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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. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SOUL'S SCENE

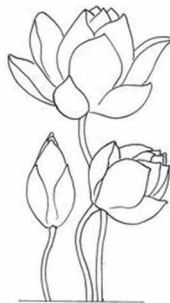
The clouds lain on forlorn spaces of sky, weary and lolling,
Watch grey waves of a lost sea wander sad, reckless and rolling,
A bare anguish of bleak beaches made mournful with the
breath of the Northwind
And a huddle of melancholy hills in the distance.

The blank hour in some vast mood of a Soul lonely in Nature
On earth's face puts a mask pregnantly carved, cut to misfeature,
And man's heart and his stilled mind react hushed in a spiritual
passion
Imitating the contours of her desolate waiting.

Impassible she waits long for the sun's gold and the azure,
The sea's song with its slow happy refrain's splashes of pleasure, —
As man's soul in its depths waits the outbreaking of the light
and the godhead
And the bliss that God felt when he created his image.

SRI AUROBINDO

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



THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY

A RELIGION of humanity may be either an intellectual and sentimental ideal, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects, or else a spiritual aspiration and rule of living, partly the sign, partly the cause of a change of soul in humanity. The intellectual religion of humanity already to a certain extent exists, partly as a conscious creed in the minds of a few, partly as a potent shadow in the consciousness of the race. It is the shadow of a spirit that is yet unborn, but is preparing for its birth. This material world of ours, besides its fully embodied things of the present, is peopled by such powerful shadows, ghosts of things dead and the spirit of things yet unborn. The ghosts of things dead are very troublesome actualities and they now abound, ghosts of dead religions, dead arts, dead moralities, dead political theories, which still claim either to keep their rotting bodies or to animate partly the existing body of things. Repeating obstinately their sacred formulas of the past, they hypnotise backward-looking minds and daunt even the progressive portion of humanity. But there are too those unborn spirits which are still unable to take a definite body, but are already mind-born and exist as influences of which the human mind is aware and to which it now responds in a desultory and confused fashion. The religion of humanity was mind-born in the eighteenth century, the *mānasa putra*¹ of the rationalist thinkers who brought it forward as a substitute for the formal spiritualism of ecclesiastical Christianity. It tried to give itself a body in Positivism, which was an attempt to formulate the dogmas of this religion, but on too heavily and severely rationalistic a basis for acceptance even by an Age of Reason. Humanitarianism has been its most prominent emotional result. Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expression of good works. Democracy, socialism, pacificism are to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence.

The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and the chief aim of the human spirit. No other idol, neither the nation, the State, the family nor anything else ought to take its place; they are only worthy of respect so far as they are images of the human spirit and enshrine its presence and aid its self-manifestation. But where the cult of these idols seeks to usurp the place of the spirit and makes demands inconsistent with its service, they should be put aside. No injunctions of old creeds, religious, political, social or cultural, are valid when they go against its claims. Science even, though it is one of the chief modern idols, must not be allowed to make claims contrary to its

1. Mind-born child, an idea and expression of Indian Puranic cosmology.

ethical temperament and aim, for science is only valuable in so far as it helps and serves by knowledge and progress the religion of humanity. War, capital punishment, the taking of human life, cruelty of all kinds whether committed by the individual, the State or society, not only physical cruelty, but moral cruelty, the degradation of any human being or any class of human beings under whatever specious plea or in whatever interest, the oppression and exploitation of man by man, of class by class, of nation by nation and all those habits of life and institutions of society of a similar kind which religion and ethics formerly tolerated or even favoured in practice, whatever they might do in their ideal rule or creed, are crimes against the religion of humanity, abominable to its ethical mind, forbidden by its primary tenets, to be fought against always, in no degree to be tolerated. Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violation, from suppression, from mechanisation, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organised in the play of its powers for the service of humanity. And all this too is not to be held as an abstract or pious sentiment, but given full and practical recognition in the persons of men and nations and mankind. This, speaking largely, is the idea and spirit of the intellectual religion of humanity.

One has only to compare human life and thought and feeling a century or two ago with human life, thought and feeling in the pre-war period to see how great an influence this religion of humanity has exercised and how fruitful a work it has done. It accomplished rapidly many things which orthodox religion failed to do effectively, largely because it acted as a constant intellectual and critical solvent, an unsparing assailant of the thing that is and an unflinching champion of the thing to be, faithful always to the future, while orthodox religion allied itself with the powers of the present, even of the past, bound itself by its pact with them and could act only at best as a moderating but not as a reforming force. Moreover, this religion has faith in humanity and its earthly future and can therefore aid its earthly progress, while the orthodox religions looked with eyes of pious sorrow and gloom on the earthly life of man and were very ready to bid him bear peacefully and contentedly, even to welcome its crudities, cruelties, oppressions, tribulations as a means for learning to appreciate and for earning the better life which will be given us hereafter. Faith, even an intellectual faith, must always be a worker of miracles, and this religion of humanity, even without taking bodily shape or a compelling form or a visible means of self-effectuation, was yet able to effect comparatively much of what it set out to do. It to some degree humanised society, humanised law and punishment,

humanised the outlook of man on man, abolished legalised torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised those who were depressed and fallen, gave large hopes to humanity, stimulated philanthropy and charity and the service of mankind, encouraged everywhere the desire of freedom, put a curb on oppression and greatly minimised its more brutal expressions. It had almost succeeded in humanising war and would perhaps have succeeded entirely but for the contrary trend of modern Science. It made it possible for man to conceive of a world free from war as imaginable even without waiting for the Christian millennium. At any rate, this much change came about that, while peace was formerly a rare interlude of constant war, war became an interlude, if a much too frequent interlude of peace, though as yet only of an armed peace. That may not be a great step, but still it was a step forward. It gave new conceptions of the dignity of the human being and opened new ideas and new vistas of his education, self-development and potentiality. It spread enlightenment; it made man feel more his responsibility for the progress and happiness of the race; it raised the average self-respect and capacity of mankind; it gave hope to the serf, self-assertion to the down-trodden and made the labourer in his manhood the potential equal of the rich and powerful. True, if we compare what is with what should be, the actual achievement with the ideal, all this will seem only a scanty work of preparation. But it was a remarkable record for a century and a half or a little more and for an unembodied spirit which had to work through what instruments it could find and had as yet no form, habitation or visible engine of its own concentrated workings. But perhaps it was in this that lay its power and advantage, since that saved it from crystallising into a form and getting petrified or at least losing its more free and subtle action.

But still in order to accomplish all its future this idea and religion of humanity has to make itself more explicit, insistent and categorically imperative. For otherwise it can only work with clarity in the minds of the few and with the mass it will be only a modifying influence, but will not be the rule of human life. And so long as that is so, it cannot entirely prevail over its own principal enemy. That enemy, the enemy of all real religion, is human egoism, the egoism of the individual, the egoism of class and nation. These it could for a time soften, modify, force to curb their more arrogant, open and brutal expressions, oblige to adopt better institutions, but not to give place to the love of mankind, not to recognise a real unity between man and man. For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity, as it must be the earthly aim of all human religion, love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life, the ideal which was expressed first some thousands of years ago in the ancient Vedic hymn and must always remain the highest injunction of the Spirit within us to human life upon earth. Till that is brought about, the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished. With that done, the one necessary psychological change will have been effected without which no formal and mechanical, no political and

administrative unity can be real and secure. If it is done, that outward unification may not even be indispensable or, if indispensable, it will come about naturally, not, as now it seems likely to be, by catastrophic means, but by the demand of the human mind, and will be held secure by an essential need of our perfected and developed human nature.

But this is the question whether a purely intellectual and sentimental religion of humanity will be sufficient to bring about so great a change in our psychology. The weakness of the intellectual idea, even when it supports itself by an appeal to the sentiments and emotions, is that it does not get at the centre of man's being. The intellect and the feelings are only instruments of the being and they may be the instruments of either its lower and external form or of the inner and higher man, servants of the ego or channels of the soul. The aim of the religion of humanity was formulated in the eighteenth century by a sort of primal intuition; that aim was and it is still to re-create human society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity. None of these has really been won in spite of all the progress that has been achieved. The liberty that has been so loudly proclaimed as an essential of modern progress is an outward, mechanical and unreal liberty. The equality that has been so much sought after and battled for is equally an outward and mechanical and will turn out to be an unreal equality. Fraternity is not even claimed to be a practicable principle of the ordering of life and what is put forward as its substitute is the outward and mechanical principle of equal association or at the best a comradeship of labour. This is because the idea of humanity has been obliged in an intellectual age to mask its true character of a religion and a thing of the soul and the spirit and to appeal to the vital and physical mind of man rather than his inner being. It has limited his effort to the attempt to revolutionise political and social institutions and to bring about such a modification of the ideas and sentiments of the common mind of mankind as would make these institutions practicable; it has worked at the machinery of human life and on the outer mind much more than upon the soul of the race. It has laboured to establish a political, social and legal liberty, equality and mutual help in an equal association.

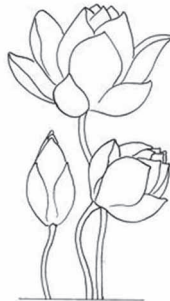
But though these aims are of great importance in their own field, they are not the central thing; they can only be secure when founded upon a change of the inner human nature and inner way of living; they are themselves of importance only as means for giving a greater scope and a better field for man's development towards that change and, when it is once achieved, as an outward expression of the larger inward life. Freedom, equality, brotherhood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and, as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society.

A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty. For the ego to speak of fraternity is for it to speak of something contrary to its nature. All that it knows is association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends and the utmost that it can arrive at is a closer organisation for the equal distribution of labour, production, consumption and enjoyment.

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the Spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth, it is the awakening of the soul in man and the attempt to get him to live from his soul and not from his ego which is the inner meaning of religion, and it is that to which the religion of humanity also must arrive before it can fulfil itself in the life of the race.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 564-70)



‘AND LITTLE BY LITTLE THY WORK IS ACCOMPLISHED DESPITE ALL OBSTACLES’

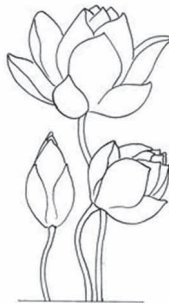
March 20, 1914

THOU art consciousness and light, Thou art peace in the depth of all things, the divine love that transfigures, the knowledge that triumphs over darkness. To feel Thee and aspire to Thee one should have emerged from the immense sea of the subconscious, one should have begun to crystallise, to grow distinct so as to know oneself and then give oneself as that alone which is its own master can do. And what effort and struggle it takes to attain this crystallisation, to emerge from the amorphous state of the environment; and how much more effort and struggle yet to give oneself, to surrender once the individuality has been formed.

Few beings consent willingly to make this effort; so life with its brutal unforeseen events obliges men to make it unintentionally, for they cannot do otherwise. And little by little Thy work is accomplished despite all obstacles.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 104)



A CONVERSATION OF THE MOTHER

["When you come to the Divine, you must abandon all mental conceptions; but, instead of doing that, you throw your conceptions upon the Divine and want the Divine to obey them. The only true attitude for a Yogi is to be plastic and ready to obey the Divine command whatever it may be. . . ."]

Questions and Answers 1929 (19 May)]

What is "plasticity"?

That which can easily change its form is "plastic". Figuratively, it is suppleness, a capacity of adaptation to circumstances and necessities. When I ask you to be plastic in relation to the Divine, I mean not to resist the Divine with the rigidity of pre-conceived ideas and fixed principles. I knew a man who declared: "I am wholly consecrated to the Divine, I am ready to do whatever He tells me to do; but I am not at all worried, for I know that He would never tell me to kill anybody!" I answered, "How do you know that?" He was indignant. This is a lack of plasticity.

If one is plastic in all circumstances, isn't it a weakness?

But you are not asked to be plastic to the will of others! Nobody asked you to be plastic in relation to others. You are asked to be plastic to the divine Will — which is not quite the same thing! And that requires a great strength because the very first thing that will happen to you is to be exposed to the will of almost everyone around you. If you have a family, you will see the attitude of the family! The more plastic you are to the divine Will, the more opposition you will meet from the will of others who are not accustomed to be in contact with that Will.

If everybody expressed the divine Will, there would be no conflict any longer, anywhere, all would be in harmony. That is what one tries to do, but it is not very easy.

But it is difficult to know the divine Will, isn't it?

We have already studied the subject at length. Don't you remember what we said? There are four conditions for knowing the divine Will:

The first essential condition: an absolute sincerity.

Second: to overcome desires and preferences.

Third: to silence the mind and listen.

Fourth: to obey immediately when you receive the order.

If you persist you will perceive the divine Will more and more clearly. But even before you know what it is, you can make an offering of your own will and you will see that all circumstances will be so arranged as to make you do the right thing. But you must not be like that person I knew who used to say, "I always see the divine Will in others." That can lead you anywhere, there is nothing more dangerous, for if you think you see the divine Will in others, you are sure to do their will, not the divine Will. There too we can say that not one among many, many human beings acts in accord with the divine Will.

You know the story of the irritable elephant, his mahout, and the man who would not make way for the elephant. Standing in the middle of the road, the man said to the mahout, "The divine Will is in me and the divine Will wants me not to move." The driver, a man of some wit, answered, "But the divine Will in the elephant wants you to move!"

[Mother passes on to another question: illnesses. During the talk in 1929 someone asked whether illnesses were not due to microbes rather than to "adverse forces" or to fluctuations of yoga. Mother answered:

"Where does Yoga begin and where does it end? Is not the whole of your life Yoga? The possibilities of illness are always there in your body and around you; you carry within you or there swarm about you the microbes and germs of every disease. How is it that all of a sudden you succumb to an illness which you did not have for years? You will say it is due to a 'depression of the vital force'. But from where does the depression come? It comes from some disharmony in the being, from a lack of receptivity to the divine forces. When you cut yourself off from the energy and light that sustain you, then there is this depression, there is created what medical science calls a 'favourable ground' and something takes advantage of it. It is doubt, gloominess, lack of confidence, a selfish turning back upon yourself that cuts you off from the light and divine energy and gives the attack this advantage. It is this that is the cause of your falling ill and not microbes."

Questions and Answers 1929 (19 May)]

One thing that is now beginning to be recognised by everyone, even by the medical corps, is that hygienic measures, for example, are effective only to the extent that one has confidence in them. Take the case of an epidemic. Many years ago we had a cholera epidemic here — it was bad — but the chief medical officer of the hospital was an energetic man: he decided to vaccinate everybody. When he discharged the vaccinated men, he would tell them, "Now you are vaccinated and nothing will happen to you, but if you were not vaccinated you would be sure to die!" He told them this with great authority. Generally such an epidemic lasts a long time and it is

difficult to check it, but in some fifteen days, I think, this doctor succeeded in checking it; in any case, it was done miraculously fast. But he knew very well that the best effect of his vaccination was the confidence it gave to people.

Now, quite recently, they have found something else and I consider it wonderful. They have discovered that for every disease there is a microbe that cures it (call it a microbe if you like, anyway, some sort of germ). But what is so extraordinary is that this “microbe” is extremely contagious, even more contagious than the microbe of the disease. And it generally develops under two conditions: in those who have a sort of natural good humour and energy and in those who have a strong will to get well! Suddenly they catch the “microbe” and are cured. And what is wonderful is that if there is one who is cured in an epidemic, three more recover immediately. And this “microbe” is found in all who are cured.

But I am going to tell you something: what people take to be a microbe is simply the materialisation of a vibration or a will from another world. When I learned of these medical discoveries, I said to myself, “Truly, science is making progress.” One might almost say with greater reason, “Matter is progressing,” it is becoming more and more receptive to a higher will. And what is translated in their science as “microbes” will be perceived, if one goes to the root of things, as simply a vibratory mode; and this vibratory mode is the material translation of a higher will. If you can bring this force or this will, this power, this vibration (call it what you will) into certain given circumstances, not only will it act in you, but also through contagion around you.

[During the talk in 1929, a disciple asked why we drank filtered water since we did not believe in microbes here. Mother answered:

“Is any one of you pure and strong enough not to be affected by suggestions? If you drink unfiltered water and think, ‘Now I am drinking impure water’, you have every chance of falling sick. And even though such suggestions may not enter through the conscious mind, the whole of your subconscious is there, almost helplessly open to any kind of suggestion. . . . The normal human condition is a state filled with apprehensions and fears; if you observe your mind deeply for ten minutes, you will find that for nine out of the ten it is full of fears. . . .

And even if by discipline and effort you have liberated your mind and your vital of apprehension and fear, it is more difficult to convince the body.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (19 May)]

Why is it so difficult to convince the body, when one has succeeded in liberating oneself mentally and vitally?

Because in the large majority of men, the body receives its inspirations from the subconscious, it is under the influence of the subconscious. All the fears driven out from the active consciousness go and take refuge there and then, naturally, they have to be chased out from the subconscious and uprooted from there.

Why does one feel afraid?

I suppose it is because one is egoistic.

There are three reasons. First, an excessive concern about one's security. Next, what one does not know always gives an uneasy feeling which is translated in the consciousness by fear. And above all, one doesn't have the habit of a spontaneous trust in the Divine. If you look into things sufficiently deeply, this is the true reason. There are people who do not even know that That exists, but one could tell them in other words, "You have no faith in your destiny" or "You know nothing about Grace" — anything whatever, you may put it as you like, but the root of the matter is a lack of trust. If one always had the feeling that it is the best that happens in all circumstances, one would not be afraid.

The first movement of fear comes automatically. There was a great scientist who was also a great psychologist (I don't remember his name now); he had developed his inner consciousness but wanted to test it. So he undertook an experiment. He wanted to know if, by means of consciousness, one could control the reflex actions of the body (probably he didn't go far enough to be able to do it, for it can be done; but in any case, for him it was still impossible). Well, he went to the zoological garden, to the place where snakes were kept in a glass cage. There was a particularly aggressive cobra there; when it was not asleep, it was almost always in a fury, for through the glass it could see people and that irritated it terribly. Our scientist went and stood in front of the cage. He knew very well that it was made in such a way that the snake could never break the glass and that he ran no risk of being attacked. So from there he began to excite the snake by shouts and gestures. The cobra, furious, hurled itself against the glass, and every time it did so the scientist closed his eyes! Our psychologist told himself, "But look here, I know that this snake cannot pass through, why do I close my eyes?" Well, one must recognise that it is difficult to conquer the reaction. It is a sense of protection, and if one feels that one cannot protect oneself, one is afraid. But the movement of fear which is expressed by the eyes fluttering is not a mental or a vital fear: it is a fear in the cells of the body; for it has not been impressed upon them that there is no danger and they do not know how to resist. It is because one has not done yoga, you see. With yoga one can watch with open eyes, one would not close them; but one would not close them because one calls upon something else, and that "something else" is the sense of the divine Presence in oneself which is stronger than everything.

This is the only thing that can cure you of your fear.

[Years afterwards this talk was followed up by a question from a disciple (19 May 1965):]

You say, "If one always had the feeling that it is the best that happens in all circumstances, one would not be afraid." Is it really the best that happens in all circumstances?

It is the best, given the state of the world — it is not an absolute best.

There are two things: in a total and absolute way, at each moment, it is the best possible for the divine Goal of the whole; and for one who is consciously connected with the divine Will, it is the most favourable for his own divine realisation.

I believe this is the correct explanation.

For the whole, it is always, at every moment, what is most favourable for the divine evolution. And for the elements consciously linked with the Divine, it is the best for the perfection of their union.

Only you must not forget that it is constantly changing, that it is not a static best; it is a best which if preserved would not be the best a moment later. And it is because the human consciousness always has the tendency to preserve statically what it finds good or considers good, that it realises that it is unseizable. It is this effort to preserve which falsifies things.

(Silence)

I saw this when I wanted to understand the position of the Buddha who blamed the Manifestation for its impermanence; for him perfection and permanence were one and the same thing. In his contact with the manifested universe he had observed a perpetual change, therefore he concluded that the manifested world was imperfect and had to disappear. And change (impermanence) does not exist in the Unmanifest, hence the Unmanifest is the true Divine. It was by considering and concentrating on this point, that in fact I saw that his finding was right: the Manifestation is absolutely impermanent, it is a perpetual transformation.

But in the Manifestation, perfection consists in having a movement of transformation or an unfolding identical with the divine Movement, the essential Movement; whereas all that belongs to the inconscient or tamasic creation seeks to preserve exactly the very same existence instead of trying to last through constant transformation.

That is why some thinkers have postulated that the creation was the result of an error. But one finds all possible concepts: perfect creation, then a "fault" which introduced error; the creation itself as a lower movement which must have an end since it had a beginning; then the Vedic concept, as Sri Aurobindo has explained it, of an unfolding or a progressive and infinite discovery — indefinite and infinite — of the All by Himself. . . . Naturally, all these are human interpretations. For the

moment, as long as you express yourself in human terms, it is a human translation. But according to the initial position of the human translator (that is to say, whether it is the position which admits “original sin” or an “accident” in the creation or a supreme conscious Will from the beginning in a progressive unfolding), in the yogic attitude, the conclusions or “descents” are different. . . . There are Nihilists, Nirvanists, Illusionists; there are all the religions which admit the devil’s intervention under one form or another; then there is the pure Vedism which is the eternal unfolding of the Supreme in a progressive objectification. And according to taste, one places oneself here, another there or elsewhere, with all the nuances between. But according to what Sri Aurobindo has felt to be the most total truth, according to this conception of a progressive universe, one is led to say that at every minute what happens is the best possible for the unfolding of the whole. It is absolutely logical. And I believe that all contradictions can arise only from a more or less pronounced tendency towards this or that, for one position or another. All who admit the intrusion of a “sin” or an “error” and the conflict resulting from it between forces which pull back and those which pull forward, may naturally contest the possibility. But one has to say that for him who is spiritually linked with the supreme Will or the supreme Truth, for him it is necessarily, at every instant, the best that happens for his personal realisation. In all instances it is like that. An unconditional best can be admitted only by one who sees the universe as an unfolding, as the Supreme’s self-awareness of Himself.

(*Silence*)

To tell you the truth, all these things are of no importance; for that which *is*, goes in every way entirely and absolutely beyond everything that human consciousness can think about it. It is only when you are no longer human that you *know*; but as soon as this knowledge is expressed, human limits reimpose themselves and then you cease to know.

This is incontestable.

And because of this incapacity, there is a kind of futility also in wanting to reduce the problem altogether to something which human reason can understand. In this case it is very wise to say like someone I knew: “We are here, we have a work to do, and what is needed is to do it as well as we can, without worrying about the why and how.” Why is the world as it is? . . . When we are capable of understanding, we shall understand.

From the practical point of view, this is evident.

Only, each one takes a position. . . . I have all the examples here. I have a sample collection of all attitudes and see very clearly their reactions. I see the same Force — the same, one Force — acting in this sample collection and producing naturally different effects; but these “different” effects, to a deeper vision, are very

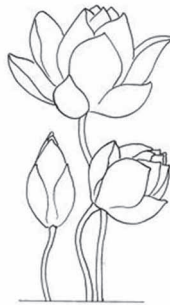
superficial: it is only “It pleases them to think in this way, that’s all, it just pleases them to think thus.” But as a matter of fact, the inner journey, the inner development, the essential vibration is not affected — not at all. One aspires with all his heart for Nirvana, another aspires with all his will for the supramental manifestation, and in both of them the vibratory result is almost the same. And it is a whole mass of vibrations which is prepared more and more to . . . to receive what must be.

There is a state, a state essentially pragmatic, spiritually pragmatic, in which of all human futilities, the most futile is metaphysics.

14 March 1951

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM 2nd ed., Vol. 4, pp. 207-16)



WHAT HAS BROUGHT US HERE?

Mother, what's interesting is this: What is there in us that has made us come here?

AH, that is interesting! What is the reason of your being here? Well, it's for each one to find it. Have you found it, you? No, not yet? Why, that's another very interesting question!

If you . . . (*Silence*) If you asked yourselves this, you would be obliged to seek the answer somewhere, within — because it is *within* you, the answer. “What is there in us that has made us come here?” The answer is within. There is nothing outside. And if you go deep enough, you will find a very clear answer . . . (*silence*) and an interesting answer. If you go deep enough, into a sufficiently complete silence from all outer things, you will find within you that flame about which I often speak, and in this flame you will see *your destiny*. You will see the aspiration of centuries which has been concentrated gradually, to lead you through countless births *to the great day of realisation* — that preparation which has been made through thousands of years, and is reaching its culmination.

And as you will have gone very deep to find this, all your incapacities, all your weaknesses, everything in you that denies and does not understand, all that — you will feel that it is not yourself, it is just like a garment which serves in some way and which you have put on for the time being. But you will understand that in order to be truly capable of profiting fully by the opportunity to do what you wanted to do, what you have aspired to do for such a long time, you must gradually bring the light, the consciousness, the truth into all these obscure elements of the external garment, so that you may be able to understand integrally *why you are here!* And not only that you may understand it, but that you may be able to do it. For centuries this has been prepared in you, not in this . . . (*Mother pinches the skin of her forearm*) this is quite recent, isn't it? . . . but in your true self. And *for centuries* it has been awaiting *this opportunity*.

And then you enter *immediately* into the marvellous. You see to what an extent it is extraordinary . . . that things which one has so long hoped for, things for which one has prayed so much, made so many efforts, suddenly a moment comes when *they are realised*.

It is the moment when great things are done. One must not miss the opportunity.

4 August 1954

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1954*, CWM 2nd ed., Vol. 6, pp. 271-72)

**“YOGA” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

Your impression, please, of this poem?

YOGA

I shut mine eyes and saw a Face
Of everlasting fire
Against abysses of calm space
Where no word-wings aspire.

Under the invulnerable gaze
Of that prodigious Sun
My spirit grew a giant daze
Of self-oblivion.

But suddenly the mystic blaze
And I were a single sense
Of an eternal fount of rays
Pouring omnipotence . . .

Then I awoke. Yet all my days
Some mute in-sky made bright
And all their span of tearful haze
Rainbowed a deathless light!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is a good poem.

13 December 1933

[*Version from The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 449:*]

YOGA

I shut my eyes and saw a Face
Of everlasting fire
Against abysses of calm space
Where no word-wings aspire.

Under the invulnerable gaze
Of that prodigious Sun
My spirit grew a giant daze
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Some mute in-sky made bright
And all their span of tearful haze
Rainbowed a deathless light.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of May 2012)

Chapter XIII

The Teacher: In and Outside the Class

“So, you met Aurobindo Ghose. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond. If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.”

A. B. Clarke, Principal, Baroda College¹

THE time Sri Aurobindo spent in Baroda flowed along several streams, mostly quiet and imperceptible. His official and formal assignments included working in different departments of the Secretariat of the Baroda Raj, rendering personal assistance to the Maharaja by way of writing out important speeches for him and preparing his reports and replies to the colonial Indian Government, tutoring his younger children for a while, acting as his secretary on one occasion on their trip to Kashmir and of course teaching French and English at the College as well as acting as the Vice-Principal and later as the Acting Principal of the College. Of all these functions teaching alone seems to have been close to his heart.

Of the other streams of his interest and actions, literary, spiritual and political, the first was evidently a native element of his nature though interest in spirituality and politics too came to claim his keen attention before long. Although no biographer can avoid presenting this kind of conventional chronological estimates, even a cursory study of the specifics of his life on the surface would lead us to the conclusion that all these interests were intrinsically rooted in a single inspiration: they were facets of its integrality.

However, before focusing on these aspects of his Baroda days let us look at the impressions available to us of his role as an educator, the most vital segment of his obligation to his job. He began taking classes — for French at first — in early 1897. Soon the Principal must have realised the qualitative difference this new entrant into his staff made. The Maharaja too had realised the unique potentiality in this young scholar-officer who could project his [the Maharaja’s] own image better by writing his speeches and letters. Thus there was a subtle conflict between their claims on Sri Aurobindo, as the following two sample documents would indicate. The

Principal, Mr. Tait, wrote to the Dewan (a principality's topmost bureaucrat) on the 6th of September 1900:

I have just sent a *tippan* to the Dewan Saheb pointing out that for various reasons it is essential to retain Mr. Ghose as a Professor in the College, and requesting him to obtain the orders of His Highness to the effect. What I have stated I herewith append for your information. You know as well as I do how necessary it is that the College staff should be strengthened in order that it may emerge from second class rank. I therefore trust that you will mention this matter to His Highness and ask him to be kind enough to assist me in making the College a better institution than it has hitherto been. At the same time you may add any more arguments of your own that occur to you in favour of my proposal.²

Though on the 26th of the same month the Principal was informed that His Highness, who was away from Baroda, had approved of his suggestion "for the present", not long after it, a "confidential Huzur Order", dated the 30th of November, said:

His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has an idea of getting the memoirs of his life and of his reign, together with a Review of the last twenty years' Administration in Baroda written soon after his return to Baroda. For this purpose the services of Professor Arvind A. Ghose of the Baroda College will be required for about a year or so. Arrangements should therefore be made to relieve Mr. Ghose from his College duties soon after the return of His Highness.³

Through uncertainties, intervals and altering of functions, Sri Aurobindo continued to teach till the end of his Baroda service. We can, to some extent, visualise him in his role as a professor through the reminiscences of some of his students. Needless to say, the words these former students attribute to Sri Aurobindo cannot be literally exact; but they are obviously true in their spirit. (*This author has taken the liberty of changing the different spellings of Sri Aurobindo's name used by those quoted to the universally accepted one.*)

Recollects K. M. Munshi, an outstanding political figure,

The Aurobindonian legend in the College filled me with reverence and it was with awe that I hung upon his words whenever he came to College as Professor of English.⁴

Elsewhere he says:

I remember only one occasion when I directly talked to Prof. Arvind Ghosh. “How can nationalism be developed?” I asked. He pointed to a wall-map of India and said something to this effect:

Look at the map. Learn to find in it the portrait of Bharatmata. The cities, mountains, rivers and forests, are the materials which go to make up Her body. The people inhabiting the country are the cells which go to make up Her living tissues. Our literature is Her memory and speech. The spirit of Her culture is Her soul. The happiness and freedom of Her children is Her salvation. Behold Bharat as a living Mother, meditate upon Her and worship Her in the nine-fold way of Bhakti . . .

During the Partition movement Prof. Arvind Ghosh resigned his post of Professor in our College. While leaving Baroda he gave us a stirring speech, the substance of which I noted down on the spot. The summary of that speech and his messianic utterance, the *Uttarpara Speech*, remained the source of inspiration for me for years.⁵

We have a relatively more elaborate account of Sri Aurobindo’s life at home and at the college from Rajaram N. Patkar (we have referred to him earlier), the younger brother of the wife of Keshav Ganesh Deshpande, Bar-at-Law, Sri Aurobindo’s friend since their Cambridge days and who too was in the service of the Baroda State. The young Patkar was singularly lucky because of his brother-in-law’s friendship with Sri Aurobindo in gaining proximity to the latter. He recollects in his reminiscences written in 1956 that Sri Aurobindo’s

. . . passion for reading was very great . . . and not confined to any particular subject and was extended to various compartments of human knowledge. . . . After reading a book he used to brood for a time and commit his views to paper. I had seen volumes of such writings in his room in different languages such as Greek, Latin, French and English. . . . His concentration was so great that he felt himself the least perturbed by any outside disturbance. Once I had to communicate a message to him when he was engrossed in a book. I had to wait for over fifteen minutes just in front of him before he directed his attention to me. One evening his servant brought him his meal consisting of rice and a curry with some vegetables, and addressed him, “*Saab, khana rakha hai!*” Sri Aurobindo simply said, “*Achha!*” without even moving his head. After about an hour or so the servant came again to remove the dish, but to his surprise found the dish untouched lying on the table as it was. He dared not disturb his master and he quietly came to me and told me about it. Then I had to go to his room to do the unpleasant task of reminding him of the waiting meal. He then

gave a pleasant smile and hurriedly went to the table and within about ten minutes finished his job of feeding his belly and resumed his work. . . .

I had the good fortune to be his student when I was in the Inter class. His method of teaching was a novel one. At the beginning he used to give a series of introductory lectures for initiating the student to the subject-matter of the text. . . . After preparing the student to understand the text in this manner he used to start reading the text, stopping whenever necessary to explain the meaning of difficult or obscure sentences. Then he used to dictate general lectures bearing on the various aspects pertaining to the text. These lectures which were given at the close of the term were availed of by many students belonging to other colleges.

But more than his college lectures it was a treat to hear him on the platform. He used to preside occasionally over the College Debating Society. When he used to preside, the College Central Hall which is sufficiently large was almost packed to the full with the audience which not only consisted of the College students but many educated people from the public. He was never an orator, but a speaker of a very high order and when he rose to speak there was a pin-drop silence and the audience used to listen to him with rapt attention. Without any gesture or movement of limbs he stood like a statue, motionless and the language used to flow like a stream from his lips with a natural ease and melody that kept his audience almost spell-bound. Every sentence that he uttered was full of meaning and set the audience thinking for days together. He was at his best when the subject pertained to religion or philosophy. He rarely dabbled in politics but references were made now and then to the down-trodden condition of India and illiteracy and ignorance of the masses. Though it is more than five decades now since I heard him on the Baroda College platform I still remember his figure with the ring of his sweet melodious voice as if I heard him yesterday.⁶

Though awe and reverence for Sri Aurobindo did not let his students approach him at their will, those who broke through that invisible barrier found him disarmingly unassuming and helpful. As a student of the Matriculation class, once Patkar asked him how to improve his English and if he should follow the style of Macaulay since the latter's *Lives of Great Men* fascinated him.

As usual he smiled and replied, "Do not be Macaulay's slave, but be your own master. By reading Macaulay or any other writer you will never be like him. You will not be a Macaulay, but a faint echo of Macaulay. . . . You may read any good author carefully but should think for yourself and form your own judgment. It is likely you may differ from the views of the writer; you should think for yourself and cultivate a habit of writing and in that way you will be a master of your own style."⁷

On another occasion when the young Patkar praised a gentleman who had translated the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as a 'great poet', Sri Aurobindo told him that all those who wrote verses were not poets and that "even a prose-writer could be a poet if he had a poetic gift in him".⁸

Shri P. B. Chandwani, a Member of the 'Servants of the People Society' who came to the college during the last phase of Sri Aurobindo's sojourn at Baroda has put down his experiences thus:

Way back in 1905, I had the rare privilege of learning at the feet of Sri Aurobindo, known at that time as Aravinda Ghose, at the Baroda Arts College, when he took charge of it as Acting Principal. I was then in the Intermediate Class and he used to take our class in English and teach us Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. He would often keep his left hand on the table with the thumb touching a finger and pour out his deepest thoughts. While many a student complained that he made no effort to coach us for examination, I felt that his teaching was so exhaustive that no examiner could ever ask a question which we could not answer with the flood of light thrown on it by the learned Principal. And while many of us, including this writer, used to poke fun at several Professors, all the students without exception looked up to him with awe and respect.

In common with a few other students, such as the brilliant K. M. Munshi and A. B. Purani, who were a couple of years senior to me, I happened to be his favourite student and had free access to him at the College as also at his residence, where he once introduced me to his younger brother, Barindra. Once on a moonlit night, he attended a party organised by me in his honour at the College tennis courts. At the end of the year, having secured a 1st class, a rare distinction in those days, I was offered a handsome scholarship by the Elphinstone College, Bombay, and though I left Baroda contrary to his wishes, he gave me a glowing testimonial in his own handwriting.⁹

Yet another contemporary of Chandwani, Shankar Balwant Didmishe, recalls the way Sri Aurobindo taught Burke's *French Revolution*:

As his method consisted in going to the roots, one could never forget what he taught, even though the whole text was not completed. His mastery of the English language was phenomenal. . . . He had no books or notes with him; everything was extempore.¹⁰

Writing for *The Baroda College Golden Jubilee Commemoration Volume* (1933) several former students who had the chance to be Sri Aurobindo's students recorded their impressions of their teacher and here are a few glimpses:

Mr. Littledale was succeeded [as Professor of English] by Sri Aurobindo . . . whose command over English was second to that of none, not even to that of an Englishman.

The speech he delivered at one of the annual social gatherings was a piece of chaste and polished English, the like of which I have never heard. It occupied only three pages of the *College Miscellany*, but it set an example in classical English. Professor Ghose gave us essays to write. He corrected all the essays. He used to teach us that every sentence should logically follow from the preceding sentence and similarly every para should logically follow from the preceding one. Correct composition leads to correct thinking. (M. H. Kantavala)¹¹

Here is another recollection from the *Commemoration Volume*:

He was revered by all, but being by nature shy and reserved, was not easily accessible we were all stunned at his genius when he dictated extemporaneous notes in a very lucid style. One sentence followed another naturally. I owe to him and his notes on *Pride and Prejudice* for my effort in writing a Gujarati novel. (R. S. Dalal)¹²

Bengal was in turmoil and it was time for Sri Aurobindo to leave Baroda. Shankar Didmishe and others planned a “send off” in the College Central Hall but as Principal Clarke did not allow it, they held it at a place outside the College. Sri Aurobindo “reprimanded” the students for asking the Principal for use of the Central Hall and bore with their arrangements for being photographed with three groups: those of B.A. senior English students, B.A. junior English students and students of French.

We return to Patkar’s invaluable reminiscence:

One day . . . he appeared to me in a jubilant mood. It was a pleasant surprise to me and I forthwith made bold to ask him how it was that I see him like that and without the least reservation he replied, “Don’t you know, brother, that the time for my service to the Mother had arrived! My prayer is heard and I am leaving Baroda very soon.”

. . . I little thought he would leave us so soon. . . . The day of his departure came at last and it was extremely touching. I was very restless throughout the day. Though his circle of friends was limited, the number of his admirers was so large that his house was flooded with visitors and most of them had come to have a parting *darshan* of this great man.

At about 11 o’clock in the morning he went to the palace to call on His Highness the Maharaja Saheb; his interview with His Highness lasted for about half an hour. Nobody knows the details of the interview but it is said that the

wise Maharaja gave him leave with the greatest reluctance as he must have been convinced that the task imposed by Sri Aurobindo on himself was of a far greater importance than his services to the Baroda State.

In the evening, Aurobindo Babu, though he had a very busy time, called me in his room and I sat by his side. With a caressing touch of his hand on my shoulder he affectionately said to me, “Well, Rajaram, we part after all. We part in body but not in soul — which is omnipresent. I leave Baroda because supreme duty demands my presence elsewhere — and I cannot shirk. I have not much to tell you. You are a good boy; continue to be good throughout your life. You have yet to complete your education — which over, you will enter the arena of public life which is full of struggle. You will come out successful and triumphant only if you remain honest and good and obey the dictates of your conscience. If you observe this dictum your path will be smooth and you will be happy.”

He finished these words and got up. He went straight to his book case and knowing my love for Sanskrit picked up two books — Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* and *Vikramorvasie* — and presented them to me as a token of his love for me. He also gave me a few verses composed by himself — one styled *Songs to Myrtilla and other Poems* and the other *Urvasie* — a translation in verse of Kalidasa’s drama.

I quietly bowed, touched his feet and left the room with a heavy heart and wet eyes.¹³

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

1. A. B. Clarke, the then Principal of Baroda College, said this to the renowned educationist Dr. C. R. Reddy, who succeeded Sri Aurobindo as the Vice-Principal of the college. Dr. Reddy cited this in his address as the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University, at its Convocation on 11 December 1948 when the 1st National Prize was bestowed *in absentia* on Sri Aurobindo. (The Award has not gone to anyone else thereafter.)

2. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives Collection, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. See also *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

3. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives Collection, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

4. K. M. Munshi in *The Baroda College Golden Jubilee Commemoration Volume*, edited by Prof. A. K. Trivedi; Times of India Press, Bombay, 1933.

5. *Bhavan's Journal*, 22 July 1962.
6. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives Collection, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
7. *Ditto*.
8. *Ditto*.
9. *Mother India*, August 1971; Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
10. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives Collection, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
11. *Ditto*.
12. *Ditto*.
13. *Ditto*.

My philosophy was formed first by the study of the Upanishads and the Gita; the Veda came later. They were the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to realise what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy, not on ideas by themselves. I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others. The other source of my philosophy was the knowledge that flowed from above when I sat in meditation, especially from the plane of the Higher Mind when I reached that level; they [the ideas from the Higher Mind] came down in a mighty flood which swelled into a sea of direct Knowledge always translating itself into experience, or they were intuitions starting from experience and leading to other intuitions and a corresponding experience. This source was exceedingly catholic and many-sided and all sorts of ideas came in which might have belonged to conflicting philosophies but they were here reconciled in a large synthetic whole.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*,
CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 113)

SRI AUROBINDO ON CONSCIOUSNESS, WILL AND MOTIVATION

THE Nature of consciousness has largely eluded our understanding “because when we think of consciousness, it is of the individual we think”.¹ We do not realise what is a palpable fact of yogic experience, namely, that consciousness is not confined to the human individual but is a cosmic reality, is indeed the one Reality, besides which nothing else exists, so that there is nothing in the universe that is devoid of consciousness and nothing that in essence is not consciousness. A basic dictum of the psychology founded on spiritual experience is: “you must know the whole before you can know the part”.² Consciousness must be understood as a universal reality before we can hope to understand human consciousness which is only a part of the total reality.

We identify consciousness with mind, but to the experience of a yogi,

Chit, the divine Consciousness, is not our mental self-awareness; that we shall find to be only a form, a lower and limited mode or movement. As we progress and awaken to the soul in us and things, we shall realise that there is a consciousness also in the plant, in the metal, in the atom, in electricity, in everything that belongs to physical Nature; we shall find even that it is not really in all respects a lower or more limited mode than the mental, on the contrary it is in many “inanimate” forms more intense, rapid, poignant, though less evolved towards the surface. But this also, this consciousness of vital and physical Nature is, compared with Chit, a lower and therefore a limited form, mode and movement. These lower modes of consciousness are the conscious-stuff of inferior planes in one indivisible existence. In ourselves also there is in our subconscious being an action which is precisely that of the “inanimate” physical Nature whence has been constituted the basis of our physical being, another which is that of plant-life, and another which is that of the lower animal creation around us. . . .

. . . as we have in us these subnormal selves and subhuman planes, so are there in us above our mental being supernormal and superhuman planes. . . . It is this Chit which modifies itself so as to become on the Truth-plane the supermind, on the mental plane the mental reason, will, emotion, sensation, on the lower planes the vital or physical instincts, impulses, habits of an obscure force not in superficially conscious possession of itself. All is Chit because all is Sat; all is various movement of the original Consciousness because all is various movement of the original Being.³

From the viewpoint of yogic psychology, will is nothing but the force, power or energy of consciousness: “. . . Will is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result.”⁴ Therefore will, like consciousness, is a universal reality. The form in which we most readily recognise will, namely, mental will, is only one band in the spectrum of Will which, like the spectrum of Consciousness, consists of bands both above and below the level of mind:

It [Will] is of the nature of consciousness; it is energy of consciousness, and although present in all forms, conscious, subconscious or superconscious, vital, physical or mental, yet comes into its kingdom only when it emerges in Mind.⁵

The fundamental nature of will as the energy or force of consciousness is conveyed by the Vedantic concept of Chit-Shakti, “consciousness-force, inherent conscious force of conscious-being”.⁶

Since Consciousness, “whose active nature is Force or Will”⁷ is omnipresent, Will or Force is also present everywhere, even in matter which seems to be devoid of consciousness:

Material force is, in fact, a subconscious operation of Will; Will that works in us in what seems to be light, though it is in truth no more than a half-light, and material Force that works in what to us seems to be a darkness of unintelligence, are yet really and in essence the same, as materialistic thought has always instinctively felt from the wrong or lower end of things and as spiritual knowledge working from the summit had long ago discovered. We may say, therefore, that it is a subconscious Mind or Intelligence which, manifesting Force as its driving-power, its executive Nature, its Prakriti, has created this material world.⁸

. . . in the very atom there is something that becomes in us a will and a desire, there is an attraction and repulsion which, though phenomenally other, are essentially the same thing as liking and disliking in ourselves, but are, as we say, inconscient or subconscient. This essence of will and desire are evident everywhere in Nature and, though this is not yet sufficiently envisaged, they are associated with and indeed the expression of a subconscient or, if you will, inconscient or quite involved sense and intelligence which are equally pervasive.⁹

Since Consciousness is one, so Will is one, though it manifests in different forms in matter, plant, animal and the human being:

. . . Chit-Shakti of the Vedanta, consciousness-force, inherent conscious force of conscious-being, which manifests itself as nervous energy full of submental sensation in the plant, as desire-sense and desire-will in the primary animal

forms, as self-conscious sense and force in the developing animal, as mental will and knowledge topping all the rest in man.¹⁰

Even in the human being, will “takes different shapes, the will of the intelligence, the wishes of the emotional mind, the desires of the passion and the vital being, the impulsions and blind or half-blind compulsions of the nervous and the subconscious nature . . .”¹¹

The many-shaped will of the human being — which is inherently a divided and conflict-ridden will — is referred to by Sri Aurobindo as personal will, or self-will, and is distinguished from the one Will of the cosmic and transcendent Reality, variously called Universal Will, Will of the Transcendent Spirit, God’s Will or the divine Will.

Personal Will and Universal Will

As the one Consciousness becomes many separate egos in human beings through identification with body, life-nature and mind, so the one divine Will becomes the seemingly-independent personal will of each individual ego, “a misled and wandering ray that has parted from the supreme Puissance”¹² of the divine Will. This accounts for one fundamental difference between the Universal Will of the Divine and the personal will of the ego, namely, the omnipotence of the divine Will and the relative impotence of the personal will. For

The essentiality of the divine Will is that in it Consciousness and Energy, Knowledge and Force are one. . . . It is this divine Will that conducts the universe; it is one with all the things that it combines and its being, its knowledge, its action are inseparable from each other. What it is, it knows; what it knows, that it does and becomes.

But as soon as egoistic consciousness emerges and interferes, there is a disturbance, a division, a false action. Will becomes an impulsion ignorant of its secret motive and aim, knowledge becomes a dubious and partial ray not in possession of the will, the act and the result, but only striving to possess and inform them. This is because we are not in possession of our self (*ātmavān*), our true being, but only of the ego. What we are, we know not; what we know, we cannot effect.¹³

The divine Will is not alien to the individual, for it is the will of the individual’s highest Self:

This divine Will is not an alien Power or Presence; it is intimate to us and we ourselves are part of it: for it is our own highest Self that possesses and supports it. Only, it is not our conscious mental will; it rejects often enough what our conscious will accepts and accepts what our conscious will rejects. For while this secret One knows all and every whole and each detail, our surface mind knows only a little part of things.¹⁴

Mental, Rational or Intelligent Will (Buddhi)

As previously stated, will, being the energy of consciousness, is present at all the levels in different forms. But just as Consciousness is generally identified with mind, so Will is usually identified with mental will. What we generally call “will power” is the force of mental consciousness which we use to execute an act and to control tendencies and impulses of physical and vital consciousness. “The energy which dictates the action or prevents a wrong action is the will.”¹⁵ Since mind is a relatively more highly evolved form of consciousness it can apply its power of will and dictate to the less evolved physical and vital parts of our being what the mental faculties of reason and judgement perceive as right or beneficial, and prevent the inferior members from following what the mind sees as wrong or harmful. As long as one lives primarily in the ordinary consciousness — that in which mind is the highest evolved form of consciousness — one needs to rely chiefly on mental will for regulating the activities of one’s physical and vital nature. As Sri Aurobindo wrote to a sadhak:

I suppose it must be because you have not been in the habit of using the will to compel the other parts of the nature — so when you want it done, they refuse to obey a control to which they are not accustomed and it also has not any habitual hold upon them.

The will is a part of the consciousness and ought to be in human beings the chief agent in controlling the activities of the nature.¹⁶

One who seeks to grow into a higher state of consciousness but who still lives primarily in the ordinary mental consciousness needs to bear in mind: “So long as there is not a constant action of the Force from above or else of a deeper will from within, the mental will is necessary.”¹⁷

In the light of what has just been stated, weakness of will is caused by the opposition of physical and vital propensities to the mental will. “The weak-willed man is governed by his vital and physical impulsions, his mental being is not dynamic enough to make its will prevail over them.”¹⁸

The will is felt to be particularly weak when one is dominated by the physical consciousness which is characterised by inertia and passivity, the opposites of dyna-

mism which is the characteristic of a strong will. As Sri Aurobindo explained to a sadhak experiencing a weakness of the will:

It [the weakness of the will] is a first result of coming down into the physical consciousness or of the physical consciousness coming up prominently — formerly you were much in the mind and vital. The physical consciousness is full of inertia — it wants not to move but to be moved by whatever forces and that is its habit.¹⁹

The predominant quality of the vital being is energy and power. Consequently, the mental will is often overwhelmed by strong vital impulses. On the other hand, the mental will is rendered more powerful if the vital being lends its energy and force to the mental will.

But even the strong mental will of the mentally governed individual is often powerless in contending with the physical, vital and subconscious forces of human nature:

This control [by the mental will] is very partial: for the reason is often deluded by vital desires and the ignorance of the physical and it puts itself on their side and tries to justify by its ideas, reasonings or arguments their mistakes and wrong movements. Even if the reason keeps free and tells the vital or the body, “Do not do this”, yet the vital and the body often follow their own movement in spite of the prohibition — man’s mental will is not strong enough to compel them.²⁰

Man is a mental being and the mind is the leader of his life and body; but this is a leader who is much led by his followers and has sometimes no other will than what they impose on him. Mind in spite of its power is often impotent before the inconscient and subconscious which obscure its clarity and carry it away on the tide of instinct or impulse; in spite of its clarity it is fooled by vital and emotional suggestions into giving sanction to ignorance and error, to wrong thought and to wrong action, or it is obliged to look on while the nature follows what it knows to be wrong, dangerous or evil.²¹

As stated previously, personal or mental will is relatively impotent due to the fact that in the mental being there is an inherent division and discord between knowledge and will, “so that where the knowledge is ripe or sufficient some will in the being opposes it or the will fails it; where the will is powerful, vehement or firmly or forcefully effective, knowledge guiding it to its right use is lacking.”²²

Infallible Will belongs to the consciousness beyond mind — the supramental or Truth-Consciousness in which Knowledge and Will are one:

Knowledge and Force or Will — for all conscious force is will — are the twin sides of the action of consciousness. In our mentality they are divided. The idea comes first, the will comes stumbling after it or rebels against it or is used as its imperfect tool with imperfect results; or else the will starts up first with a blind or half-seeing idea in it and works out something in confusion of which we get the right understanding afterwards. There is no oneness, no full understanding between these powers in us; or else there is no perfect correspondence of initiation with effectuation. Nor is the individual will in harmony with the universal; it tries to reach beyond it or falls short of it or deviates from and strives against it. It knows not the times and seasons of the Truth, nor its degrees and measures. The Vijnana takes up the will and puts it first into harmony and then into oneness with the truth of the supramental knowledge. In this knowledge the idea in the individual is one with the idea in the universal, because both are brought back to the truth of the supreme Knowledge and the transcendent Will. The gnosis takes up not only our intelligent will, but our wishes, desires, even what we call the lower desires, the instincts, the impulses, the reachings out of sense and sensation and it transforms them. They cease to be wishes and desires, because they cease first to be personal and then cease to be that struggling after the ungrasped which we mean by craving and desire. No longer blind or half-blind reachings out of the instinctive or intelligent mentality, they are transformed into a various action of the Truth-will; and that will acts with an inherent knowledge of the right measures of its decreed action and therefore with an effectivity unknown to our mental willing. Therefore too in the action of the *viññānamaya* will there is no place for sin; for all sin is an error of the will, a desire and act of the Ignorance.²³

. . . Supermind, — a Will that knows and a Knowledge that effects, — which creates universal order out of infinity. Its awakening into action brings down, says the Veda, the unrestricted downpour of the rain of heaven, — the full flowing of the seven rivers from a superior sea of light and power and joy. It reveals Sachchidananda. It reveals the Truth behind the scattered and ill-combined suggestions of our mentality and makes each to fall into its place in the unity of the Truth behind; thus it can transform the half-light of our minds into a certain totality of light. It reveals the Will behind all the devious and imperfectly regulated striving of our mental will and emotional wishes and vital effort and makes each to fall into its place in the unity of the luminous Will behind . . .²⁴

The relative powerlessness of the mental will becomes evident especially in sadhana where spiritual progress takes place only when the sadhak is more or less seized by a deeper and more powerful will than that of the mind. As the Mother remarks:

. . . so long as the thing goes on in the head in this way (*Mother turns a finger near her forehead*), it has no power. It has a very little force that is extremely limited. And all the time it belies itself. One thinks that with great difficulty one collects a will, artificial enough, besides, and one tries to catch something, and the very next minute it has all vanished. And one doesn't even realise it; one asks oneself, "How does it happen to turn out like that?"

I don't know, indeed it seems to me very difficult to do yoga with the head — unless one is gripped.

The will is not in the head.

The will — what I call the will — is something that's here (*Mother points to the centre of the chest*), which has a power of action, a power of realisation.²⁵

Psychic Will

The will just spoken of, which is distinguished from the mental will "in the head", and which has a power of spiritual realisation is the will of the psychic.

In Sri Aurobindo's description of the human constitution, the psychic represents the soul element, a portion of the Divine, which stands behind mind, life and body, gaining experience through these instruments, presiding over the different births one after the other, and evolving from life to life. "It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic."²⁶

The soul or the psychic is at first an undifferentiated power of the Divine Consciousness:

It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality, — that which we call usually the psychic being. It is always this psychic being that is the real, though often the secret cause of man's turning to the spiritual life and his greatest help in it.²⁷

In the spiritual life the mental will needs to be progressively replaced by the psychic will. As stated previously, the mental will is necessary "so long as there is not a constant action of the Force from above or else a deeper will from within". As Sri Aurobindo states in writing about the need to control the vital nature:

Even apart from yoga, in ordinary life, only those are considered to have full manhood or are likely to succeed in their life, their ideals or their undertakings who take in hand this restless vital, concentrate and control it and subject it to

discipline. It is by the use of the mental will that they discipline it, compelling it to do not what it wants but what the reason or the will sees to be right or desirable. In yoga one uses the inner will and compels the vital to submit itself to tapasya so that it may become calm, strong, obedient — or else one calls down the calm from above obliging the vital to renounce desire and become quiet and receptive.²⁸

The “inner will” or the “deeper will” spoken of above is the will of the inner being.

The psychic being — which Sri Aurobindo calls the delight-soul — is often confused with the emotional aspects of the vital being — the desire-soul. But whereas the psychic will is the will to delight, the vital will expresses itself as desire for pleasure.

The will of the psychic insists always on truth and good and beauty because these are akin to its own inherent nature. The mission of the psychic being is to turn the physical, vital and mental nature towards the Divine and transform the entire outer being so that it becomes an instrument for the manifestation of the divine Will on earth. But at first the psychic is veiled by mind, life and body, and is not able to impose its will on them:

[It] stands back and in most human natures is only the secret witness or, one might say, a constitutional ruler who allows his ministers to rule for him, delegates to them his empire, silently assents to their decisions and only now and then puts in a word which they can at any moment override and act otherwise.²⁹

Even when there is a formed psychic being, able to express itself with some directness in life, it is still in all but a few a smaller portion of the being — “no bigger in the mass of the body than the thumb of a man” was the image used by the ancient seers — and it is not always able to prevail against the obscurity and ignorant smallness of the physical consciousness, the mistaken surenesses of the mind or the arrogance and vehemence of the vital nature. This soul is obliged to accept the human mental, emotive, sensational life as it is, its relations, its activities, its cherished forms and figures; it has to labour to disengage and increase the divine element in all this relative truth mixed with a continual falsifying error, this love turned to the uses of the animal body or the satisfaction of the vital ego, this life of an average manhood shot with rare and pale glimpses of Godhead and the darker luridities of the demon and the brute. Unerring in the essence of its will, it is obliged often under the pressure of its instruments to submit to mistakes of action, wrong placement of feeling, wrong choice of person, errors in the exact form of its will, in the circumstances

of its expression of the infallible inner ideal. Yet is there a divination within it which makes it a surer guide than the reason or than even the highest desire, and through apparent errors and stumblings its voice can still lead better than the precise intellect and the considering mental judgment. This voice of the soul is not what we call conscience — for that is only a mental and often conventional erring substitute; it is a deeper and more seldom heard call; yet to follow it when heard is wisest: even, it is better to wander at the call of one's soul than to go apparently straight with the reason and the outward moral mentor. But it is only when the life turns towards the Divine that the soul can truly come forward and impose its power on the outer members; for, itself a spark of the Divine, to grow in flame towards the Divine is its true life and its very reason of existence.³⁰

The will for spiritual progress and purification comes from the psychic, and its exercise augments the growth of the psychic. As the Mother says, answering the question as to how one can light the “psychic fire within” (which Sri Aurobindo speaks of):

By aspiration.

By the will for progress, by the urge towards perfection.

Above all, it is the will for progress and self-purification which lights the fire. The will for progress. Those who have a strong will, when they turn it towards spiritual progress and purification, automatically light the fire within themselves.

And each defect one wants to cure or each progress one wants to make — if all that is thrown into the fire, it burns with a new intensity. And this is not an image, it is a fact in the subtle physical. One can feel the warmth of the flame, one can see in the subtle physical the light of the flame. And when there is something in the nature which prevents one from advancing and one throws it into this fire, it begins to burn and the flame becomes more intense.³¹

(To be continued)

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ORDEAL OF THE IDEAL KING

But joy cannot endure until the end:
There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note.

(*Savitri*, CWSA 33: 16-17)

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:

...

Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law,
It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers:
Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence
It turns against the saviour hands of Grace;
It meets the sons of God with death and pain.
A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,
Their sun-thoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds,
Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,
The cross their payment for the crown they gave,
Only they leave behind a splendid Name.
A fire has come and touched men's hearts and gone;
A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.
Too unlike the world she came to help and save,
Her greatness weighed upon its ignorant breast
And from its dim chasms welled a dire return,
A portion of its sorrow, struggle, fall.

(*Ibid.*, 7)

A unique kingdom had been established. One that was to provide an unequalled ideal for ages to come. For thousands of years people would remember and long for such a kingdom. For thousands of years its story would be told and retold with colourful variations of meanings and shades until it got firmly ingrained in the psyche of the whole nation. It has known no parallel. It came to be known as Rama-rajya, the kingdom of Rama.

The following is one of its most poignant episodes.

The evening had come and it was the time for the king to receive reports from the secret agents. They had come. One after another they gave their reports. The reports were a glowing picture of people at ease, happy and content. They followed the

paths of dharma, righteousness. There was no lack of food, clothes or houses for anybody. People pursued their work and their vocation without fear or hindrance. They were full of praise for the whole system of Government the king had so justly established. All the state officers were people of honesty and integrity, efficiency, kindness and courtesy. Complaints were rare and were immediately attended to. Justice was impartial and swift. There was no fear or danger from dacoits or thieves. No threats from enemies outside the state. People often slept with their doors wide open. In their personal lives people followed the laws of Dharma, the ways of those highest in the land. Fear of God, that is that of His law of Karma, existed indeed, but of nothing and nobody else. And this fear checked all kinds of evil forces, excessive or inordinate ambitions, desires, jealousies, lusts and angers. Progress and development in all fields came steadily without their stings. A spirit of harmony and goodwill prevailed. People met and talked with joy in their hearts and smiles on their faces. Diseases were rare and were soon cured by methods and medicines in harmony with Nature. Premature death did not exist. Sons never died before their fathers.

Even the forces of Nature collaborated when Rama ruled. Rains came as and when needed. The earth responded with her plenty. Grains, fruits and flowers were abundant. Streams and rivers flowed smoothly with clear sparkling waters. The seasons gave their best: healthy coolness to pleasant warmth to delightful rains, a happy variation throughout the year.

The king listened with care and contentment. In fact, such reports had become, more or less, a routine. Only rarely some case arose which required his personal intervention. He remembered the case of the highly ambitious and cruel Tapasvi, an ascetic. He had acquired some terrible occult powers and was still engaged in acquiring more. He could kill people from a distance. He had already threatened and killed a young boy — the only case of premature death (the boy was later revived) — to make the parents and others fear and obey him. People had become terrified of him. And the king had to intervene and with his incomparable arrow eliminate that dreadful ascetic. But that was long ago and for quite some time things had been tranquil and happy.

However, he had noticed that one of the agents had held himself back with downcast eyes and sorrowful mien. Understanding his unspoken desire to speak last and alone, Rama did not call him until all the others had left. Finally, Rama looked at him and he came nearer. Obligated as he was under a sacred oath to report truthfully everything he had seen and heard concerning the king and the State, he spoke. But his lips trembled and his eyes watered. He told the story of the dhobi — a washerman. Rama listened carefully. He asked a few questions and let the agent go with a gentle nod.

Rama was stunned within. Is this what the people were thinking? Is this what would come up under a little stress?

“I am not Rama,” the dhobi had shouted at his wife with anger and contempt,

“who would harbour a wife who had been so long in a stranger’s house.” And among all the people who had gathered at the loud conjugal quarrel nobody had protested! Nobody had uttered even the slightest murmur! They had simply looked at one another, perhaps growing aware of their own hidden suspicions. And not knowing quite what to say or do, had quietly slunk away.

A storm was surging up within Rama.

Of course he would call the dhobi and severely punish him — make an example of him . . . but . . . but . . . would it stem the thoughts of the people? He could suppress the outward expressions but could he stop the unexpressed thoughts which seemed to be so widespread in the minds of the people? A punishment could generate fear but not the conviction of his righteousness. And this, the people’s faith in him, in his righteousness, was the most important element in the king’s relation with the people.

Rama continued to sit in his work-chamber where nobody could come without being called. A fierce storm was raging within him.

How could people even think of such calumny, let alone give expression to it?

Had he not himself, anticipating such base suspicions, let Sita go through *Agnipariksha*¹ in presence of all the people assembled in Lanka itself? He knew Sita and he knew base minds. He wanted to eliminate all the possibilities of such suspicions against her from the beginning. And it could be done only by some supreme, unquestionable test like this. He knew Sita would come out shining and glorious from it. And she did. All the assembled people who had witnessed the incredible miracle, had, awe-struck, fallen flat at her feet. And there was no question of even a hint of suspicion . . . And yet, the evil hidden in the hearts of people had now stirred after so many years and was coming out into the open. Of the people who had witnessed the *Agnipariksha* only Lakshman and Hanuman were present in Ayodhya, apart from himself. It had been so long ago! So many eventful and happy years had rolled by since then! A whole new generation had grown up in Ayodhya to whom it was a mere distant legend!

What was he to do now? If he were an ordinary person it would not matter much. He could easily punish or he could ignore. But he was a king, the first and foremost example of truth and virtue for people to follow. In his case the whole society, and not just himself, had to be satisfied as to his rightness. Justice had not only to be done, but perhaps more important, had to be seen as being done. What would happen if he simply ignored the base insinuation? Would not the general character and the integrity of the people begin to decline? The people followed the ways of the highest in the

1. Test by fire. Even now in some parts of the world including Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry there are some temples where a simpler fire walking ceremony takes place once every year. People from nearby villages who have observed some vows and penance, walk with slow and bare feet over a path laid out with burning charcoals. The path is about 15ft in length and 10ft in width. The people remain unhurt. Anybody interested can witness this phenomenon.

land. And if the highest were thought of so lowly, what pernicious reactions and results would not come about? What degradations would not follow? It was wrong, absolutely wrong of people to cast doubts on Sita's character. He had taken the greatest possible precautions to see that no blame or ill-reputation came to her. And it had succeeded so far. But now the evil hidden in the hearts of people was coming out. . . . Without doubt, it was because the rule of dharma was so strongly established on earth that the evil forces had become desperate and were frantically searching for any and every loophole in the human heart to disrupt it.

This was his second ordeal. The first had come when Sita was abducted. Perhaps nothing else could have so united all his energies to wipe out the Rakshasic empire — an empire based on bare brute force unrestrained by any ethical, moral or human values. And now the second ordeal had come, a subtler enemy lodged in the breast of his own people. What remedy could be employed here?

The evening was passing into night. Food was forgotten. The king continued to ponder in his work-chamber.

It was impossible for him to talk with Sita about this. Not only would it needlessly poison that pure and lovely life but at the slightest suspicion that her beloved lord was facing some problem because of her, she would not hesitate even to give up her life. It was equally impossible for him to talk with any of his brothers. They would be so enraged that it would be difficult to restrain them from meting out a terrible retribution to the dhobi. And if that happened it would only drive underground and multiply the evil. Again he was confronted with the fact that he was a king. He had to raise the standard and quality of the people. He had to establish healthy, concrete precedents, give guidelines, make the people move in the healthy and harmonious upward way of dharma.² He could do so only by setting a high personal example. He could not do so by mere words or by force. Somehow the people had to be

2. The Sanskrit word 'dharma' is difficult to translate. It has come to mean many different things — righteousness, law, religion, duty, morality etc. — in different contexts. However it comes from the root word 'dhr', to uphold. That is, that which sustains, nourishes and guides towards ever higher things until the godhead is attained. Therefore it becomes an intimate personal thing — swadharmā. It may even come in conflict with the established tenets of religion or morality. But in Hindu philosophy it has always held a higher place. Thus it was that though non-violence is considered the highest religious principle, Sri Krishna could enjoin Arjuna to fight and kill because it was his dharma then. Thus it was that when a massive brute force, Vali, was oppressing his friend Sugriva, Sri Rama killed him in the swiftest way though his action may not have been in accordance with the rules of war prevailing then between noble warriors. And again, thus was it that Sri Rama approved of Sugriva and Vibhishana marrying their brothers' widows though it may shock a rigid and narrow-minded religionist or a moralist. Dharma recognises different stages of inner soul development as well as different outer circumstances and enjoins rules appropriate to them. Therefore there can be no absolute rigidity or uniformity therein. At the same time it must be said that it is the most difficult thing to find out one's dharma especially when placed in a critical or a desperate situation. Self-realised sages can know it because they have an inner vision which can see invisible factors. The Avatars have an instinctive sense of dharma. They may give general guidance for general upliftment of people. But in specific cases they may give more specific guidance. In fact, the shastras also give a special rule: "Whatever the Great Ones (that is of course the spiritually Great Ones) say or do is dharma."

convinced and satisfied as to the highest moral virtues and practices of the royal family. His rule was based on the spontaneous love and reverence people felt for him. He could not even think of suppressing them by force.

Of course he could abdicate. And he was tempted to do it. After all the trouble and care he had taken, the ceaseless work he had done for the welfare of people, the good and true careful selecting of people and placing them in proper positions of authority, every sacrifice unhesitatingly made, powerful enemies destroyed so that the rule of dharma and righteousness could prevail, so that people might prosper, might live a happy and fearless life, progress happily in the path of dharma . . . and . . . and . . . this was the reward! Not a single voice was raised for Sita or for him!

Fierce and unbearable pain assailed his human heart. Today it was a dhobi and a small crowd around. Tomorrow it would spread in the whole city and outside. It would come creeping and whispering, in the palace too. How would Sita be able to stand it? No doubt, nobody would dare utter a word to her. But could the thought and the feelings remain undetected for long? Could the atmosphere of harmony, joy and love remain unaffected? From her very birth she had always lived in an atmosphere of love. In her father's palace she had grown up happily as a beautiful and a lovely princess, adored by all. Married to him she was joy incarnate. Even when they had gone to live in the forest she had always been happy. Never once had she raised a single complaint. Surrounded by an atmosphere of love she had never even seemed to lack anything. She was ever smiling, joyous and full of life; physical hardships did not seem to exist for her. If at all she felt sad or sorry it was for the people left behind in Ayodhya, away from her Rama. How would this delicate soul of love live in an atmosphere of doubts and suspicions? Physical hardship she could face without a tremor. But, he knew, the vital and mental atmosphere of suspicions she would not be able to endure.

Of course she could be sent to her father's place. But would not the same worldly atmosphere of suspicion pursue her there too? And it could be only for a short while. Any prolonged stay there would be unseemly and would cause greater comment.

Yes, it would be best if he gave up this so heavy and so shackling role of the king. What would happen then? He remembered the first time he had given up his right to the kingship to honour his father's vow when he was only an heir apparent and his father, the king was alive. People were in a turmoil and had streamed out of the city to follow him wherever he went. And he had to stealthily move away at night to elude them. Sita and Lakshman insisted and went with him to the jungle; Bharat being away and therefore failing to do so, had adopted a meager and ascetic life outside the city during all the 14 years of his exile and his father, the king, had died within days of his departure, longing and pining for him. The joyous family life had turned into a life of intense suffering and sorrow and the whole population, bewildered and discontent, had waited for his return. What would happen now? He

knew that none of his brothers would accept the kingdom and would insist on going away with him. What then? Without a single proper and right person to guide and uphold the people, would not chaos, confusion and conflicts arise, society lapse into anarchy and lawlessness, all the work done for the upliftment of people end in ruin? And Sita, coming to know everything, would she be less unhappy?

The night was coming to an end but there was no respite for Rama. Various thoughts were rushing through his mind, fierce feelings assailed him.

For a while his mind went back to those far-off days when they had lived in the forest, sometimes staying with some rishis. How simple and pure were the lives led by those men! How tranquil and happy the atmosphere there! Intent on God and godliness they were far away from all the worldly cares and thoughts. The whole atmosphere was filled with simplicity, calm and joy. No low or evil thoughts or feelings could stay there . . . and suddenly a thought struck his mind: could not Sita stay in such a place? She would be safe from gossip and evil tongues there. She was pregnant and only a few days back she had talked longingly of those far-off days when they had stayed in the ashram of the rishis in the jungle: the freedom, the simplicity, the joy of nature! Away from all the protocol and ceremony, the heavy and exacting schedule of royal duties, the restricting and stifling formalities, the compulsory pomp, pageantry and show. How she remembered the carefree life of nature, unalloyed freedom among the trees, the plants and flowers, the sparkling streams, the pet birds, animals, godly saints and their pure and high-minded families and disciples. Would not she be happy with them? . . . And people would be satisfied that Rama had observed proprieties, done right. No doubt she would suffer but she would suffer here too. And he thought of Rishi Valmiki, the greatest among the rishis, who had known all the phases of his life. Sita would be quite safe there and well looked after.

There was of course no question that Sita would misunderstand him. Their love was based on the unity of their souls where no mental misunderstanding or vital doubts could reach. She had an absolute faith in him and would understand that whatever he did was right however terrible it might seem to be. He also knew that it would be unfair to Sita and doubly unfair to himself because he would have to bear not only the pain of separation but also the blame for the decision. But he had to view the general welfare of the people and their future generations as against the personal happiness of Sita and himself. He had to fight the invisible evil forces and could not afford to give them any foothold in the minds of the people. And it could be done only by the sacrifice of Sita's and his own happiness.

And how was he to live without Sita by his side? Through thick and thin, in palaces and jungles, they had always lived together. Not only were their souls united but their worldly lives had also grown one. Without her, life's flavour and joy-giving streams would dry up. Lonely, he would have to go on mechanically performing his duties until the rule of dharma was firmly established on earth, his

mission accomplished and he could retire to his divine home. But his mind wavered. Once again he thought over the matter: he should not punish; he could not ignore; he could not abdicate; that is, if he had the welfare of the people at heart rather than the personal happiness of Sita and himself.

Then his gaze turned within, went deeper and deeper, seeking help, guidance, solution, support. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, his consciousness changed status. It rose beyond all vital and mental worlds and entered directly into the divine regions beyond all human thoughts and feelings. Fierce and violent storms of human hearts were left far behind. Waves after waves of calm bliss poured down on the tortured breast. And then a soft divine music gently formed into words:

“O Rama, take this not into thy heart. Remember why you have taken human birth. It is not only to destroy the demons and the demonic rule but also to establish the rule of the dharma, a Dharma-rajya; also, at the same time, providing an ideal which they can understand — an Ideal Man, as a son, as a husband,³ as a brother, a friend, a warrior, a master but above all, as a king. Because on a king depends the welfare of the whole society. Thus only they can rise to higher things. You and Sita have always been one from all Eternity and always so remain. What are these few human years in the bliss of Eternity? Accomplish thy mission fully, O Rama.”

The words ceased and an utter calm prevailed. And an invincible strength entered and settled in his inner depths. Blissful relief flooded every nerve. He bathed and swam and lingered in the oceanic divine bliss.

Slowly his consciousness descended. Slowly it awoke to the human world — again to the strife and struggle, again to the pain and sorrow. Though a decision had been taken, it was no easy thing to carry out in practice. What was he to say to Sita? What to Lakshman and Bharat? No questions and answers were possible. It would be like stabbing a bare and open wound. It was not even possible to see Sita. He feared that his resolve would break if he saw that face but once. And if that happened all the evil forces would gradually come out in full sway, ideals evaporate, his life’s mission would be undone and humanity slide into downward paths.

The morning came and tired and exhausted but with a will of steel he rose from his seat and sent for Lakshman. The cheerful face that had known no sorrow while giving up a kingdom, was wan and pale. The eyes were red and swollen. But an adamant resolve had been stamped on them all. Lakshman came and bowed down to his brother and king. Utterly grim and grave, Rama spoke, keeping his eyes closed, “Please ask no questions if you would see me alive. Take Sita in a

3. While generally always ready to follow the high and holy priestly advice and popular will, there is one instance recorded when Rama disregarded both. It was at the time of the Ashwamedha yajna, the horse sacrifice, which would officially endorse him as the emperor of all known lands. The ceremony connected with the yajna required the presence of a queen and Sita was away in exile. The ministers, priests and prominent citizens advised Rama to marry again. Rama refused. Finally a solution was found whereby a life-like image of Sita, made of gold, was created and placed by his side. And all the ceremonies were completed with this image serving as queen.

chariot and leave her near Valmiki's ashram." Then looking for a moment at Lakshman who looked absolutely stunned, he added: "I can only say that there is not an iota of fault in Sita. Only . . . only . . . our destiny is so decreed." And he turned away from a stupefied Lakshman, staring aghast at him.

SHANTILAL VIRANI

* * *

. . . But most of all, it was his [Rama's] business to typify and establish the things on which the social idea and its stability depend, truth and honour, the sense of Dharma, public spirit and the sense of order. To the first, to truth and honour, much more than to his filial love and obedience to his father — though to that also — he sacrificed his personal rights as the elect of the King and the assembly and fourteen of the best years of his life and went into exile in the forests. To his public spirit and his sense of public order (the great and supreme civic virtue in the eyes of the ancient Indians, Greeks, Romans, for at that time the maintenance of the ordered community, not the separate development and satisfaction of the individual was the pressing need of the human evolution) he sacrificed his own happiness and domestic life and the happiness of Sita. In that he was at one with the moral sense of all the antique races, though at variance with the later romantic individualistic sentimental morality of the modern man who can afford to have that less stern morality just because the ancients sacrificed the individual in order to make the world safe for the spirit of social order. Finally, it was Rama's business to make the world safe for the ideal of the sattwic human being by destroying the sovereignty of Ravana, the Rakshasa menace. All this he did with such a divine afflatus in his personality and action that his figure has been stamped for more than two millenniums on the mind of Indian culture, and what he stood for has dominated the reason and idealising mind of man in all countries, and in spite of the constant revolt of the human vital, is likely to continue to do so until a greater ideal arises. . . .

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 416-17)

VISITS RELIVED

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

(Continued from the issue of May 2012)

OUR next visit was in May 1961. I had written to M. P. Pandit-ji requesting Darshan of the Mother on my birthday on 2nd May. But after reaching Pondy I was told by Pandit-ji that the Mother had said to celebrate my birthday on the 1st May itself, and that she would bless me on the 1st. So I and my elder brother had Darshan of the Mother on the 1st May. On going inside the Mother's room to receive her blessings, I bowed down to her lotus feet, looked into her eyes for some seconds and she blessed me with a bouquet. From that day I changed my official birthday from 2nd May to 1st May. On returning home I went to my family astrologer to prepare a new horoscope of mine dated 1st May 1961, coinciding to the Nakshatra of the time that I was blessed. On learning that the Mother had given me a new birthday to celebrate, he refused to draw my new horoscope as it was a blessing from a great Yogi, the Mother.

She again saw us on 3rd May 1961. We for the first time met Dyuman-ji and requested him to get three gold rings for us, three brothers. We went to the Mother's room and bowed to her. She gave me the gold ring with a ruby, while my elder brother Babuanna had the privilege of getting his ring put on his finger by the Mother herself. I purchased Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Savitri* and some other books by the Mother and by Nolini Kanta Gupta. We had also the special privilege of going to Sri Aurobindo's room. We returned to Hubli after having Balcony Darshan of the Mother the next day at 6.15 a.m. After this visit, I started having dreams wherein the Mother and Sri Aurobindo often appeared and talked with me, which I recorded in my diary. From 1961 onwards we regularly visited Pondichery for the Mother's Darshans on the 21st February and August 15th Darshan days.

We brothers had our next Darshan of the Mother on the 15th August, 1961. We had the Balcony Darshan at 6.15 a.m. and the Mother's Darshan in her room at 10 a.m. When I went to the Mother I was somewhat gloomy, I do not know why, and so was not able to receive any force. However, the Mother's sweet smile put me in very good spirits in the afternoon. I had the opportunity of seeing the Mother again from 3.45 to 5.15 p.m. during the function in the Playground, where we witnessed the Rassemblement, the March Past, and the singing of 'Vande Mataram', and heard the music played by the Ashram Band Orchestra etc. At 7.15 p.m. there was a slide

show about the Ashram and the Mother. I went to the Samadhi at about 10 p.m. and was there up to 10.30, praying and meditating at the Samadhi of the Lord. I was inwardly given a Guru Mantra by the Lord, which, unfortunately, I did not note in my diary. So it has remained unrecorded.

I also attended the meeting of the Sri Aurobindo Society at the residence of Navajat-ji on the 16th. Enlightened talks were given by Navajat-ji, Kireet Joshi, Registrar of the Education Centre, a certain professor from Orissa and the Vice-Chancellor of Patna University. Navajat-ji told me to visit Vasantarao's Matapur Estate near Hubli on our return and to help him in developing it. After dinner, we had a friendly talk with Chandrapradip-ji by the seashore. On the 17th morning we returned home.

During this visit Vasantarao Kulkarni took us to the Lake Estate of the Ashram, where I met Louis Allen, who was in charge of the Estate. We became very close to each other in later years. He wanted to make the Lake Estate greener and more productive by planting coconut palms and fruit-bearing plants and trees. The Mother had given the first cononut 'nut' for planting in the Estate after blessing it. The soil of the Estate was too arid, and Mr. Allen had to put in great efforts in greening the Estate. Some bore wells were sunk but with no great success. He requested me to send some seeds of *Eucalyptus citriodora* and some other seeds for planting in the Estate, which I sent later. Around this time Vasantarao Kulkarni had brought Mr. Allen to show him the Matapur Estate, near Hubli and I took the opportunity of meeting him again, near my native place.

Our next visit to Pondy was for the Mother's Birthday Darshan on February 21, 1962. The message issued on this day was significant. The quotation of Lord Sri Aurobindo said:

Our object is the supramental realisation and we have to do whatever is necessary for that or towards that under the conditions of each stage. At present the necessity is to prepare the physical consciousness; for that a complete equality and peace and a complete dedication free from personal demand or desire in the physical and the lower vital parts is the thing to be established. Other things can come in their proper time. What is the real need now is not insistence on physical nearness, which is one of those other things, but the psychic opening in the physical consciousness and the constant presence and guidance there.

During this visit we purchased a Deluxe Edition of *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo, of which 2100 numbered copies were printed, and each copy was autographed by the Mother. On our copy the Mother wrote "To neginhals with blessings", and the book had as its serial number '1215'.

Around November-December 1962-63, two or three *Eucalyptus citriodora* trees, growing loftily and tall at the entrance to the present Meditation Hall, were

severely damaged by the cyclonic gales. The spirit of these trees, I was told, went to the Mother and requested that they be replanted at their former place. This work was entrusted to Dyuman-ji, one of the trustees and an ardent devotee of the Mother. I do not know how Dyuman-ji thought of me for this planting work. He contacted me in this connection; and I sent him some *E. citriodora* seeds for sowing at the place where the *E. citriodora* trees earlier stood, before their devastation by the cyclonic winds. The seeds germinated, and some three plants started growing well over 15 ft (5 m). When the Eucalyptus trees started growing taller over the years, they were removed, foreseeing similar cyclonic damage in later years.

In a dream on the morning of 15.3.66, Sri Aurobindo visited me and I had the privilege of seeing him, hearing him, and getting some guidance in painting. Many people had gathered in a group and the Lord was there. He guided me in painting. Surprisingly, I had never painted in my life, and have not attempted it so far.

On April 6th 1966, I was saved from a great disaster! That day I was travelling by train with my wife, my daughter Meera, and our one-year-old son, Pankaj. Our train halted at the Nagaragali railway station, waiting for another train to pass by. At this time a deafening loud bang was heard. We wondered what it was! We soon came to know that it was caused by lightning. It had struck a tree standing just opposite us, within about 100 ft (35 m)! The healthy tree was severely damaged and had split in two. But we, including all other travellers and railway staff on the platform, were safe. When the lightning struck I was reading the March 1966 issue of *Mother India*, in which Sri Aurobindo's talks were being serialised. I wrote about this incident to the Mother, saying "Dear Mother, Thy protection is greater than the greatest destructions. Pranams at Thy feet. We pray for Thy protection."

On 23rd March 1966 I had written a letter to the Mother, praying for my 37th birthday Darshan on 1st May 1966, which she graciously granted. I and my brother went to Pondy, and received her blessings. We used to carry small boxes of toffees and chocolates, one for the Mother and the other to be blessed by her for us to take home. These would be for distribution to others. She used to play with us by stretching her hands as if to give us the boxes, and again smilingly she would withdraw the boxes a little, before again giving them back to us.

During December 1967, we prayed to the Mother for her Darshan. M. P. Pandit-ji informed us that the Mother would receive us on the 28th December at 3 p.m. So my elder brother Babuanna and myself dashed to Pondicherry. We were lodged in the Park Guest House. We also brought with us a plan of our house to be constructed at Hubli. We took it to the Drawing Office of the Ashram on the 27th morning through the introduction of Athawale, an ashramite, and got some changes made. On the 28th at 2.30 p.m. we collected flowers from Parichand-ji who looked after the garden section of the Ashram, and who always lovingly obliged us by giving us fresh and beautiful flowers on such occasions. Flowers from the flower section of the Ashram were also collected. We went to Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi and prayed

for receptivity to be able to receive the Mother's blessings. At 2.45 p.m. we went to M. P. Pandit-ji, who took us to the first floor (the Mother's living room was on the second floor). We were made to sit in the hall along with other visitors who had also been given appointments. Six doctors from a medical conference had also come. A devotee in charge was checking and ascertaining our names from the appointment diary. Minutes rolled on. At about 3.30 there were hurried movements of the personal assistants of the Ashram, going up to the Mother and coming down from the second floor. This was in connection with a visit of some Miners from Bihar who had come to see the Mother. They had already been given an appointment for a special Balcony Darshan of the Mother on the 29th at 5 p.m., but they wanted it to be changed to the 28th itself as they were to return the same day by a special train to their native place. The Mother graciously agreed to give them a special Balcony Darshan on the 28th at 5.15 p.m. We were told that it was for the first time she had changed her appointment like this! This was announced at about 3.40 when we were waiting to go up to the Mother.

Our names were called at 3.45 p.m. by Champakalal-ji to go up the staircase leading to the Mother's room. At about 3.50 Vasudha-ben, the Mother's attendant, called us in. As our turn came, we stepped into the Mother's room.

In the room, the Mother was sitting on a wheelchair at her office table, facing to the north-east. We stood before her. A wonderful experience! First my elder brother did his Pranams to the Mother. He gave flowers to the Mother, and bowed before her. The Mother received them and laid her right hand on his head. He then bowed down to the sacred feet of the Mother below the table; and got up and showed her the plan of our house to be constructed at Hubli. The Mother saw the names of our three brothers on the plan through a magnifying glass and remarked, "It is a family." She called for a board, and the attendant brought it. She placed the plan of our house on it, took her pen, and asked us where to sign and write her blessings. She signed on the plan and added her blessings. After this I too bowed before her for Pranams and took her blessings. We came back from her room and went to the Samadhi and sat there for some time, trying to assimilate the Mother's force put into us.

At 5.15 p.m. we again assembled in the street below the Balcony, along with other visitors, and the Miners from Bihar for whom this special Darshan was arranged, and had the Mother's Balcony Darshan. It was interesting to see the Miners standing with their large identification number on brass plates around their necks.

28th February 1968 was the grand inaugural ceremony of Auroville. We were at Pondy for this function. In the morning we went to Auroville. There was a huge assembly of visitors. Representatives from various parts of the world put the soil brought from their countries into a beautiful, aesthetically erected urn.

The next day was the 29th February, the anniversary of the supramental descent. There was meditation around the Samadhi from 10 to 10.30 a.m. In the evening,

from her balcony, the Mother blessed all who had come for the Darshan.

We were at Pondy for the Mother's birthday Darshan on the 21st February 1969, for which we reached Pondy on the 19th and camped at our favourite Park Guest House. On the 21st there was meditation at 10.30 a.m. around the Samadhi, and Darshan of the Mother in the evening at 6 p.m.

In May 1969, we went to Tirupati, had Darshan of Lord Venkateswara, our *kula-devata*, and proceeded to Pondy and were there on the 29th. When we contacted Pandit-ji, requesting permission for the Mother's Darshan, we were told that the Mother was indisposed and could not give personal Darshan.

On the 15th August, we were at Pondy for the Mother's Darshan on the Lord's birthday. As usual we camped at Park Guest House. There was meditation around the Samadhi from 10 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. Mother gave her Balcony Darshan at 5.45 p.m., and she was there upto 5.55 p.m. She was in good health and was always smiling.

On the 4th December, we were at Pondy. We had Darshan of the Lord's room on the 5th December. Again, in the fourth week of February 1971, I camped at Pondy for 3 nights, but couldn't have the Mother's personal Darshan.

I had requested permission for special Darshan of the Mother in 1971. I received a letter from Pandit-ji that the Mother would see us on 2nd May 1971 and the other members of my family on the 4th. We went to Pondy for Darshan of the Mother. I went up to the Mother, bowed down before the Mother, offering Pranams, looked into her eyes till she smilingly indicated that it was over. As usual Chamapakalal-ji was there by her side. He handed the birthday greeting card to the Mother who gave me a beautiful handmade paper envelope with the birthday blessing card inside. The beautiful front page had the painting of a single white lotus and below it, in Sri Aurobindo's handwriting, "Aditi, The Divine Mother." Inside was a painting of a red lotus and below it, in the Mother's handwriting, "The avatar, Sri Aurobindo." Inside, she had written my name, the date, "Bonne Fête" and added her Blessings and her signature.

What a birthday blessing I got! My future soon flowered into a number of new avenues, offering specialisation in wildlife, environment, and urban forestry during the years to come.

(To be continued)

S. G. NEGINHAL

“CHAUDVIN KA CHAND”

(Remembering a Night-Out with Mridul and Milan at Mani-bhai’s Le Faucheur)

MRIDUL, a natural singer, had a flair for popular and semi-classical songs — Bengali, Urdu and Hindi — sung in a clear baritone voice.

His potential showed even in his late teens in the course of birthday parties where his songs graced the occasions.

“My teachers,” he said, “are Mohammad Rafi and Hemonto Mukherji” although he had never met them nor attended any of their recitals. Even so, by listening to their songs on music players he became interested in music. Later on, emulating them, he moved on, giving extempore recitals to his young companions without any accompaniments either of tabla, harmonium or tanpura. The pulsating vibrancy of his voice had magic elements of its own. It made his live concerts more interesting than many of those heard on cassette or CD players.

An easy-going chap, he and his comrades had a special liking for Nature. During their outings his songs brought about a measure of moderation to the group’s general mood.

Milan and I listened to him sing on one occasion during a night-out. The experience was over-powering. . . .

Mridul, I believe, had the potential to rise to high levels among amateur singers or even professionals. For that matter, if he had worked to expand his artistic capabilities, if he had cared to develop his musical gift with greater discipline, a quality not apparent among his other attributes, one can only imagine what he might have done and become. He might even possibly have found a place among the best Hindi Pop singers of his time. That is what I feel.

At the least he could and would have given joy to more people by singing for many years on various occasions. That wish remains only a wish now.

On the 26th of April 2011 he passed away. His last words to his sister Protima are meaningful: “It’s time for me to go to the Mother,” he said before falling into a coma at 2.00 p.m. A few minutes later he passed away quietly. With him a promising voice also faded away.

This notwithstanding, his music lives on. It lives in the minds of his former companions for whom he sang in the open air, amid trees, in the plains, near the ravines, beside the sea located in and around Le Faucheur, the Lake Estate and Auroville, as well as in other spots and natural surroundings. Mother Nature was his inspiration and the object of his adoration.

* * *

Thirty years ago, in one of the most beautiful sites of the Ashram of the time, we got a glimpse of the singer and his heart-song, “Chaudvin Ka Chand Ho” sung on a full-moon night at Le Faucheur Estate (we called it Mani-bhai’s garden, the correct designation would be ‘Le Faucheur-3’ or “Vamba”) situated in Ariyankuppam, six kilometres to the south of the town centre, Pondicherry.

The Search

The search for joy in our routine work and movements of life can be fruitful in a large or small way. Being a personal experience, it is as we see and feel about it.

On rare occasions, we can all experience exceptional moments. Even the thought of these instances may remain with us all through our lives as a source of contentment — sometimes an inspiration. Are they designed by our stars? By someone at all? Who controls the cosmic events? How do they all happen to perfection?

The Ride

It was late evening in June 1980. Mridul, Milan and I mounted our bicycles to go to Mani-bhai’s garden in the Le Faucheur Estate.

To the East, on the Pandy-Cuddalore highway, the moon shone brightly, lighting up the outskirts of the city in a silhouette — turning it into a grand ‘tableau vivant’ — with trees, huts and people. It had risen a few hours earlier and now lay well above the horizon but had a long way to go before fading away gradually at day-break. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it!” exclaimed Milan as we pedalled along, quietly enjoying the ride. “Our night has only begun. There should be more to come,” rejoined Mridul.

During this time, we wished to observe the moon’s passage across the sky and see the way its rays drew and re-drew the shades of the scenery around Mani-bhai’s estate and its surrounding areas where a green cover of plantations lay: coconut trees, banana trees, mango trees, casuarinas and paddy fields, girdled on three sides by a stretch of backwater. Here small fishes, eels, prawns and jelly-fish thrived. The place at sunrise, sunset and on full-moon nights was truly charming.

Twenty minutes later, we left the highway to take a dusty road passing through the countryside, ploughing our way through the loose soil as we moved slowly. Suddenly a snake (two feet in length) slithered past right in front of me; in a flash it then disappeared into the thick bush — a grim reminder of the kind of creatures living in this place and the need to be vigilant at all times.

“The creature came close,” I said, getting down from my cycle, ruffled. “It panicked more than you,” remarked Milan. “It’s gone now. So let’s move on.”

In ten minutes we reached the barren ground adjacent to Mani-bhai’s place on which stood a crematorium and a few tombs. Here the Hindus of the locality brought

their deceased for the last rites and after incineration, consigned their remains to the backwater’s care. As we walked through the place under the moon’s light, a still and eerie atmosphere pervaded the spot that night.

“It’s dead silent here,” remarked Mridul after looking around a moment. “Nothing to fear though. Bama Khepa used to meditate in cremation grounds. He felt Mother Kali’s presence in the place,” continued Mridul with a laugh. “Why don’t we also try to meditate in this place . . .?” I said jokingly. “Why not? If you have the faith and the courage,” replied Mridul half-jokingly as we entered Mani-bhai’s garden. “Are you a disciple of Bama Khepa Mridul?” I asked playfully. “I am the Mother’s son,” was Mridul’s reply. “And I meditate in the Ashram — on its pavements also at times. Where else can one find that atmosphere?” said Mridul solemnly.

Mani-bhai’s garden, Le Faucheur, “Vamba”

Before going up to the terrace of the farmhouse to watch the moon, we decided to walk along the borders of the estate, familiar to us since our boyhood as a playground. Fond memories of those times began to re-appear in my mind as we walked along leisurely on the sandy pathway — bordered by tall trees on both sides.

As a teenager and adult, I had spent many hours here alone or with companions. We roamed within the casuarina grove, plucked “*kalojām*” from a tall tree with branches spread out and laden during the season with juicy fruit and also whiled away weekend afternoons, gazing at the ripples of the silver backwater surrounding the estate on three sides as we breathed the pure air of the countryside. . . .

On its banks, kingfishers and egrets lurked, waiting for the right moment to catch a small fish. The kingfishers sometimes hovered over a spot for a while, beating rapidly their colourful wings before plunging into the water for the catch. The egrets glided smoothly close to the water for long distances, surveying the spots for prey before coming down to the surface to pick them. On land, field workers cleared water channels, loosened the soil with spades before the irrigation and sometimes plucked coconuts: a lively farmland scene unfolded here on week days.

In the past, seated inside the shady casuarina grove, Milan and I had spent long hours chit-chatting on music and Nature as time flowed on like the ripples over the estuary that lay only a few feet away from us towards the East. “The ripples move so smoothly, don’t they?” remarked Milan during one of our talks, absorbed by the water lapping continuously the shoreline with a soothing warbling note. Mani-bhai’s garden exuded tranquillity and induced peace of mind.

Parking our cycles by the farmhouse, we walked along the estate’s western border to make a clockwise round trip of the oval-shaped area of 15 or 20 acres. A cool breeze blew on us off and on. On both sides, crickets chirped in chorus with

shrill, rhythmic cries, alternately calling and listening to their mates, it seemed. “What can they be saying to one another so passionately?” I remarked. “They are just happy to be, so they sing,” replied Mridul. “Yes, why not?” I said.

Water?

During the walk, at one point, I approached the site where, in the early 60’s, was located an artesian well. Its pristine water rising constantly out of the earth had quenched our thirst on many occasions after long walks or a feast of “*kalojām*”. Now, twenty years later, it lay dried up and sealed with soil. A clear testimony to the depleting reserves of groundwater. Now we would have to look for drinking water elsewhere.

Along the border of the estate and on the lane leading to the farmhouse stood a number of coconut trees. Fronds spread out, clusters of coconuts clinging below their crowns, they were a tempting sight. Feeling thirsty and finding no water nearby, I said, “There is no shortage of coconuts here, as you can see. Can any of you climb trees?” “Leave that to me,” Mridul assured us. Soon, with our help, Mridul brought down six coconuts (on the sly) for us to eat and drink shortly during the night . . . “Mani-bhai! Very Very Sorry! We were very thirsty. Please forgive our naughty act.” Yes! Mani-bhai was a man to be reckoned with. His mark — as a righteous man — over the estate remains indelible even after his demise. He may never have taken a single coconut for himself. Occasionally though, he permitted young people of the Ashram to help themselves when they came for work at the estate to join the night-watch prior to paddy harvest.

Walking into the casuarina grove a few minutes later, we saw the trees swaying in the breeze, accompanied by a long musical whistling note. It rose and fell in pitch in accordance with the wind’s speed. As we walked along, deep inside the grove, a sequence of music with movements played itself out around us. The tall, lissome trees of equal height performed with the wind a natural dance in complete abandon under the moon’s beams. This was a proper setting for “Swan Lake” choreographed in ballet, I fancied. Here Odile, the heroine of the fairy tale, could have danced until dawn with her prince in an enchanting fairyland surrounding before having to retire into the lake as a swan.

After an hour’s walk on the borders of casuarinas and the paddy fields during which time the sea gently roared nearby, we went up on the open terrace of the farmhouse.

A panoramic view of the landscape, made up of the estuary hemmed by plantations steeped in moonlight lay before us on all sides. “Stunning!” exclaimed Milan. “Absolutely,” I rejoined as we looked on the scene for a while, “however, let’s drink coconut water first and then we can look around again.” “Yes!” agreed Mridul, “I am thirsty too.” Milan simply chuckled, amused. Knocking the coconuts

against the protruding pillars of the farmhouse, we peeled off the husk, cracked the shell and then drank the water — two coconuts each. It was refreshing indeed. After that, we lay down again to gaze at the sky, feeling more at ease now to draw in till dawn the tranquil ambience of the place. “We have come here many times before, but never on a full-moon night. This is mind-blowing,” remarked Milan. His feelings for Nature were pronounced. He may have grown to become a poet — eventually, but alas! . . . he too is no more.

Mani-bhai, the “Night Watchman”

Thirteen years ago at the very spot where we lay comfortably on the spacious terrace, content to look at the sky, stood a shack, a 4m x 3m x 2.5m dwelling. It had only basic amenities even by labour-class standards. However, the occupant who was a remarkable man did not seem to mind his modest accommodation. “Nothing can happen without the Mother’s permission,” he once told Batti-da, “not even a leaf can fall off its branch.” This watchman was Mani-bhai, who chose to live like a “fakir” and to guard the land with his six dogs. A fakir of rare courage, devotion and dedication to the Mother’s work: keeping night watch in a desolate, snake-infested estate, adjacent to a cremation ground, for six years until his demise.

Maybe, his spirit still roams the place to keep away miscreants, I dare say, excepting ourselves (I hope) and protect its fruits for the Dining Room and the idyllic beauty of the place for posterity.

“Chaudvin Ka Chand Ho” a poem by Sahir Ludhianvi

“Mridul, sing us a song,” said Milan, as we contemplated drowsily the scenery for a while, lying on the terrace floor. “I know you sing well,” continued Milan with a teasing smile. Mridul opened his eyes, and after a pause replied, “You want me to sing?” and then continued to look at the bright sky. What thoughts, what dreams played in his mind then? . . . There was a long pause. Then, rising slowly to a sitting position, legs crossed, he cleared his throat and said, “Well, I will sing you a ‘ghazal’, a sufi love song. Now look at the moon for some time! See the way it shines on us. How wonderful it is! She is the most beautiful of all!” The moon lay close to the zenith. A flood of light fell on the earth at this time, illumining Mridul, the surrounding fields and reflecting on the dancing waves of the backwater which shone like a stream of molten gold and silver on the fringes of the estate. The scene, dotted with coconut trees on the borders, their fronds swaying gently in the breeze with a pleasing rustling music was a dream décor set by Mother Nature. It was past midnight. Soon the first strains of the song sounded in a hum under the clear sky on that full-moon night.

“Chaudvin Ka Chand Ho”
(You are the Moon on the Fourteenth Night)

You are the moon on the fourteenth night
 Or like the sun are you.
 Whatever you be in the name of the Lord,
 You are incomparable.
 Your face is like the lotus smiling on the lake
 Or as a melody played on an instrument.
 The locks on your shoulders
 Are like leaning clouds from the sky.
 Purity plays on your lips like lightning.
 You are the springtime of life.
 From the domain of beauty and love
 You are the only answer.
 Your eyes, your love are like cup-full of intoxicating wine.
 I am drunk, my beloved. You are the poets’ dream . . .
 Even the seventh heaven bowing down would worship you.

At the beginning, it seemed Mridul led us into an exquisite realm of romantic poetry. Milan lay motionless on the terrace floor, perhaps lulled into sleep by the song. Mridul, sitting legs crossed, eyes closed, head raised towards the moon, poured out his soul abroad . . .

Going within himself Mridul sang a melody fine-tuned by years of joy in singing. It rose from the depths of his being and the fields of his bitter and sweet memories. His voice rang with feeling and poignancy, confirming he was living out a profound personal experience in the words of Ludhianvi. “Good Lord! Who could be the woman in the poet’s mind when he wrote the poem, deifying her beauty?” I thought.

Was that “Lady” human or was she something more than a human form, before whom even heaven bowed down? Dizzy in the midst of the scene I wondered, carried away: was it that “Lady” swaying so gracefully in the form of casuarina trees in the grove? and is “She” now dancing as the sparkling waves of the backwater and also shining as the brilliant moon? Is she Mother Nature who in her numerous forms adorns the world and the universe and sometimes in the midst of men also assumes a human form? It is only before her, the queen of the universe that heaven would bow down . . .

That night, around Mridul, Nature’s elements too joined together harmoniously; trees, fields, backwater and the stars, driven by an omniscient, omnipotent force to make the night a spectacle for the Gods. Mridul, the star performer chosen by Mother Nature supported by her multifarious forms, sang her glory, casting a spell in the

atmosphere — and what a spell!

Time, place, scene, melody and meaning had all blended together spontaneously to create an ethereal scenario. Ludhianvi's 'ghazal' sung with uncommon devotion and sublime adoration sounded like the chanting of a Mantra — like a prayer invoking the supreme being symbolised by the sun. Purity of melody and tone had transmuted a sentimental love-song into a hymn to Mother Nature of overwhelming appeal. For a moment I was puzzled: “Am I dreaming or awake? This show seems too beautiful to be true.”

The air charged with music, the sky with light, Mother Creatrix seemed to be everywhere now. Her many forms filled all with awe and the creation meanwhile broke into a dance of joy at the touch of her radiance, at the sight of her splendour.

A ‘stupendous silence’ reigned all over the surroundings, dispelling completely the eerie atmosphere of the cremation ground — situated a few metres only from the farmhouse.

During all this time, the moon poured down her beams in a continuous flow. A “sea of light” lay in front of us as we gazed upon it quietly until daybreak when the events of the night came to an end finally.

Bowled over, I wondered, looking on at the scene for some time — mute.

“Who is the creator of this show?”

“Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?”

“Is He Brahma or Vishnu?”

“Is she Lakshmi or Bhavani?”

“Oh Lord! Whatever be thy name or thy form

We bow down before Thee.

Thy creation and Thou art the most beautiful of all

The most compassionate.”

[With all my respects to Mani-bhai (Manibhai Patel: ?-1967) and many thanks to my comrades Mridul (Mridul Das: 1954-2011 and Milan (Milan Ghosh: 1952-2010) for the night's treat.]

KANU DE

THE LUMINOUS PAST

(Continued from the issue of May 2012)

Now let me tell you the story of how I became a teacher. School was over for me. We had holidays for a month and half. We were busy with games and picnics. Of course, there was work at the Laundry — morning and afternoon. One afternoon, at the Dining Room after work, as I was eating, I met one of my old teachers. From him I received a piece of good news: I had been chosen to teach French to a class of little children. It seems Pavitra-da had asked why the students of the school didn't teach by taking classes at night. I said that I would be happy to teach. The next day Pavitra-da sent for me. I went to see him. He wanted to know whether I was happy with the new work given to me. I said, "I am very happy." He then said, "The Mother wants to know why you are happy."

I replied, "Because by teaching, I will be able to learn French better."

Pavitra-da said, "This is exactly as the Mother wished. She said that if you are going to teach in order to learn then it will be beneficial for both you and your pupils. In any case, in this matter you have been given full marks. The Mother has said that now you should choose twelve pieces from her *Prayers and Meditations* which would be suitable for children. You have to copy these out in a notebook and send it to us. I will return the notebook to you after the Mother has seen it. You have to send it within seven days. Can you do it?"

I said, "I can, Pavitra-da."

Five days later I gave the notebook to Pavitra-da. The Mother saw it and returned it three days later. On the cover, on a thick piece of paper, were written the words, "Seen by the Mother". I opened the notebook and saw that the Mother had written "Bien" (Good).

Now it was time for me to get ready to teach. Pavitra-da encouraged me. He also told me if I could persevere and show good work, he would make arrangements for me to learn French at a higher level. It was his wish to see me understand French better and to make it my own language.

* * *

My class started on 16th December. It was a new experience. I was given a mixed group of children — young and old. Two of the children had already been learning French before coming to my class. All the others were beginners. The two older children were extremely careless. They did not care to follow any rules. They were not interested in their studies. I was a new teacher and the class was for intensive

learning. So I had to be careful and observe the behaviour of the children. The Mother did not approve of people complaining. The two older pupils went and complained to Pavitra-da. Their complaint was this: The new children and the old ones were being taught with the same methods. Pavitra-da did not say anything to me. One day, just before the Mother's translation class, he quietly came and asked me how my class was going. I replied, "The two older children have not learnt anything. They are not even able to keep up with the new children. Even now they are incapable of taking down a short dictation. The new children come to the class having prepared their dictation at home. In fact, the older ones are not really interested in learning." As soon as the Mother came in we stopped talking.

But later, Pavitra-da went and fetched the two children's previous teacher and came with him to me. He told the other teacher, "By blocking children in the experimental classes for two or three years you are not helping them in any way. The children who were promoted from your class to the next one say that they can't understand anything. You wanted to make light of the matter by putting the blame on the teachers. You said that all these teachers are against classes where we are experimenting with different ways of teaching. The one who has been given the two students this year doesn't even know from which class they have come, and this new teacher too has the same complaint. The two boys don't know anything. Now I have a plan to stop that experimental class and to make it follow an ordinary method."

Pavitra-da left having said this. I understood very well that I had to face a very difficult test.

(To be continued)

PRAMILA DEVI

(Translated by Sunayana Panda from the original Bengali, *Ujwal Ateet*)

*Our life's repose is in the Infinite;
It cannot end, its end is Life supreme.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 197)

BOOK REVIEW

(*Shri Suresh Chandra Rachanasangraha*. Editor and Publisher: Dipak Gupta, Kolkata.
Price: Vol. I: Rs. 140, Vol. II: Rs. 150, Vol. III: Rs. 170 and Vol. IV: Rs. 170.)

It was on 31 March 1910 that a young man of eighteen arrived at Pondicherry armed with thirty rupees and a letter of introduction penned by Sri Aurobindo. His mission was to arrange for the accommodation of Sri Aurobindo — who after receiving a divine command — had decided to shift to Pondicherry which was destined to become the seat of his sadhana. And accordingly, he had deputed this young man named Suresh Chandra Chakraborty *alias* Moni, the younger brother of Prafulla Chandra Chakraborty, the first martyr of the revolutionary movement in Bengal. Four days after Suresh Chandra arrived, Sri Aurobindo landed on the soil of Pondicherry and for the next forty years Suresh Chandra lived under the wings of Sri Aurobindo's affection. From Sri Aurobindo — whom he accepted as the polestar of his life — Suresh Chandra received immeasurable love, indulgence and inspiration to create. In 1926, when the Mother took charge of the newly formed Ashram after Sri Aurobindo's retirement into complete seclusion, every inmate had to take up some sort of physical work as a part of his or her sadhana; however, some sadhaks were exempted from this rule and Suresh Chandra was one of them. Suresh Chandra's life revolved around his Guru and it was because of Sri Aurobindo's personal attraction that he spent four decades of his life at Pondicherry. But following the physical withdrawal of Sri Aurobindo in December 1950, Suresh Chandra not only lost all interest in life but also the very will to live. Within four months of Sri Aurobindo's departure, Suresh Chandra left his body in sleep on 28 April 1951; thus he followed Sri Aurobindo not only in life but in death as well.

An ideal follower is not Suresh Chandra's only identity. He was a litterateur of the first rank who had explored successfully the various branches of Bengali literature. His works earned him the praise of stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore and Pramatha Chowdhury *alias* Birbal of *Sabuj Patra* fame; noted magazines also showered praise on his literary creations but unfortunately the present generation of readers has almost forgotten him. We too do not usually recall his contribution in the field of Bengali literature. But fortunately for us, Mr. Dipak Gupta has published all the works of Suresh Chandra in four volumes titled *Shri Suresh Chandra Rachanasangraha* and thus reintroduced him to us, and for this noble work he deserves to be congratulated.

The four volumes of Suresh Chandra's collected works comprise fifteen books of which four are anthologies of poetry namely *Sri Aurobindo*, *Sandhyaloke*, *Saki* and *Indradhanu*. A salient feature of Suresh Chandra's poetry is romanticism. In

most of his poetic creations we find the reflection of his romantic heart. His love, however, is not restricted to a particular object or person; being a lover of life and a worshipper of beauty, he has sought the image of love in all beautiful things, including the beautiful creations of Nature. Hence we find him confessing candidly in his poetry: “Evening is my lady-love, I am its beau” or “This evening, this tranquil evening, is sweetness incarnate/ How much I love it . . .”¹ Along with the element of romanticism, Suresh Chandra’s poetry is characterised by the presence of realisation and truth-vision. On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo’s seventieth birthday, he had penned and published a long narrative poem titled *Sri Aurobindo* in which he wrote about Sri Aurobindo’s life. In this poem, we find that Suresh Chandra has predicted that the overall development of India would not be possible without the light of knowledge provided by Sri Aurobindo. In this same poem we also find his analysis as to why Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to the world is indispensable and he predicts that a day would come when the entire world would look up to Sri Aurobindo.

If a comparison is made between Suresh Chandra, the poet and Suresh Chandra, the prose-writer, then the latter would undoubtedly emerge victorious. One marvels at the many experiments Suresh Chandra had conducted with the Bengali language. Just as a singer plays with the seven notes of music, Suresh Chandra has played with the Bengali language. He has not used prose as a means to express mere narrative descriptions; on the contrary, he has so uplifted it that at times his prose becomes beautiful poetry. Though he was born in the bygone century, there is no trace of antiqueness either in his style of writing or in his expressions. His books *Indrajalik*, *Sagarika* and *Notun Roopkatha O Ekti Rupak Golpo* are living testaments of his modern mind and thoughts.

Another striking feature of Suresh Chandra’s prose-work is his unique sense of humour. Considering the pivotal role humour plays in our life Sri Aurobindo had termed it as the salt of existence. And Suresh Chandra happens to be an ideal follower of his humorous Guru. The use of puns even in a most ordinary sentence leaves the reader wonderstruck. It won’t be an exaggeration if Suresh Chandra is hailed as a creator of spontaneous laughter and a magician of prose. While narrating a very serious event, he does not fail to add a tinge of humour to it and thus the description attains greater charm.

The second volume of Suresh Chandra’s collected works consists of his most well-known book *Smritikatha*. The articles included in this book were written and published in the mid 1940s in reputed Bengali journals like *Probasi* and *Golpo-bharati* when distorted facts about Sri Aurobindo’s journey from Calcutta to Chandernagore and then to Pondicherry were being published. Suresh Chandra was witness to this notable period of Sri Aurobindo’s life and therefore with Sri Aurobindo’s approval he took up his pen not only to refute those distorted facts but

1. Translation by the reviewer.

also to reveal the unadulterated truth. This book not only provides the details of Sri Aurobindo's voyage but also details of his early years in Pondicherry. It also includes two well-written articles on Prafulla Chandra Chakraborty and Prafulla Chaki, who were both notable revolutionaries of the *agni-yuga*.

Some people think. And there are some who make others think. Suresh Chandra belonged to that rare class of people who not only thought but also made others think. He did not merely keep himself self-lost in the ocean of special thoughts and realisations but also expressed them in the best possible way and thus generated the light of truth. His articles published in anthologies titled *Nabayuger Katha*, *Urochithi*, *Sundarer Simana*, *Nabo Kamalakanto* and *Pakistani Panchkatha* have not lost their relevance despite being written more than seventy years ago. In *Sundarer Simana*, he has argued with Dilip Kumar Roy regarding the latter's concept of the horizons and limitations of art. This exchange between two literary giants is not a mere duel of words; it is actually a presentation of two view-points the results of which are meant to be beneficial for the reader. In the book *Pakistani Panchkatha* we find Suresh Chandra's insights on the then prevailing political condition of the nation as well his analysis of politics. He has condemned the idea of the creation of Pakistan and evaluated the consequence of the Partition in this book. It is worth noting that the articles included in this anthology saw the light of day half a decade before the Partition of India actually took place.

The collected works of Suresh Chandra would enable the reader to think anew and open their eyes to the light of Knowledge and Truth. Every reader is invited to take a sip of the nectar hidden in the pages of these volumes.

ANURAG BANERJEE

*Immortal pleasure cleansed him in its waves
And turned his strength into undying power.
Immortality captured Time and carried Life.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 237)

THE KRISHNA WORLD

(Continued from the issue of May 2012)

10. A Bouquet of Games

WE do not usually speak of Krishna's life as a matter for documentation. We tell the stories to children, engage with his life in discourses and go to sleep hugging the thought of the blue-sheened boy, after assuring ourselves that come what may, we will ever be his companions:

We will tell the whole world of His ways and His cunning:
He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;
He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,
Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.

All music is only the sound of His laughter,
All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.¹

Come morning we wake up to find that there are documents abounding regarding the life of Krishna. Is there any inch of space in the Indian consciousness that is totally devoid of the Krishna presence? We are told Adi Sankara was an Advaitin who spoke of the Brahman as the only Truth and indeed considered the entire manifestation of Prakriti as but an illusion. But even for him, his childhood bonding with the Krishna temple in Kalady where he was born remained a constant experience all his life and he has written heart-warming verses on Krishna in his work *Prabodha Sudhakara* which is actually moulded to teach philosophy.

As he describes Krishna's beauty and ability to put down the forces of evil, Krishna becomes a guardian-mother to him. Well, it is for this mother to destroy the evils that plague her child!

O Mother, bearing the name Krishna! Having consigned me, produced from the source which is Ignorance, to the hand of Maya, the illusive Power, for the work of maintaining (me), you have fallen into the state of indifference for a long time. Supreme Abode of Compassion! You do not look at my face even

1. Sri Aurobindo, 'Who', *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 202.

once. Then, All-knowing One! Are you indeed unable to bring about the removal of the root-cause (of birth, which is Ignorance)?²

In all this Krishna literature, whether they show Krishna as a child, a young boy, a grown up youth or a seasoned statesman, the authors refer to all his doings as 'play'. Indeed, we stand before some of the scenes in wonder. Then we refer to Krishna's *līla* (play) and all at once is said. The divine had put on a man's form out of playfulness and Krishna is but *līlā mānuṣa vighraha!*

Even setting aside his superhuman feats of 'play', Krishna is seen often as a normal child in our homes. Till the end-note comes by felling the Arjuna trees or smashing the cart, he looks and acts as a child. He has friends, he plays, he irritates his mother, he gets punished, he gets out of difficult situations with electric ease. In his time, Krishna, the Yadava boy seems to have had plentiful time to spend for happy games. No punishing class-schedules, nor crushing homework! Bliss was it in that Dwapara Yuga to be alive as a Yadava boy! John Stratton Hawley says:

Since cowherding is not such a demanding occupation, he joins them in whatever games come to mind, and he is forever playing the rustic flute. All this is left to the worshippers' imagination, so as to heighten their sense of welcoming him when he comes back from the forest.³

There are innumerable games played by Krishna that have been re-enacted during the past and continue to draw crowds even in the present. Always, it is Krishna in Brindavan who comes back annually during our Janmashtami celebrations. Getting engaged in the literature on hand for such games, the simple and guileless game of *Hariṇākriḍanam* in the *Sri Vishnu Purana* readily comes to mind.

One day Balarama and Krishna went towards a banyan tree known as Bhandeera. The incident is related by the great Sage Parashara to Rishi Maitreya. However, Parashara exults in drawing a very realistic portrait of the brothers as cowherd boys. Balarama and Krishna had thrown round their necks the rope used for binding the hindlegs of the cows when milking them. Now the cows were free to graze and the ropes were in the care of their masters. Along with the rope dangled garlands of wild flowers. Walking with the gait of young bulls, they roared now and then like lions. Often they sought out trees with plenty of strong branches which they could climb and call out to the calves that were straying at a distance. Apparently their mothers had a flair for colour, for the fair Balarama was dressed in black silk, while the dark Krishna sported a golden garment.

2. Verse 244. Translated by Samvid.

3. John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (1992), p. 8.

Led by the two, the cowherd boys went around in pairs holding hands, and enjoyed themselves climbing trees, making swings of aerial roots and going up and down. And what fun they had twirling stones and sticks! At last they decided to play the game of *Hariṇākrīḍanam*. This deer-play involved jumping like a deer. The boys should go in twos, moving fast like gazelles and reach the huge banyan tree Bhandeera which was a little distance away. Of the pair the boy who lost had to carry the victor on his shoulder for a longish distance again upto the Bhandeera tree. When the pairs were formed Sridama and Krishna were together. With Balarama was a new cowherd boy who had joined them on that day. None of them knew that a demon called Pralamba had managed to sneak in as a guileless cowherd boy. The game was in full progress. Krishna was the winner over Sridama; Balarama defeated Pralamba. Sridama carried Krishna upto the banyan tree Bhandeera and returned. It was now the turn of the fake cowherd to carry Balarama. He hitched up Balarama on his shoulders and started for the tree. Some other losers also carried the winners in this manner towards the tree.

Just as the boys were proceeding with their game with some of them even completing their return journey, Pralamba suddenly went up into the sky with Balarama. He had now shed his disguise and looked his real self. The huge, dark figure was quite a contrast to the fair and handsome Balarama. Indeed Krishna's brother looked like the full moon on a dark cloud. Sensing the danger he was in, Balarama made himself heavy. The demon found it difficult going but somehow he was going forward and away from the boys.

Things looked pretty nasty. Balarama shouted in distress to Krishna: "Krishna! he is carrying me away. We have been really taken for a ride by this newcomer to our group. He is a full-fledged rakshasa. How shall I free myself?"

Thus does Dame Maya cloud the minds of even incarnations. How else can we explain the manner in which Rama discarded Sita on the battlefield of Lanka?

The significance of avatarhood is that they go ahead with the work on hand all alone. Rama has to fight Ravana himself; Arjuna cannot kill Karna by proxy. We have heard Rishi Narad speaking of this Secret to King Aswapati and Queen Malawi.

As a star, unaccompanied, moves in heaven
Unastonished by the immensities of Space,
Travelling infinity by its own light,
The great are strongest when they stand alone.
A God-given might of being is their force,
A ray from self's solitude of light the guide;
The soul that can live alone with itself meets God;
Its lonely universe is their rendezvous.⁴

4. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 460-61.

Krishna who knew Balarama's strength and heroic nature smiled and began to describe his brother's true nature for he must prove that he by himself could overcome any evil force that opposed the good and the innocent on the earth. Krishna addressed Balarama: "Brother! You are Universal, Subtlest of the Subtle. Even during the deluge you remain indestructible in your subtle form. Why are you then acting as though you are a helpless human being? Think of your nature which is the Original Cause. Have you forgotten that we have incarnated to lessen the burden on earth? The sky is your crown, the clouds form your tresses, the earth is your feet, your face is Agni, your mind is Chandra, your breath is Vayu and the four directions are indeed your four shoulders."

Having thus reminded Balarama of the task for which he had incarnated, Krishna asked him to kill Pralamba. But he should do it in the guise of a boy, not in his real, supra-normal form. This is a familiar scene in our ancient works. In the *Ramayana*, when the monkeys had learnt though Sampati that Sita had been abducted to a city across the seven seas, it becomes clear that Hanuman alone could cross the seas and return triumphantly. Hanuman himself is skeptical and says he is a powerless creature. Then Jambavan reminds him of his true nature born to win. Immediately self-confidence floods into Hanuman and he fulfils the arduous task. It is a truism that in a critical juncture we do tend to forget our powers which lie dormant in ourselves. We gain enthusiasm to act when others remind us of it.

After being reminded thus of his true nature, Balarama realised his own strength. He smashed the head of Pralambasura with a smile. Done in a trice! The cowherd boys were jubilant and raised shouts of victory. Accompanied by Krishna, Balarama returned to Gokula. Narayana Bhattatiri (16th century) in his Sanskrit version of the *Bhagavata* makes a subtle change. Sridama, a dear friend of Krishna is the winner when the two take part in a game. Without a second's thought for his own incarnational status, Krishna carried Sridama because the Lord is the servitor of his devotees, a *bhakta-dāsa*!

Since Krishna is associated so much with games and pranks, the poet who wrote the *Bhagavata* in Tamil, Arualaladasa (17th century) relates two sports in Brindavan. One day Balarama and Krishna were playing in the forests along with their friends. All of them were given parts. Krishna would be the king, Balarama the minister and Sridama was to be the commander-in-chief. The rest of the cowherds were divided into soldiers and thieves. It was very dramatic. The soldiers went hither and thither rounding up the thieves and there was great laughter when shouts arose: "Catch the thieves who are trying to run away! Bind their hands! Cut off their legs! Punch them! Cut off their heads!"

The group that was acting as sheep stealers folded their hands and began to pray for mercy. "We were awfully hungry and so stole a kid to have a meal. We will give you a portion of it too. Do not punish us!"

Then they acted as if they were going to give the slip to the soldiers. Then they

returned with the same speed, laughing uproariously. It was then agreed that they give two sheep to the king and one hundred sheep to the minister who spoke in favour of the thieves. Just as they were playing thus, impervious to what was happening around them, an asura called Vyomana dragged them away into a cave and shut them up with a huge stone at the entrance. Krishna who was outside caught hold of him. Vyomana rose to the sky, carrying Krishna with him. Krishna punched his chest and killed him. As Vyomana fell to earth, Krishna also came down and released the boys and the sheep with them.

Giving the gist of this play of the Lord as it is found in the *Bhagavata*, Srila Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada writes:

They were imitating the play of thieves and police. Some of the boys became police constables, and some became thieves, and some took the role of lambs. While they were thus enjoying their childhood pastimes, a demon known by the name of Vyomasura, ‘the demon who flies in the sky’, appeared on the scene. He was the son of another great demon named Maya. These demons can perform wonderful magic. Vyomasura took the part of a cowherd boy playing as thief and stole many boys who were playing the parts of lambs. One after another he took away almost all the boys and put them in the caves of the mountain and sealed the mouths of the caves with stones. Kṛṣṇa could understand the trick the demon was playing; therefore He caught hold of him exactly as a lion catches hold of a lamb. The demon tried to expand himself like a hill to escape arrest, but Kṛṣṇa did not allow him to get out of His clutches. He was immediately thrown on the ground with great force and killed, just as an animal is killed in the slaughterhouse. After killing the Vyoma demon, Lord Kṛṣṇa released all His friends from the caves of the mountain.

Yashoda churning curds and Krishna begging for milk is a familiar scene for story-tellers. When Yashoda got irritated, how Krishna kicked the pot of curds being churned! The naughty fellow! It broke and curds flowed all over. But then Yashoda could never be really angry with Krishna. “My poor hungry baby!” We can hear her soft, love-laden voice in every mother, hugging the baby to herself.

This scene of Yashoda nursing Krishna has been part of the Indian psyche. Our ancients had found a beautiful way of elevating the healthy way to bring up babies: mother’s milk! The early decades of the last century had splashed so much of advertisement on baby food products that it was nothing less than a massive attempt at brainwashing the entire middle and upper classes. One has to go to the musty bookshelves of old libraries and open the magazines of those times to come upon the Glaxo Baby advertisements. As the foreign companies bombarded the hapless parental section to buy their products, one could only remember the exploitative farming techniques of the Britishers forcing farmers to sow indigo in the 19th

century that was powerfully criticised in Dinabandhu Mitra's Bengali drama, *Nil Darpan*. The baby food advertisements were a more sophisticated attempt to exploit the citizens of a 'slave' country. From the thirties onwards Gandhian groups began to fight back against this and wrote on the natural way of bringing up children with mother's milk and ayurvedic medicines. It is a big story by itself, a heroic chapter in our social history and the crusaders would have derived immense help from the icon of Yashoda nursing a bonny baby Krishna!

The Tamil poet Perialwar (7th century) has a charming decad on Yashoda inviting Krishna for a breast-feed, verses that were sung fondly by ladies at home even half a century ago.

One who rests on the snake-bed!
 Bull among cowherds! Wake up to drink milk.
 You slept last night without drinking any.
 Now it is noon and you have not come.
 Your stomach looks hollow.
 My healthy breasts stream forth milk.
 Place your mouth at the breast
 And drink milk, kicking with your legs.⁵

It is all so realistic. It is also a fine example of how Indian culture has seamlessly drawn together the secular and sacred aspects of existence.

Krishna's importunity for mother's milk and Yashoda's readiness to nurse him have been beautifully rendered by Srila Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada in his version of the *Bhagavata*:

. . . when Yashoda once was nursing her child and patting Him with great affection, there streamed a profuse supply of milk from her breast, and when she opened the mouth of the child with her fingers she suddenly saw the universal manifestation within His mouth. She saw within the mouth of Krishna the whole sky, including the luminaries, stars in all directions, the sun, the moon, fire, air, seas, islands, mountains, rivers, forests and all other movable and immovable entities. Upon seeing this Mother Yashoda's heart began to throb, and she murmured within herself, "How wonderful this is!" She could not express anything, but simply closed her eyes.

What else could she do? There is a familiar story told by Tamil poets and Manipravala commentators which takes over from here and produces a special version of Krishna's breaking pots in Gokula. Once Yashoda was churning curds

5. *Periyalwar Tirumoli* 2-2-1. Translations from Perialwar quoted in the essay are by Prema Nandakumar.

when Krishna troubled her no end, pulling her sari-end and holding on to the churner preventing it from moving, crying aloud that he was hungry. She began to nurse him. Just as he was having his glorious feed, Yashoda remembered the milk she had put on the fire was coming to boil. So she put Krishna down and ran into the kitchen. Frustrated, Krishna broke the pot full of curds and began feeding a cat with a pot of butter. When Yashoda came in, she was incensed and tried to catch him but he ran out. Before Yashoda could trace him, Krishna went and hid in the house of a potter.

Dadhibanda the potter knew that Krishna was an unusual being, as the baby's exploits were well-known. He agreed to hide Krishna in one of his pots. When Yashoda came searching, she found no Krishna and went away. Now Krishna asked Dadibanda to take him out of the pot and release him. But the potter refused. Krishna would get his freedom only if he gave moksha to Dadhibanda, the twenty-eight families related to him as also the pot that had had the privilege of hiding Krishna!

A famous Tamil poet Pillai Perumal Iyengar sings:

My heart cannot remember enough of it;
 No poetic tongue to recite all your names;
 My body cannot salute you nor bring you
 Flowers twice daily for worship.
 But devotion can make you gift moksha
 To anyone, O Ranganatha!
 I remember how you granted Realisation
 Even to the curd-pot of Dadhibanda!

The array of games associated with Krishna continue to be played with zest even today. One of the most popular is 'Uriyadi' (Breaking the Pot) when boys and young men vie with each other in climbing a greased pole to get at the prize money tied atop. Again, pots with milk and curds are tied at the upper end of a pole while boys from below take turns at jumping and hitting the pots with poles in hand and breaking them. This Uriyadi game is part of Krishna Jayanti celebrations in South Indian temples. Maharashtra also celebrates it. Though there is excitement among the young generations about these dramatic activities, elders explain the act as symbolic of the several obstacles one faces in life (as the greased pole) before one comes face to face with the Divine and that the Uriyadi Utsavam is an invitation for gaining devotion and strength of purpose in one's search for the Divine.

We come across this scene in *Savitri*:

A formidable voice cried from within:
 "Back, creature of earth, lest tortured and torn thou die."
 A dreadful murmur rose like a dim sea;

The Serpent of the threshold hissing rose,
 A fatal guardian hood with monstrous coils,
 The hounds of darkness growled with jaws agape,
 And trolls and gnomes and goblins scowled and stared
 And wild beast roarings thrilled the blood with fear
 And menace muttered in a dangerous tongue.
 Unshaken her will pressed on the rigid bars:
 The gate swung wide with a protesting jar,
 The opponent Powers withdrew their dreadful guard; . . .⁶

Well, a game played by Krishna and his friends is thus tapasya as well.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 489.

The principle of Yoga is to turn Godward all or any of the powers of the human consciousness so that through that activity of the being there may be contact, relation, union. In the Yoga of Bhakti it is the emotional nature that is made the instrument. Its main principle is to adopt some human relation between man and the Divine Being by which through the ever intenser flowing of the heart's emotions towards him the human soul may at last be wedded to and grow one with him in a passion of divine Love. It is not ultimately the pure peace of oneness or the power and desireless will of oneness, but the ecstatic joy of union which the devotee seeks by his Yoga. Every feeling that can make the heart ready for this ecstasy the Yoga admits; everything that detracts from it must increasingly drop away as the strong union of love becomes closer and more perfect.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 561)