I’ve seen instances, I’ve met people who suddenly got knowledge they didn’t previously have, knowledge that came ready-made. She must have chosen someone.

If it had come, I would have been very happy.

All that came was general ideas, overall visions, and something that absolutely wanted to convince me that after death there is dispersion.

She had a very strong mind, very strong. Perhaps a small embryo of psychic being. But it was a whole mental organisation.

(long silence)

She liked me very much, but she didn’t have any trust in me! I represented what she didn’t want to know!

Yes, as Sujata puts it, it was love she was afraid of.

Oh, yes.

Very well.

Did she still have any family? . . . I suppose they've been informed?

Yes, she had prepared a dozen letters with all the addresses — to be filled in.

Letters in which she was announcing her death!

She had just written the addresses and left the letters blank, to be written. She had even prepared a telegram for someone. Oh, it was all . . . organised.

(silence)

You know, she sent me everything in her that was contrary to what Sri Aurobindo said — she made a nice bundle with it and sent it all to me! (*Mother laughs*) Never mind! I looked at it, received it quite seriously, very seriously — I didn't send it back, didn't sweep it away: I received it all, sorted it all out, organised it all . . .

But never before in the . . . (how many?) ninety years of my life have I been so occupied with someone's death as with hers, precisely for that reason, because she wanted to give me proof of 'dispersion': "No one will ever know what happened to Bharatidi . . ."

I didn't tell her, "That is childishness!" because, as she no longer had a body, I treated her gently. But the moment, the transition was difficult . . . painful. There was a painful moment when she felt very lonely. Mentally very lonely, of course. Physically, she had her little Krishna [her servant] there. It wasn't physical, it was mental — because of her conception.

Very well.

We'll see.

Her psychic has gone to rest.

(silence)

But if you feel in you a difference in thought, in ways of thinking, tell me!
(*Mother laughs*)

November 9, 1968

* * *

5

It's what Bharatidi always said; she always used to say: "The Divine is the greatest culprit, He's the one who allows all those horrors!" (*Mother laughs*)

She said that once when we were preparing a play to be staged here (I don't know if you were there). There was the "chief of the mountains" and the "chief of the valley," and then an incarnation of the Divine. The two chiefs were quarreling; the incarnation of the Divine came, and when he tried to stop the fight, they killed him. When they killed him, all of a sudden they woke up to the awareness of the horror of what they had done, owing to the fact of the killing. You see, night fell when they began fighting, and the Incarnation came between them to stop them, but they didn't see him and killed him . . . The story was like that, we staged it. We gave out the roles and so on — we had got the play through Bharatidi. So she was there, and she told me, "But the Divine is the greatest culprit! It's quite natural that He should suffer, since He's the one who allowed humans to be like that!" (*Mother laughs*)

Ah! . . .

(*long silence*)

October 11, 1969

* * *

6

. . . And then, I get letters (from children) asking me, "Why? Why has the Supreme Lord allowed things to be like this? . . ." That's what I receive most often.

But as soon as there is a *true contact* . . . it's over.

Then there are those who said (I forget who, in what religion), "But God does not suffer! . . ." (*Mother laughs*) So that made people still more furious: "Yes, *he* doesn't suffer; he makes us all suffer while *he* doesn't!" (*Mother laughs*) Maybe he finds it amusing!

I remember that poor Bharatidi (she was a rebel), once, long ago, we prepared together a play to be staged, and one day she told me (we were with all those who were going to act), "To think that God sees all this and tolerates it!" (*Mother laughs*) I told her, "Maybe he doesn't see it as we do!"

I found it amusing because she was a very intelligent woman. But that . . . (*Mother laughs*).

7 February, 1970

AN EXILE IN THE ANDAMANS

[*The Tale of My Exile: Twelve Years in the Andamans* by Barindra Kumar Ghose, introduced and edited by Sachidananda Mohanty, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2011. Price: Rs. 95.]

The Tale of My Exile by Barindra Kumar Ghose with a very scholarly and researched introduction by Sachidananda Mohanty, introduces us to a forgotten figure of India's independence movement. It chronicles a significant part of the life of a great revolutionary, who followed the path of militant nationalism and had to spend 12 long years in *Kalapani*, India's most notorious Cellular Jail in Port Blair. The introduction also covers the life of Barin after he was released from jail because of a royal amnesty.

Thanks to our knowledge of the background of Barin Ghose's family life, his trials and tribulations after the death of his father, his constant search for a Guru, his unique combination of yoga with nationalism, this tale of Barin's exile will not be read merely as a description of his most agonising and painful jail life, but with great interest, as a document of India's independence movement diarised with meticulous, minute, graphic and exhaustive details.

This incarceration narrative reveals the complex mind of a true nationalist, who is constantly searching for an answer to many questions such as the need to regenerate India and its people. It deals with other questions such as whether a sinner be condemned for ever, whether change comes in the mind of a sinner or he becomes a hardened criminal, and finally whether it is possible to face the trials of life with humour and perseverance. I cannot but refer to a statement made by Barin in the context of untouchability and oppressed communities in this context. Like a critical insider, almost like Gandhi and Tagore, he is trying to find out where we had faltered as a nation. He says, 'Do we not see that our sins in the way of neglecting and despising and oppressing our kith and kin have accumulated to a perilous extent and that it is this which has paralysed all the life movement of our motherland?'

I can imagine that after his release from Cellular Jail and the publication of the *Tale* in 1922, the British authorities must have gone through it and also another prison tale by Vir Savarkar in Marathi entitled *Karavas tha Kahani*. Thanks to sustained political agitation, the penal system was officially disbanded in 1938 but not before Tagore wrote a scathingly critical piece on 2 August 1937:

The pitiless method of punishment that still persists in many parts of the world in their penal system is enough to condemn human civilisation. . . . On the continent of Europe they have their Devil's islands. . . . their concentration

camps and other specially built hells for punitive exhibition of humanity, but in England they have no such unhallowed places . . . but now to our dismay we find that the infringement of their own rule has been possible exclusively for the subject races, the insult of their distinction humiliates all of us and I offer my protest in the name of my country.

In this respect, one can refer to the 'Ghetto Diary' by the eminent Polish Jew, writer and paediatrician, who gave up his brilliant medical career to devote himself to the care of about 200 Jewish children when he was sent into the Warsaw ghetto after the Nazi occupation of Poland. He immediately set up an orphanage for those children to take care of them. Korczak's diary is a moving piece of literature and an indispensable insight into life inside the ghetto. It reveals how a spiritual and moral person struggled to shield innocent children from the atrocities of the adult world in one of history's darkest times. Korczak became a legend in Europe when he refused offers to save his own life and chose to march with the orphans under his care in a dignified procession through the streets of the Warsaw ghetto to the trains that were to carry them to 'Resettlement to the East' but took them instead to the death camp of Treblinka. It is interesting to note that when the time of their death in the gas chamber was very near, Korczak directed and staged in the orphanage, a very well known play of Tagore 'The Post Office', translated by Andre Gide in French. When Korczak was asked by someone as to why he selected this play, his reply was that he wanted to give the message to the children of the need to accept the angel of death in peace. Today he is remembered not for the way he lived, but for the way he faced death.

Barin's tale of his exile in the Cellular Jail is also a tale of tremendous pain, frustration and degradation, but one does not find any spiteful or rancorous statement against the British in the tale. With what grace has he related the story of horror and utter diabolism and maintains even his humour! An example can be quoted: 'thus, when we had to change our clothes we were in as helpless a condition as Draupadi in the assembly of the Kauravas.' Thereafter the stark reality comes out in a disillusioned voice laced with pain: 'I slowly understood that here there was no such thing as gentleman, not even perhaps such a thing as man, here were only convicts.' The result of it was suicides one after the other by the convicts either by hanging with the help of their torn shirts or by hunger strike or by some other means. In between we hear, on one side, the doleful words of Barin: 'What is the meaning of this tragedy? Is it to be called just punishment or revengeful oppression?' One feels moved by hearing his insightful words, which really creates in us an image of a man with divine spark: A tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storm and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. "The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the supreme realities."

We are grateful to Sachidananda Mohanty for adding a valuable and exhaustive introduction to the tale which brings forth before us the complete picture of the revolutionary, from his childhood days to that of militant nationalism, to the Cellular Jail and finally a life of the mind and the spirit. He had a spiritual bent of mind, and right from his young days was in search for a Guru. He ultimately discovered this Guru in his elder brother, Sri Aurobindo, who was the first to determine his goal of life and then showed him the path to achieve it. Hence Barin would not hesitate to say that Sri Aurobindo had become ‘the loadstone, the guiding star of my spiritual life.’

This spirituality was in constant flow in his life from early days and it was reinforced in him not so much due to his Cellular Jail experience but because of the right guidance he received from Sri Aurobindo. Barin’s spiritual bent of mind could be seen shaping his total journey of life: first his search for a Guru in his Baroda days, his notion of intertwining yoga with nationalism in his observations in the Cellular Jail, and finally, his aspiration to discover the true meaning of life, the progressive evolution of his mind from ‘militancy’ to spirituality under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo.

Barin’s comments on how reforms can be brought about in jails are extremely valuable. Today we happily see that a great number of reforms have already been introduced in different jails in the country. How true is his comment in this respect!

You cannot uplift a man by punishing him. It is a greater crime than murder to corrupt a pure and innocent man by throwing him into the very heart of vice and sin under the excuse of punishment.

While critiquing Bolshevik communism, he boldly writes in his book *Wounded Humanity* that it is wrong to think that it is by the denial of religion and spirituality that social transformation can take place.

Today we are realising that no democracy can survive without the support of an extra-political normative moral order.

The introduction, in many ways, presents before us a well-thought out response to a discourse on colonisation. It gives valuable information about Barin Ghose and explicates many aspects of his life. We see that he grew up from his childhood days to a youth in great suffering in the company of his ailing mother in Deoghar. However, the company of his maternal grandfather, a Bramho devotee of Upanishadic mysticism, Rajnarayan Bose, was a great solace to young Barin and also his shy and studious brother, Sri Aurobindo, who would tell Barin about India, her past glories, present degradation and probable deliverance. Barin’s father died when he was 13 and the young boy described it at a later period in deeply moving terms: ‘Where did father disappear forgetting his tired and indisciplined son.’

Upendra Nath Banerjee, Barin’s long time associate, gave a vivid picture of

Barin at Deoghar, after Barin was seen recovering from malaria: 'I saw his skeletal body, forehead as broad as a field, enormous eyes and thick nose, I knew then he was among those who combine imagination and passion to make the impossible possible.'

With the death of his father, the financial condition of the family deteriorated. While studying in Patna, Barin opened a tea-stall to meet his expenses. If Swami Vivekananda connected Vedanta with the theory of action for the sake of regeneration of people and infused the spirit of nationalism, Barin connected yoga with nationalism for the same purpose.

In fact the introduction uncovers a sub-text that intertwines the life of Barin with that of his elder brother, Sri Aurobindo. It presents before us many hitherto unknown facts and incidents while both were in Alipore jail in 1908-09:

1. Barin would always observe Sri Aurobindo in deep, introspective mood in the jail — focused and serene. Alipore jail ushered in spirituality in Sri Aurobindo's life where in solitary confinement he had the vision of Sri Krishna.
2. While noticing his gleaming hair, Barin once asked if he had applied oil. Sri Aurobindo's reply was, 'My body has undergone some changes with meditation. My hair draws fat from my body.'
3. When Ullaskar and Barin were sentenced to be hanged, his Sejda, that is Sri Aurobindo, said without any fanfare of a prophecy: 'they would not be hanged.' A second prophecy he made was that Barin would be released. Both the prophecies came true.
4. The difference between Sri Aurobindo and Barin surfaced in the house of Lele. Sri Aurobindo practised meditation. On the other hand, as Barin tells us in his 'Atma Kahini', he himself could not meditate at a stretch, for thoughts of political engagement would constantly occupy his mind.

The introduction further elucidates many other incidents which inform us that both the brothers loved each other deeply, and that the elder brother was constantly concerned about Barin. One can refer to a statement made by Sri Aurobindo collected in his *Autobiographical Notes and other Writings of Historical Interest* to show the love Sri Aurobindo had for Barin and the confidence he placed in the latter's honesty, integrity and uprightness:

. . . I have empowered you to act for me in the collection of funds and other collateral matters. I have an entire confidence in you and I would request all who wish me well to put in you the same confidence.

There are many reasons why Barin did not get the recognition he deserved. I am not going into that. He was too independent minded and did not care for name

and fame. The reprint of the tale of his exile with such a researched and meaningful introduction by Sachidananda Mohanty, I am sure, would revive our cultural memory and help us better understand the sociology of cruelty, which is continuing in different forms even today. In the present context, forgotten figures like Barin can still empower us and give us the message of a life of hope.

INDRANATH CHOUDHURY

*[An earlier version of this text was presented at the
India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi in January 2012.]*

The tradition of later Vaishnava Bhakti is an attempt to sublimate the vital impulses through love by turning human love towards the Divine. It made a strong and intense effort and had many rich and beautiful experiences; but its weakness was just there, that it remained valid only as an inner experience turned towards the inner Divine, but it stopped at that point. Chaitanya's prema was nothing but a psychic divine love with a strong sublimated vital manifestation. But the moment Vaishnavism before or after him made an attempt at greater externalisation, we know what happened — a vitalistic deterioration, much corruption and decline. You cannot appeal to Chaitanya's example as against psychic or divine love; his was not something merely vital-human; in its essence, though not in its form, it was very much the first step in the transformation, which we ask of the sadhaks, to make their love psychic and use the vital not for its own sake, but as an expression of the soul's realisation. It is the first step and perhaps for some it may be sufficient, for we are not asking everybody to become supramental; but for any full manifestation on the physical plane the supramental is indispensable.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 86-87)

THE KRISHNA WORLD

9. The Globe Revealed

Tayige bāyalli jagavanna thoridha
Jagadoddharakanamma Udupi Sri Krishna

(He is Krishna of Udupi, who raised this world, the one who showed the world in his mouth to his mother.)

A BHARATANATYAM performance of Balasaraswati essaying these lines when she danced for the Kannada hymn could never be forgotten. Each time she was on stage changing from Yashoda to Krishna with lightning speed and always it was an incredible show bringing to life the ancient legend. As Yashoda she was the very personification of maternity. So much love, care and anxiety for her child, controlled irritation at the complaints from neighbours. My Krishna!

But come the lines “jagavannu thoridha” (showed the world) Balasaraswati’s face was a medley of bhayanaka and adbhuta rasas, not easy to emote on stage. Adbhuta rasa is understandable: the emotion of wonderment. The mother is happy that her little Krishna is capable of such fun games. Is he my Krishna? Perhaps not. Maybe he is some other person, a god descended into my womb! Surely one who can reveal the world in his tiny mouth is a superman! How many times have I asked him to open his mouth to check his tongue? Are there traces of eatables? Of butter? Or is he having any stomach upset? Oh, this fever!

Hypertension is often a cross borne by mothers. Again, Yashoda must have had much trouble daily making Krishna clean his teeth with a twig of the neem tree. There must have been wonderment enough for her then to see such pearly teeth, set in the background of his dark complexion with red lips and red eyes completing the strange ensemble. Nothing ought to make her wonder anymore but astonishment grips her now to see the world in that tiny mouth.

No, it is not merely the world. There must have been some cinematic zoom-in, zoom-out technique in the Puranic author’s imagination. Yashoda’s eyes see not only the world but the very spot of Gokula. Why, she sees herself in Nanda’s palace. The *Bhagavata* speaks of the Lord’s immediate obedience to the Mother’s order, “Open your mouth!”

She saw within it the whole universe of moving and unmoving entities — the sky and the quarters; the earth with its mountains and oceans, including the spheres of wind called Pravaha and lightning called fire; and the moon and the

stars and all the other worlds. Besides, she saw the whole heaven with its luminaries, the surrounding girdle of the categories of water, fire, air and sky; the deities presiding over the Indriyas and the Indriyas (sense powers) themselves; and the mind, the elements forming the object of senses, and the Gunas of Prakriti. She saw within her child the whole universe with all its diversities and distinctions caused by the Jiva (for individuality), Time (or the principle of change), Swabhava (Nature), the impressions caused by Karma and the mind. What was more, she was filled with worry and doubts to see within his open mouth even that land of Vraja with herself in it.¹

Well, what is this? So Yashoda saw herself in Krishna's mouth? Srila Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada gives an added directorial touch in his version of the passage. The chubby little boy Krishna is on her lap! The Krishna without, the mouth open, laughter in his eyes at his mom's discomfiture. The baby within on the lap, comfortable, a piece of total surrender.

Yashoda could find within the mouth of her child everything necessary for cosmic manifestation. She also saw, within the mouth, herself taking Krishna on her lap and having Him sucking her breast . . . Then she thought that she had become mad, mentally deranged, to see all those wonderful things.

The *Bhagavata* is probably the first to record this incident. *Sri Vishnu Purana* and *Harivamsam* do not mention this dramatic scene. But once it was accepted, no questions were asked. It may have come in handy as a bit of geography-lesson for the children! The grandchild would have interrupted the grandmothers and grandaunts of yore:

“Grandma, how could this little mouth contain that big world?”
 “It could, as the world for Krishna is like the marble you play with.”
 “Like marble? Round like marble?”
 “Of course, the world is round.”
 “Then how come we do not fall off it?”

Questions that have tested the patience of generations of parents. The child knows that he will not fall off if the surface is flat. There was a time when people believed that the earth was flat. I did, and it took quite some explaining to me that the world is indeed a sphere but we do not fall off because of the law of gravitation. The friendly uncle who decided to educate me on this subject assured me that the earth has a gravitational field but the gravitational force varies according to the topography

1. Translated by Swami Tapasyananda.

and this is known as gravitational anomalies. Then he made a dash for geophysics and spoke of gravimeters and sedimentary rocks. It was time to put an end to his enthusiasm as at every stop he had to explain his explanation, seeing my face all blank. Then he hit upon a wonderful idea. He took up the pin cushion on my father's table. "It is like this, we remain stuck to earth as these needles. Do they fall off unless you pull them out with your rocket-like fingers?"

There could not have been a more prosaic approach to the persona of the human being for I have always loved to wander in Shakespeare's world:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. . .²

But the concern of the non-scientific, mythos-loving mind has always worried about what Yashoda saw in the mouth of Krishna. A few years ago I was quite excited when I came across an advertisement for a book titled with incisive clarity: *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*. The author was the well-known Thomas L. Friedman and the cover replayed all my childhood fears, when I sat watching the Bay of Bengal on the Ramakrishna Beach at Visakhapatnam. Two ships sailing in the seas, and one is falling off the sea into Nothing!

But it was such a disappointment when the book turned out to have nothing to do with the flat-earth theory. All about the problems of globalisation! No matter. When you begin meditating upon the child Krishna, you are a 'globalised' being all right! The globe and Krishna have been associated in my mind from the time they began to show him on the silver screen. Krishna showing the earth in his mouth keeps the audience enchanted as the sphere moves around flashing colours, countries, continents. You can never have enough of it!

Fond as I am of this incident and intrigued at the same time, I was certain Krishna was upto one of his pranks when I received a copy of a book with the arresting title, *Global Krishna* by Siddharthan. The author confessed that the book grew out of the tales he told to his grandchildren. Like Friedman's title, the matter in this book too had nothing to do with the globe in the mouth of Krishna. But I was on a global tour with little Krishna!

Of course, anything is possible for Krishna. Had he not shown the entire earth to his mother in a trice? She had looked into his mouth and it was probably like looking through a telescope. Now the boy who had shown whole universes to his mother decides upon a world-tour along with his brother. According to Siddharthan it was actually the idea of dear Rishi Narad. The Aurobindonians have come to love this sage in particular because of the way he comes down from the far heavens to

2. Hamlet, Act II, Sc. ii.

the earth, to Aswapati's palace. A remarkable descriptive passage where poetry literally takes wings and makes an accurate recordation:

In silent bounds bordering the mortal's plane
 Crossing a wide expanse of brilliant peace
 Narad the heavenly sage from Paradise
 Came chanting through the large and lustrous air.
 Attracted by the golden summer-earth
 That lay beneath him like a glowing bowl
 Tilted upon a table of the Gods,
 Turning as if moved round by an unseen hand
 To catch the warmth and blaze of a small sun,
 He passed from the immortals' happy paths
 To a world of toil and quest and grief and hope,
 To these rooms of the see-saw game of death with life.³

The rishi sees the earth below him "like a glowing bowl tilted upon a table of the Gods", turning slowly to catch the warmth of the sun, as no doubt it moved in the mouth of Krishna to give Yashoda an idea of the magnificence of creation. I was glad to meet the Rishi in *Global Krishna* as the catalytic agent. He advises the boys who have completed their education in Sandeepani's ashram to see the world for a while.

Their first step is Sri Lanka where they help Vibhishana's descendant from losing his throne. As they travel across the Bay of Bengal there is a tsunami (of course!). Australia follows and we keep moving like the globe rotating in Krishna's mouth. The two boys have been riding the royal Karimukha elephant, but how can it cross the Arctic? It will have to swim in ice cold water, impossible! The elephant would change himself into something more appropriate for the climate.

So saying it transformed itself into a big polar bear. The Emperor of China had already gifted them bearskin clothing as they were going to polar region. Krishna and Balarama wore those warm clothes and continued their travel, riding on the Panimukha, the Polar Bear. Panimukha swam in the water and walked over the rocky ice of the arctic ocean.

Panimukha? The author is quite wily. If the earlier version of Krishna's mount was called Karimukha (the Elephant-faced), the present version is Panimukha (the Ice-faced)! When the Krishna world expands, it expands with a vengeance! So brave, so kindly is our global Krishna with an equally good natured Balarama.

3. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 415.

Are all these miracles? Whoever is detailing Krishna's life, from Parashara to Shuka to Siddharthan, they do not seem to be trying to just fascinate us with miracles. Miraculism has never been a preferred topic for me. Well, 'miracle' is not the right term to use when Krishna dances on a snake. According to those who record the Kaliya episode, the Yadava boy does it with natural ease. To speak of such recordings as miracles would bring down the weight conferred by centuries of faith upon such incidents. The childhood of Krishna is not juvenile literature but an experience enjoyed and revered by elders and even philosophers. Could Adi Sankara who propounded the Adhyasa (Superimposition) theory remain aloof to the Krishna presence? His 'Govindashtakam' is a sweet prayer calling upon us to rise in Ananda consciousness by remembering Krishna growing up in Gokula. The stotra opens with the celebrated triad, Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam:

I salute that Govinda who is the extreme limit
 Of happiness,
 Who is truth, wisdom, eternal, stable,
 Not ether bound and the eternal ether,
 Who is happy to crawl in cowsheds, is beyond problems
 And is the end of problems,
 Who due to illusion appears as without any form
 And with many forms,
 And who is of the universe, consort of Lakshmi
 And is without any lord.⁴

The elders of the Vaishnava canon have even listed six reasons for Krishna eating mud and revealing the worlds in his mouth. He was demonstrating to the world his true nature:

1. Krishna is pure sattva. But he has to make use of 'rajas' for helping mankind, like driving the chariot in the Kurukshetra War. Hence he partakes of this dust which represents rajas.
2. The earth is also known as 'kshama' (compassion). Since he should not get angry if the friends vilify him due to ignorance, he ate earth in a symbolic way assuring others of his forgiveness.
3. This dust was the right medicine to overcome the effects of Putana's poison.
4. Perhaps the earth could be a digestive for over indulgence with butter? Or to clean the mouth which was now oily and sticky with stolen butter?
5. As one who devours creation during dissolution and guards it safely in his belly, Krishna carries a countless number of lives within himself. These

4. Translated by P. R. Ramachander.

lives wanted to be purified by the dust of the cowherdesses who are considered as the best of devotees. Hence this eating of Gokula's mud.

6. It is natural for children to put in their mouth whatever comes in handy, and our little Krishna was no exception!

Arulaladasar, the author of the Tamil Bhagavata dwells fondly on this episode. Krishna's love of butter was legendary. He was a very mischievous boy but no one could be really angry with him. But one day he went too far. Along with Balarama and his friends he caught hold of little girls and broke their bangles, destroyed the tiny sand-houses they had built with care and even ate handfuls of the muddy sand!

Immediately the cowherdesses went to Yashoda and Rohini to give a complaint. Balarama said Krishna had eaten the mud; but Krishna assured everyone that it was Balarama who had gobbled up handfuls of sand. Listening to this mutual accusation, all of them laughed to their heart's content. Now Yashoda knew the nature of these children. She said that Balarama never tells a lie. "Tell the truth, you butter-thief! Open your mouth!" Slowly Krishna opened his mouth. Ah!

She saw Brahma. Also the grand cosmic sphere.
She saw the sun and the moon too.
The great mountains and the seven oceans.
The elephants guarding the eight directions,
And the golden mountain Meru.

The guardian-gods of the eight directions too⁵
She saw the stars, the groups of divine sages.
She saw the world, the cowherd settlement,
She saw her darling son, saw the stick⁶ in her hand.⁷

She stood arrested, overwhelmed with fear. How idiotic of me to think of this divine glow as my son! But soon maya covered her knowledge even as Krishna began crying. "No darling, I won't beat you", she said and hugged him.

Krishna became a regular subject for prayerful discussion at home during the last years of my father when he was engaged in writing *Krishna Geetam*. He would not entertain any suggestion that these feats of Krishna were miraculous claptrap. According to him they were spontaneous exultations in an avatar. Man's consciousness, unless it rises above the mere mental, cannot understand the spontaneity of such scenes. He preferred the received tradition about this episode:

5. Indra, Agni, Yama, Kubera, Nirruti, Varuna, Marut and Isana.

6. Yashoda had the stick ready to beat Krishna.

7. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.

All Space and Time seemed to be in his mouth;
 The elements, the quarters,
 The seas, mountains, the cities, countrysides;
 Herself and all living things!

She felt she saw all past, all present, and
 The future, and all heaven,
 Earth, and the nether worlds; quite a chaos
 And a soothing symphony!

Yashoda shuddered, horripilated,
 And slipped into ecstasy;
 And Krishna smiled, and smiled, and she kissed him
 In a beatific mood.⁸

Motherhood divine!

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

8. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Krishna Geetam*, Book II, canto v.

The Paramhansa is a particular grade of realisation, there are others supposed to be lower or higher. I have no objection to them in their own place. But I must remind you that in my yoga all vital movements must come under the influence of the psychic and of the spiritual calm, knowledge, peace. If they conflict with the psychic or the spiritual control, they upset the balance and prevent the forming of the base of transformation. If unbalance is good for other paths, that is the business of those who follow them. It does not suit mine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 96)