SECTION I

SRI AUROBINDO ON HIS VISION OF MAN AND HIS LIGHTS ON EDUCATION

MANOJ DAS*

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND VISION

A GOLDEN PARADOX

Calcutta a hundred years ago was a far cry from the Kolkata of 2008. A public speaker had no opportunity to ring out a resounding voice courtesy the microphone. The public transport system was in its infancy and the greater part of the would-be audience had to trek miles to hear its leaders and often pass the night on pavements after the event, under blinking kerosene lamps. Population of the city was less than that of an average town of today. Keeping this perspective in mind, let us appreciate the report that follows, reproduced from *The Times,* London, from an issue of August 1909:

"As things were, the audience of August 7 consisted of about 5,000 persons, of whom about half was youthful…The sole orator of the Calcutta boycott meeting, Babu Bhupendranath Bose, excited no enthusiasm whatever, partly because his speech was too moderate and partly because it was audible to a small number. The Bengalis have primitive ideas as to the organisation of a meeting and Babu Bhupendranath was expected to harangue an open-air audience, numbering some thousands, from the top of a small dining table.

*He is a Professor at International Centre of Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry.

Mr. Bradlaugh or Dr. Clifford would have failed under such conditions. The remarkable fact was, however, that damped as the crowd was by a lone essay, it burst into loud cheering when Mr. Aurobindo Ghose was seen standing near the dining table aforesaid. He was unquestioningly the hero of the meeting."

What the report does not say – rather could not have said – how the "hero of the meeting" who was never given to histrionics, who spoke in a soft voice and, last but not the least, in English with chaste British accent, could be the object of such adoration. With the historic Surat Congress and the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case behind him, he was a legend non-pareil. Even years after he had disappeared from the British India, this was what Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had to say: "When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth." *(An Indian Pilgrim)*

Leaders of those days, in the popular perception, were made of special stuff but even among them Sri Aurobindo was outstanding. Let us see the impression of the renowned statesman M.R. Jayakar, then a young delegate to the Calcutta Congress of 1906: "I then had my first opportunity of observing from close quarters the Congress leaders of those times with some of whom my contact increased later. I then saw Aurobindo Ghose and his associates. What struck me were his great earnestness and dignified appearance. He had not then developed, so far as outside appearance could show, into a complete Yogi, but I got from a distance, an indication that his political philosophy was different from that of those who surrounded him." *(The Story of My Life)*

One's life story or biography is constructed with events in which one was involved, and events galore mark the life of Sri Aurobindo. No wonder that by now volumes were written on his life. But he had discouraged the very first writer proposing to write his life story, saying that no one could

write about his life, for it had not been on the surface for men to see. In other words he considered the external aspect of his life of no much consequence when compared to his inner life devoted to the pursuit of a hitherto unexplored truth, the destiny of man in terms of spiritual evolution – a vision to which the world is lately waking up slowly but steadily. The struggles and experiences he went through in the realms of consciousness were far more formidable than the storms and tumults marking his life on the surface.

Nevertheless, following the tradition of biographical accounts, we can have a bird's eye-view of the objective phases of his life.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on the 15th of August 1872, in the very house that is well-known today as Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, on the south side of Shakespeare Sarani. He was the third child of his parents, Dr. K.D. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi. Dr. Ghose, a highly qualified physician trained in the West, served as the chief of the district medical services of those days and was famous for his kind and charitable dispensations on one hand and for his thoroughly anglicised life style on the other hand. Even though Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Rajnarayan Bose, was revered as a Rishi as well as "the Grandfather of Indian nationalism", the veteran had no chance to exercise his influence on Sri Aurobindo who at the age of five, was admitted to the Loretto Convent at Darjeeling, run by an Irish Christian mission and meant for European children. Then, at the age of seven, the boy, along with his two elder brothers, was led by his parents to Manchester, and left under the care of a Latin scholar, Mr. Drewett. In 1884 the boys were shifted to London and Sri Aurobindo entered the St. Paul's School. In 1890 he was admitted as a probationer for the Indian Civil Service. Also a scholarship offered by St. Paul's helped him to enter the King's College, Cambridge. In 1892 he passed the first part of the classical Tripos in the first class, bagging all the prizes for Latin and Greek, as well as the I.C.S. examinations, achieving excellence in all the papers.

But by then he had decided not to join the bureaucracy set up by the colonial masters to rule India. His father, no longer enamoured of the British masters or their conduct, used to mail to him clippings of newspapers carrying stories of the colonial misgovernment. Sri Aurobindo got himself disqualified by not appearing for the riding test, even after he was given fresh chances for it.

His well-wishers having no idea that Sri Aurobindo had manoeuvred his own disqualification were upset. G.W. Pothero, a senior Fellow of King's College, wrote to James Cotton, the brother of Sir Henry Cotton, "He performed the part of the bargain as regards the college most honourably and took a high place in the first class of the classical Tripos, Part 1, at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes showing command of English and literary ability. That one should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most under-graduates) and at the same time to keep up the I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship he possessed knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of under-graduates, and wrote much better English than most young Englishmen."

Such efforts could have probably succeeded but for this young scholar's role in the formation of a secret association of Indian students, named "Lotus and Dagger", its members taking a solemn vow to dedicate their future to the cause of their motherland's liberation. (Incidentally, barring Sri Aurobindo, the vow did not seem to have meant much for the members in the later phase of their life.) Sri Aurobindo had also spoken at the Indian Majlis at Cambridge, of which he was the Secretary, criticising the British rule in India.

It so happened that the Maharaja of Baroda, Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, was on a visit to London and James Cotton introduced Sri Aurobindo to him. The Maharaja lost no time in offering to the young man a position in his government.

On the eve of his return to India, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern Sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

Envoi

Such was the paradox; one designed by parents and circumstances to grow and live as a model of westernised life, was back is motherland, already filled with a profound love for her. Probably such a beginning had its purpose, for as savants like Roman Rolland saw, he was the greatest synthesis hitherto achieved of the wisdom of the East and the West.

A Multi-dimensional Life

Sri Aurobindo was back in India after fourteen years, in February 1893. A great peace embraced him the moment he set his foot on the Indian soil – a peace that never left him. But the quiet home-coming had been preceded by a tragedy. The ship he was scheduled to sail by sank off the coast of Lisbon. Dr. K.D. Ghose, who had no knowledge of his son having changed his plan at the last moment and chosen another ship, was shocked at the news. He died of heart-attack muttering his son's name. Sri Aurobindo's mother had been mentally ill and was residing at her parents' house at Deoghar.

Hereafter began a new phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. He wrote, in a letter to a seeker much later: "Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material Space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies."

From Bombay Sri Aurobindo proceeded to Baroda and was assigned different portfolios in the princely government before his appointment as the Professor of English and later also of French, in the Maharaja's college. His students found in him a most inspiring guide, as some of them

recollected. During this period, extending from 1893 to 1905, his interest and activities outside his official functions, as we can perceive, flowed along four different streams simultaneously. He delved deep into the heritage of Indian literature, the spiritual lore in particular, mastering Sanskrit, Bengali and developing a knowledge of several other Indian languages. Secondly he continued with his creative writing that he had begun while in England. But very few knew about the third stream of his activities carried on in secrecy. He keenly observed the political situation in the country and decided to give it a radical new turn. With the help of his younger brother Barindra and some other trusted lieutenants he organised and inspired numerous secret revolutionary societies in Bengal and several other provinces of the country. Fourth, he began practising Yoga.

He used to visit Bengal from time to time and in 1901 he married Mrinalini Devi, the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose. Although she lived for a while in Baroda and accompanied Sri Aurobindo to Nainital and a few other places, hers was mostly a quiet life, devoted to reverentially watching her husband's travails and praying for him. She died in Calcutta in 1918.

The Indian National Congress launched in 1885 more or less under the British patronage, had begun to arouse greater expectations among the intelligentsia, but its moderate leadership never dared to take steps beyond submitting petitions to the authorities that mostly went in vain. For the first ever time a powerful call was given to the organisation by Sri Aurobindo, through a series of articles in the journal *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, for shedding its lacklustre stand and boldly voice the aspirations of the people. He wrote, using a pseudonym, "I say of the Congress, then, this – that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts not the right sort of men to

be leaders – in brief we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed."

A noted Bengali litterateur, Dinendra Kumar Roy, lived with Sri Aurobindo for some time to help him learn Bengali. Sri Aurobindo of course rarely needed any guidance, but the memoir of those days left by Roy is a valuable document. Callous towards food and sleep, Sri Aurobindo, Roy writes, sat absorbed in his studies for three quarters of the night, oblivious of swarms of mosquitoes around him. The Gaekwad depended on him for writing for him important documents and speeches and once in a while required his company probably for the sake of it. Roy was shocked that Sri Aurobindo would casually say that he had no time and the vehicle would go back, at a time when so many Indian as well as European dignitaries waited for days to have a brief interview with the Maharaja. "He was alone and he did not know what it was to run after pleasures. He did not spend even a pie in the wrong way, yet nothing was left with him at the end of the month."

Roy concludes his impression thus: "He was not a man of this earth; he was a god came down from heavens…"

Storm Without: Tranquillity Within

The Baroda phase of Sri Aurobindo's life came to an end in the wake of the mighty popular upsurge against the infamous move by Lord Curzon, the Governor-General of India, to partition Bengal, when before a huge gathering the affluent patriot Subodh Mullik announced a donation of a lakh of rupees for founding a national college, free from any control by the foreign government – and Sri Aurobindo was requested to come down to Calcutta to head it. (The people hailed Mullik as *Raja*, an appellation that became permanently affixed to his name – a solitary event of its nature.)

Sri Aurobindo readily responded to the call and resigned his well-paid Baroda job for a symbolic allowance that before long dwindled to nothing. He became the centre of the college, the unfailing source of inspiration for the

students and the staff; a new orientation to the philosophy of education that would strengthen the student's faith in himself and his motherland, prepare him to derive joy from sacrifice for a noble cause, teach him to view things globally with due attention to progress in any field anywhere in the world and absorb the lessons into the national genius, was in the making when exigency obliged him to stand aside from the experiment.

It happened like this. In March 1906 a weekly newspaper was launched by Barindra Kumar and his team, with Sri Aurobindo's blessings. Entitled *Yugantar*, it became a phenomenal success in terms of both circulation and influence. It presented the ideals of freedom in no uncertain terms and several of its lead articles were written by Sri Aurobindo. The renowned nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal now decided to bring out an English newspaper of the same kind and his scheme materialised in August 1906. He sought Sri Aurobindo's help. In the backdrop of an atmosphere charged with anti-British sentiments because of the move for the partition of Bengal, such a journal was the need of the hour and Sri Aurobindo joined hands with Pal right from the start, but without in any way revealing his association with the publication. Whose masterly hand wrote those surprisingly powerful articles? No other person than Bipin Chandra Pal himself paid this tribute to Sri Aurobindo later, in *Swaraj*: "The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thoughts, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian…Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day…Long extracts from it began to be reproduced in the exclusive columns of *The Times* of London."

Even the then Editor of *The Statesman,* S.K. Ratcliffe, recollected later how the paper was "full of leading and

special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian Press…the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism."

While the readers were mystified about the author of the main articles in the *Bande Mataram*, the British intelligence found it out. Sri Aurobindo also knew that it will not be possible for him to steer clear of the hostility of the authorities if he had to play his role in the political upheaval of the time, however sincerely he may try to keep himself in the background, and that the inevitable should not happen while he headed an educational institution, the first of its kind. Thus he resigned his position as the Principal of the National College.

The inevitable of course happened sooner than expected. In 1907 the government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and, as its editor, Sri Aurobindo. Despite his total reluctance to come to limelight, this case made him a legend overnight. It was at this time that Rabindranath wrote his celebrated poem, "*Rabindra, O Aurobindo, salutes thee, O friend, O country's friend, the voice-incarnate of India's soul.…*"

The Prosecution failed to prove that Sri Aurobindo was the editor. His acquittal was almost a national jubilation, making the government even more anxious to remove him from the public scene. The anxiety turned into determination before long, because of his role in the historic 23rd session of the Congress at Surat at the end of 1907, where the Moderate leadership received a death blow from the Nationalists led by Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In the previous year, at the Calcutta session of the Congress under the Presidentship of Dadabhoy Naoroji resolutions quite radical in nature, demanding Swaraj and upholding Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education had been passed for the first time and they were to be endorsed and some more resolutions along that line were expected to be passed in the next session of the Congress scheduled

to take place at Nagpur. But the Moderates, who were in no mood to antagonise the rulers managed to change the venue to their stronghold, Surat. As if that was not enough, they chose Rash Behari Ghose to preside over it whereas Lajpat Rai, just released from jail, had been the choice of not only the Nationalists but also the greater body of the Congress.

A showdown at Surat was inevitable. The session began before an audience over ten thousand strong. The President-elect, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, followed by other leaders, ascended the decorated dais amidst cheers from the moderates. Dewan Bahadur Ambalal Desai proposed him. But as soon as Sir Surendranath Bannerji stood up to second the proposal, his words were drowned in an ear-splitting roar of protest. The greatest orator of Bengal had the jolt of his life. Let us have a look at the first hand record left by the veteran British journalist and author, Henry Nevinson:

"Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators on the right of the Chair sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment's pause…the whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi (Chairman of the Reception Committee) half in the chair, rang his brass Benares bell and rang in vain. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again he shouted, unheard as silence. He sat down and for a moment the storm was lulled. The voices of the leaders were audible, consulting in agitated tones…Again Surendranath sprang on the table and again the assembly roared with clamour. Again the Chairman rang his Benares bell and rang in vain. In an inaudible voice, like a sob, he declared the sitting suspended."

The next day was no different. Once again the session ended in turmoil. Two different conferences were held the day after. The Nationalists held theirs in a large courtyard – and they came in a most orderly and quiet manner. Observes Nevinson, "Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the Chair and sat

unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern by his side." *(The New Spirit in India)*

Nevinson travelled with the delegates by train. At every halt he heard thunderous shouts hailing the Nationalists, Sri Aurobindo and Tilak in particular. The young Aurobindo became the object of adoration of the masses. A year later, during the Alipore trial, the prosecution witnesses narrated how Sri Aurobindo's carriages used to be drawn by his youthful admirers who gave the horses a holiday. The redoubtable Counsel for Prosecution, Barrister Norton complained, "Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country."

Though the Moderates, by the virtue of their wealth, personal influence and blessings of the powers that be continued to be active for some more years, they were a waning force. The Surat Congress marked the No Return point in the nation's march towards its goal and Sri Aurobindo was the first leader to declare openly "complete and absolute independence" as that goal.

Prelude to the Struggle for a Different Liberation

In a pre-dawn swoop on the 2nd of May 1908 a group of young men, "all educated and belonging to respectable families" according to the investigating report, residing in a garden at Murari Pukur in Calcutta, the property of Sri Aurobindo and his brothers, were rounded up, accused of secret revolutionary activities. Simultaneously another police party surrounded Sri Aurobindo's residence at Grey Street and arrested him. The 'dangerous materials' discovered in the house were some letters Sri Aurobindo had written to his wife from Baroda and a lump of earth collected from Sri Ramakrishna's place at Dakshineswar that someone had given to Mrinalini Devi, considering it sacred.

Famous as the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the trial in the court of the Sessions Judge, Mr. Beachcroft, Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge classmate and a brilliant scholar second only to Sri Aurobindo in several subjects, continued more or less for a year, 1908-1909. An eminent lawyer of the time, Mr. Norton, was specially brought from London to serve as the Counsel for the Crown. The young Calcutta lawyer who voluntarily came forward to defend Sri Aurobindo was the future celebrity, Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das. His inspired and prophetic words at the conclusion of his argument have become immortal: "My appeal to you is that a man like this who is charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands..."

While the newspapers of the day did their job very well in carrying the reports of the trial to the people agog with excitement, while political leaders and intellectuals waited with bated breath for its outcome, Sri Aurobindo took no interest in the sensational proceedings. He was in a different world:

As he spoke later, "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva, who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade... I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the Prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there and smiled." *(Uttarpara Speech)*

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted once again. The *Bande Mataram* had ceased publication. He launched the *Karmayogin*, a weekly in English, followed by a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. The rulers, however, could not be in peace with Sri Aurobindo at large. The one most eager to deport him was Lord Minto, the Governor-General of British India. Unfortunately for him, Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, vetoed the gentleman's fond resolution again and again, stating categorically, "As for deportation I will not listen to it."

While they were debating on the issue in great earnestness and confidentiality, Sri Aurobindo, in obedience to an *Adesh*, a direction from above, suddenly left Calcutta for the French pocket of Chandernagore and thence to Pondicherry, where he arrived on the 4th of April 1910. Even then in his last but one letter to Morley, Minto wrote on 26 May 1910, "As to the celebrated Aurobindo…I can only repeat what I said to you in my letter of April 14th that he is the most dangerous man we have to now reckon with … and has an unfortunate influence on the student class and Indians who know him quite well have told me he is quite beyond redemption."

Sri Aurobindo of course had figured several times in the House of Commons, but on the 28th of April 1910, that exalted forum witnessed a stormy debate on him – the first ever of that length and lively exchange on any Indian leader. Earlier Sir Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party and the future Prime Minister, had demanded to know, on the basis of some news in the *Times*, why a warrant had been issued against Sri Aurobindo, and he had been told that it was for a seditious article in the *Karmayogin*. Twice thereafter Sir Ramsay wished to see that article, but when the Treasury Bench failed to produce it, he flashed a copy of the magazine himself and read out the article concerned passage by passage and challenged anybody to point out where lay any element of sedition in it. The Members heard with amazement, only once Mr. J. King interrupting the speaker asking him if

the original article was not in Bengali and if the author was not a Bengali, to which Sir Ramsay replied, "The article is in the most excellent English. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose could no more write an article in Bengali than I could."

This series of debate ended on the 21st of February 1911, nearly a year after Sri Aurobindo had settled down at Pondicherry, when Mr. O'Grady asked "whether the publisher of the *Karmayogin* was prosecuted for issuing the article by Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, for writing which a warrant was issued against Mr. Ghose; whether that trial resulted in the acquittal of the publisher on the ground that the article was not seditious; and whether the Government has now withdrawn the warrants issued in connection with the article?" and to which Mr. Montagu, the Under Secretary of State, replied: "The answer to the first part of my Hon. Friend's question is Yes, to the second, Yes; and to the third, Yes."

The Evolutionary Crisis and Beyond

India, for Sri Aurobindo, was not just a piece of earth, but a godhead, a consciousness that had a unique role to play in the destiny of mankind and for that Her freedom from bondage to an imperial power was indispensable and in his seer vision Sri Aurobindo had seen it a fait accompli. It was a different freedom he must struggle for thenceforth – humanity's freedom from its bondage to a colossal ignorance, the cause of its manifold suffering. At Pondicherry he plunged into an exploration of the spheres of consciousness embracing everything as well as at the root of everything, determined to unravel the future that awaited man.

The Mother, French by birth but of Middle-Eastern ancestry, first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914. The *Arya*, a monthly, was launched under her initiative. Several of Sri Aurobindo's major works were serialised in this publication. The Mother had to leave for France a year later, but the magazine continued publication. She returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and the Ashram took

shape under her loving supervision. From 1926 Sri Aurobindo remained totally engrossed in his Yoga, leaving the Ashram and the ever-increasing demand for help from innumerable seekers, to the Mother's care.

Sri Aurobindo's realisations and his vision, as put forth in his works like *The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity* and the epic *Savitri*, invite us to an adventure in consciousness and help us transcend several narrow concepts that prevail widely about yoga, spirituality, education and, last but not the least, the significance of evolution. There are certain basic truths that man is trying to find through all his activities, consciously or unconsciously. Says Sri Aurobindo: "The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts, and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, for it survives the longest period of scepticism and returns after every banishment, is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, – God, Light, Freedom, Immortality." *(The Life Divine)*

Can this primeval quest of man find its fulfilment? For ages those who were seriously looking for that goal broke away from the so called mundane life and sought it in a state of ascetic other-worldliness. Was the world then doomed to remain only a field of travails or a simple illusion as any number of wise mystics would look upon it – without any spiritual culmination?

Says Sri Aurobindo, "If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the

last term of that evolution; he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being." *(The Life Divine)*

Once we appreciate the truth that "Evolution is nothing but the progressive unfolding out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being," *(The Hour of God and other Writings)* our attitude towards all problems and issues of life cannot but radically change.

About evolution Sri Aurobindo observes further, "We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond mind." *(The Life Divine)*

We could very well be in the threshold of an evolution taking a stride beyond mind. In fact, "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way."

Sri Aurobindo visualised the next stage of human evolution possible with the descent of a gnostic power, the supramental, capable of transforming the life of man as it is today into a life divine. And here comes the relevance of Yoga. It is not a business of dabbling in bizarre feats of achieving some supernatural powers. "In the right view both of life and Yoga all life is either consciously or

subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearance, is a vast Yoga of Nature attempting to realise her perfection in an ever increasing expression of her potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality." *(The Synthesis of Yoga)*

Over the ages Yoga had taken diverse courses, one major line giving great emphasis on *Jnana* or Knowledge, another on *Bhakti* and *Prema* (Devotion and Love) and yet another on *Karma* or Action. But since all the disciplines had a common goal, Sri Aurobindo culls out their salient features and makes a synthesis of them. There was no dichotomy between spirit and matter, between a life spiritual and the world. "World is a becoming which seeks always to express in motion of Time and Space , by progression in Mind, Life and Body what is beyond all becoming, beyond Time and Space, beyond mind, life and body." *(The Upanishads)*

While analysing the history of human aspiration, the great endeavours towards perfection man had made through the ages in different areas of his activity, social, cultural, scientific and political and presenting a picture of the destiny of man through his integral vision in his immortal works, Sri Aurobindo never cut himself off the current national or world events. During the World War II he announced his support for the Allies as he could foresee the devastation the civilisation would have suffered had the victory gone to the Nazi camp. On the eve of India winning independence he sent an emissary to the leadership of the day suggesting that the Cripps proposal be accepted. His counsel went in vain; but looking back several of the leading figures of the day, K.M. Munshi for example, agree that the division of the nation could have been avoided had the leadership heeded the advice. Instances are so many; but one thing is certain, Sri

Aurobindo did not expect much from the present humanity in terms of harmony and light of wisdom, though he was the greatest optimist known to us because of his faith in mankind's inner capacity to transcend his present limitations.

Sri Aurobindo passed away on the 5th of December, 1950.

Lights on Education

It follows, in the light of the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo that the true process of education should help the child to bring out the best inherent in his being. But that must be accomplished not through any imposed curriculum, but through an environment and system that can spontaneously bring out the hidden splendour in every child's consciousness. We conclude this section with a few passages from Sri Aurobindo:

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

"The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who

must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Everyone has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

"The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God's arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past,

possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education." ("A System of National Education": *The Hour of God and other Writings)*

Section II

The Politics of Contemporary Publishing in India
Ought We to Be Excited, Concerned or Despairing?

Urvashi Butalia

Abstract

The Indian publishing scene is widely acknowledged to be vibrant and dynamic today, and indeed, it is both complex and varied. After having adopted a policy of self reliance and indigenism in the years after Indpendence, the publishing sector today, like much else in the country, has opened up to foreign investement and some of the largest publishing houses in the world have a presence here. Is this a new form of colonialism? Should we be concerned about it or should we take it as inevitable? What will the presence of multinationals mean for indigenous publishing in India, and will English publishing, which seems to be dominant, outstrip Indian language publishing? How can Indian publishing hold its own, and should it do so at all? Where, if at all, do the excitements lie? Do independent publishers have anything to offer?

Tracing her own entry into the world of publishing more than three decades ago, Butalia will focus, in this talk, on what has changed, both within the industry, and in the external conditions that impinge on it, and make an examination of whether this change has been positive or negative or a mix of the two. She will argue that the production of knowledge is a political act, and that the

Indian State has done little or nothing to help the publishing industry produce books, and therefore knowledge, in order to reach the continuing hunger for it among Indians. She will further show how it is here that the contributions of the small independent publisher need to be recognised and supported.

A little over three decades ago I made my first, accidental entry into the world of publishing in India. A friend and I were playing a desultory game of table tennis while talking about what we were going to do with our lives. I was just finishing my Master's and wanted to make a decisive move away from English literature to something more 'relevant' to my life in the thriving, bustling, politically alive city of Delhi. The university was a hotbed of furious political debate, the women's movement was just taking off—surely, I thought, there has to be more to life than Spenser and Milton (much though I loved them—or Milton at least). My friend then worked as a secretary in the Oxford University Press in Delhi. Why didn't I, she suggested, try to do some freelance work there and see how I liked it. I thought her suggestion was brilliant.

At the time, a great deal of publishing activity in Delhi—and many of the larger Western publishing houses had moved to Delhi by then - was concentrated on two roads, a longer one called Asaf Ali Road that lay just outside the wall of the old city, and a shorter strip, Ansari Road, that lay just beyond. Ansari Road housed large and small publishers, and during the lunch hour many of them (almost all male) could be seen at the samosa and paan stalls, exchanging gossip or news, while small lorries and hand-drawn carts loaded with packets of books made their way to publishers' warehouses, often in the basement of their offices. While printing establishments lay some distance away, many of the other services were close by and a system of point-to-point travel by cycle or auto rickshaw had sprung up to service the needs of publishers.

Those were the days when typesetting was still done by hand, using hot or cold metal, and the nearby main road in Daryaganj, or further along Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, you could find handsetting, as well as monotype or linotype machines. When phototypesetting made its appearance, units offering this service sprung up closer to Ansari Road. Blockmakers were concentrated at the northern end, going right up till Kashmiri Gate, where the best of them were to be found. And the paper market lay in between, in Chandni Chowk. Bookshops were few and far between, and generally not much to write home about, and most were filled with remainders purchased at heavy discounts from abroad. Most of us bought our books from the second hand stalls that sprung up on pavements in different shopping areas of the city—but even they sold mainly Harold Robbins and Mills and Boon.

I remember walking into my first job in the Indian branch of the Oxford University Press (OUP) in fear and trepidation. I was a young 21-year old, straight out of university, and was going to fill in time by working in the OUP for a while until I decided what it was I wanted to do. The OUP was at that time adapting (they called it Indianising) a series of English textbooks called Active English, for Indian schools. I was employed in the inglorious role of someone called a 'paster upper'—my task was to paste Indian names (at the time—our imaginations were a bit limited—we used the names Ram and Sita) over Western ones (John and Mary)—while an artist called Dean Gasper was employed to colour blond hair and blue eyes black, and to chop off the top halves of double-decker buses! That first experience with art pulls and rubber solution (things people in publishing will probably not recognise today) was enough to make all fear vanish without a trace and to start a love affair that has lasted until today.

The OUP in those days was a rather special place to work in. The remnants of British domination still existed in the shape of some individuals who worked there. A

gentleman (and he was, and remains, a gentleman) called Charles Lewis ran the place, and two eccentric men (also British) ran the production and editorial departments. As well, a young, Oxford-returned man who chose to look different by wearing Indian kurtas and smoking thin Ganesh beedis, was the head of academic publishing. His name was Ravi Dayal. Ravi was slated to become the Head of OUP, along with a Bengali gentleman called Santosh Mukherjee, and the British directors were on their way out. In the post-independence scenario, publishing, like everything else, was required to 'Indianise' and ex-patriate employees of foreign companies had to leave, with the companies themselves reducing their shareholding to a maximum of 49 per cent (this did not apply to the OUP because it saw itself as a department of the University of Oxford, rather than the Indian branch of an overseas company, although, in the fullness of time, the OUP lost the battle to convince the Indian government of this).

One of the early projects I worked on in the OUP was the translation and publication, for the first time, of the Oxford School Atlas into Hindi and Punjabi (Gurmukhi). Somehow the bosses had managed to bag a contract to provide 475,000 copies of the OSA to the Punjab government (the Punjab School Education Board) for use in schools in Punjab. At the time, such government and private sector collaborations were possible and could take place without any apparent corruption. I mention this history also because the process of 'Indianisation', so crucial to India's post independence years, had already begun and this particular project was part of that. The project to publish the Atlas in Indian languages would also bring this money-spinner book to India for the first time, thereby keeping its income largely in India, and providing business to Indian printers. I was young and green then, but this project early allowed me to see how negotiations were done with governments, how important it was to get clearances on everything, and yet, despite this, how all of this could so easily be thrown out the door

by a political change or development. We used to have to travel to Chandigarh almost every week to meet with government officials who would check and recheck everything, and we did so royally, being driven there in the then OUP limousine (there were no SUVs then!), a battered old Standard Herald with no airconditioning. We thought it was the height of luxury!

It was on the last of these drives, when we were heading to Chandigarh in a mild state of euphoria with the first few copies of the Atlas to show to the Punjab government, that we noticed, for the first time, advertisements on walls and roadside bunds for Atlas cycles, Punjab's most famous bicycle brand. And we noticed, to our horror, that the word Atlas was spelt differently from how we had it on the copies we were carrying. What would happen now? The copies were all printed. Would they notice? We hoped not. But of course we were wrong. They noticed, not because they were vigilant, but only because the officer in charge had changed and the new one had his own views on the Gurmukhi script, views that were in direct contrast and contradiction to those of the previous officer who had okayed the cover! It was that that made me realise that the legacy of colonialism was not so easily removed. It wasn't just a matter of Indianising the structures of business, we needed also to look at things like how our languages had been structured, whether or not their scripts and systems of spelling, put in place initially by the British, were free of political power struggles. And whether or not we wanted to simply work with those inherited systems or create our own.

The process of Indianising was not easy: the state had to create a fine balance of openness (based on the belief that knowledge should be free and easily available) and protectionism (based on the understanding that the Indian book trade should be allowed to develop). So, for example, while there were restrictions on almost everything else in terms of imports—you could not bring in a refrigerator, or a car, or even clothes—books were notoriously free of such restrictions, and the conditions governing their import were

liberal. Liberal, that is for individuals like you and me who may have wanted to import books for our personal use, but within the book trade, there were some restrictions and booksellers/distributors were allowed to import up to 1000 copies of a particular title in one calendar year. However, booksellers are a notoriously clever lot and for those for whom ideology meant nothing and money meant everything, this and other such restrictions were there only to be got round somehow. So if you could bring in 1000 copies of x or y book in one year, under one name, many booksellers ended up opening three or four companies, which would import a thousand copies each of a particular book, usually at the end of a calendar year, so that the moment the next year started, they could immediately start again. This, and the existence of something called remainders—heavily discounted unsold books that were dumped into India and that sold largely on pavements but also in stores—ensured that whatever bookshops there were had mainly imported books on their shelves. Of course this was the case with English, not with other Indian languages, some of which, like Malayalam, had their own distribution structures.

Publishing has changed beyond recognition since. It's not only that technological changes have transformed the practice of publishing, and metal typesetting, letterpress printing, blocks and galleys are now a thing of the past, but the change is so much more profound, so much more wide-ranging. A new entrant walking into Ansari Road today will see many of the same names—DK, Manohar, UBS, Oxford, Macmillan, Frank Brothers or, on Asaf Ali Road, Orient Longman (now called Orient Blackswan)—but much of the action has also moved elsewhere, to other parts of the city, and indeed across the border, to neighbouring Gurgaon (in the state of Haryana) and NOIDA (in the state of Uttar Pradesh). Ansari Road is no longer the only home for publishers in Delhi, there are just too many of them to fit in there. More importantly, Delhi isn't the only home either: Indian language publishers have

always been located in the particular state to which the language belongs, but in the seventies, many English language publishers moved to Delhi. Today though, location doesn't mean the same thing, and publishers choose to work from Chennai, or Mumbai or Kolkata, or Trivandrum, or Kottayam, or up in the mountains and down in the plains, and they work with typesetters who are located in other cities, printers who might even be in other countries. The old rickshaw point-to-point system is no longer necessary—all you need is a computer and an internet connection.

The change isn't only geographical. In the early days when I began working in publishing, there were only two or three kinds of books that got taken seriously. These were school textbooks, academic books for use at the university level (which included social sciences, the natural and applied sciences, engineering, architecture and a whole host of other subject areas) and the odd novel, usually destined to take the textbook route. Trade publishing, or the publishing of books of general interest, hadn't yet made its presence felt. Very few publishers—in English at least—were publishing fiction, and although reasonably priced editions of classics by Western authors could be found in the market, they were not among the books that made money. It was around the eighties I think that things began to change. 1984 the Orwellian year—was when we set up Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house. Having cut our publishing teeth mainly in academic publishing, my then partner Ritu Menon and I focused mainly on that even in Kali, although we tried to do so innovatively (publishing books on the Indian women's movement for example). But we also slowly began to publish fiction.

India's always been a large—and generally stable—market for exports of books from the UK and the US, so it wasn't surprising that our bookshops carried so many titles published outside the country. With the decline of the rupee against the dollar, however, this began to change

a bit: dollar priced books became more expensive, with more rupees going out for each dollar, and bookshops began to look at other alternatives to fill shelf space. Enter Indian trade books in English: the late eighties and early nineties were the time when the profile of English publishing in India began to change, and trade publishing made its way into this market. (I should explain here that the term 'trade' in publishing jargon, is used to denote the general book, read by the general reader. So this can include fiction, biography, autobiography, non-fiction, books for children, etc.) Rupa, Kali for Women, Stree Publishers, Ravi Dayal, Orient Longman were among the pioneers in this field, but the big change actually came with the entry of Penguin India, who brought scale, size, marketing skills and a general 'sexiness' to trade publishing.

Nonetheless, over the next few years, the market still remained predominantly educational and predominantly Indian. The next big change came about in the nineties when India began to open up to foreign investment, and very quickly, as things became increasingly liberalised, large multinational publishers started to look towards this market – one of the few in the world which still shows considerable potential for expansion. Today, India is home to a variety of international publishers, many of whom are in joint ventures with Indian companies, and others who are fully owned by their parent corporations. While the real profits come from the scientific and technical, the medical and legal aspects of publishing, it's trade that gets much more attention. This isn't surprising for it's here that the excitement is palpable, as Indian writers get known both at home and abroad, the demand for their books grows.

But, while the large and medium sized 'foreign' actors worked hard to open up the space for Indian trade publishing in English, it was the Indian actors who actually often took the initial step of experimenting with new things. Rupa, a publisher and distributor, was one of the first to look at mass market books in English, moving away from

the literary work, to the more popular one. The success of some of its young authors such as Chetan Bhagat, whose books sell in hundreds of thousands, is by now well known. If Rupa made the initial foray into the mass market, publishers like Tara and Tulika broke new ground where children's books were concerned, just as Kali did where women's books were concerned. It wasn't only in content that you see the change. It's also there in how publishers position themselves. One of the most interesting and exciting experiments in recent years has been carried out by Seagull Publishers in Kolkata who have chosen to position themselves not as Indian publishers based in India, but as *international* publishers based in India (in their second avatar I mean). So they consciously publish non-Indian authors, distribute their books all over the world and are slowly making a name for themselves. This is an exciting development—if successful, it could begin, in a different way, the process of reversing the flow of information that has traditionally been from the West to the East, the North to the South.

In response to the growing numbers of books being published all over the country, large and small bookshops began to make their appearance, and at least half their shelves are stocked with Indian books by Indian authors. In fact, the difference in the retail trade is significant. Several years ago the British Council brought out a book which was a listing of 100 bookshops in India. They were hard put to it to find enough shops to make that number. Things are different today with three major bookshop chains—include Crossword, Odyssey, Landmark—and many individual stores that may well develop into chains. In the early days there were really only two 'chains' worth speaking about, and one of these was mainly concentrated in the south – Higginbothams, while the other, AH Wheeler and Co. was a railway station chain and therefore stocked only the kinds of things people pick up to read on long train journeys. But although the retail sector has considerably expanded today, it is unfortunate that its

development has been somewhat slowed down because of the recession, so plans by Tatas and by the Future Group to add many more bookshops to the existing ones, have been put aside for the moment. Nevertheless the increased space meant that Indian books— initially only in English but then, over time, also in Indian languages—began to find their way into bookshops so that the profile of most shops today is very different from what it was, say, twenty years ago. I should add that I have mentioned only those bookshop chains that stock principally English books—and indeed that is what my lecture is mainly concerned about—but there are other chains that are important in different languages, one of these being the bookshops run by Deecee books in Kerala. With bookshops stocking books, publishers also put much more attention to the marketing of books—something which, with textbook publishing being predominant, was not a particularly developed area of publishing. Today, author tours are common, not a week passes without a major booklaunch—in fact there probably isn't a five star hotel in the major cities that hasn't been host to a booklaunch in recent years, and many publishers put their attention into smaller, less high profile, but nonetheless important ways of marketing their books. And the publishing world is peopled increasingly with young, smart, intelligent, professional people, many of them women. And Delhi's not the only place this is happening: change is visible across the many different languages in which India publishes.

Among the many changes in Indian publishing, is another one that hasn't received enough attention. This is the entry of increasing numbers of women into the profession. Years ago, when I made my hesitant way into the portals of the OUP, my Dad came with me. Unknown to me, he took my then boss aside and told him in no uncertain terms that he expected all the men in the office (and there were MANY of them) to behave, and if he got the slightest hint of anything wrong, he would see to it that they were taken to task! In turn, my boss, when offering

me the job, said I needed to behave (by this he meant not get married immediately and become pregnant!) because, according to him, 'We have never employed a woman in an executive position before because women usually go away and get married.' He made it sound like a crime!

The situation is very different today. Not only are increasing numbers of small and medium-sized publishing houses headed by women—for example, Yoda, Yatra, Stree, Katha, Tara Books, Tulika, Karadi Tales, Women Unlimited, Zubaan—but women are the decision makers in many of the larger houses as well, such as, India Book House, Westland Books, Niyogi Books, Ratna Sagar, Random House, HarperCollins, to name only a few. Several of the bookshop chains are headed by women (Oxford Bookstores, Strand and others), and there are women printers, designers, typesetters—indeed the feminisation of Indian publishing is remarkable. And recently, when we set up India's Women in Publishing group, and decided to have a welcome party for its members in Delhi, we found ourselves sending out over 250 invitations, and nearly a hundred women turned up! And this was only in Delhi – if the numbers from other parts of India are added here, things will look very bright indeed!

In the seventies and eighties the focus on textbooks and educational publishing also meant that there wasn't much happening where translation was concerned. And given that India has 23 official languages and publishes in 22 of those, with many having rich, and strong literary traditions, you'd think translation would be a natural. But it wasn't—and when there were translations, they were seldom direct from one Indian language to another, rather they often went via a link language such as Hindi or English. Today, translation forms a vibrant and lively part of Indian publishing. Rights are being bought and sold between Bengali and Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, Gujarati and Marathi, and all of those and more.

And then there's the entry of the adventurous young—long years ago when I left my job to think of setting up my

own publishing house, people thought I was a bit mad. But today, young people are doing this all the time: a few years ago a group of young men and women came together to set up Blaft, a wonderful, dynamic publishing house that focuses on translations of pulp fiction; there's Navayana, set up by two men, to publish works by marginalised people, Phantomville which focuses on graphic novels, Kalachuvadu which publishes both fiction and non fiction in Tamil, New Horizon, set up by two Silicon valley entrepreneurs who sold their stake in an enormously profitable website, Cricinfo, to concentrate on books, Panther Books, set up by one man (and his family) to bring the best medical knowledge to the world in electronic form, Ratna Sagar, a quality publishing house doing textbooks and books for children that is providing strong competiton to the OUP… and the list goes on.

It's in recognition of these developments that Indian publishing now has such a strong profile internationally. Not only do Indian writers figure among the best international writers—and indeed recently, walking through the lanes of Venice, I was struck by the fact that virtually every small bookshop had at least one or more Indian (and not necessarily Diasporic) writers in their windows—there isn't a bookfair in the world where you don't see a significant Indian presence. There are publishers offering books, printers offering print services and even—as was evident at the Abu Dhabi book fair recently—Indian entrepreneurs offering distribution services.

Let me turn now to another aspect of Indian publishing. Almost every piece of writing on Indian publishing tends to turn its attention now to trade publishing, rather than educational publishing. Trade is the new sector, it's where the growth is—some say it is as high as 30 per cent a year, while others put this figure at 10 (which is a high enough figure). Further, almost every piece of writing then attributes this growth, and the changes in Indian publishing to the entry of the big western giants – Penguin, HarperCollins, Random House, Hachette, and so on.

There's no doubt these houses are publishing new and interesting titles, but I think it's important to recognise that the real innovations are coming from elsewhere, that it is the independent, small (sometimes not so small) Indian publishers who are really the ones who should be credited with putting Indian publishing on the international map. They may not be making money hand over fist, but they're doing something they believe in, and something that actually is the change. Here are some examples:

Tara, a publishing house set up by Gita Wolf, and based in Chennai, began publishing some 20 years ago. Initially focusing on books for children, Tara chose to create beautiful, handcrafted, sometimes screen printed, illustrated books. It wasn't easy, they did not have pots of money—what they did have was a commitment to quality and a great deal of original thinking. Tara's books were, and are, expensive, but over the years they have found a loyal audience and each year, they take their innovation a bit further. Beginning with books for children, they soon expanded their repertoire to begin to do visual books, bringing in tribal artists and illustrators whose works they showcased the world over. During the Salon du Livre in Paris in 2007 when India was the focus country, it was Tara's books and their illustrations that were displayed in libraries in the city of Paris, and Tara now regularly wins awards at Bologna. Yet, it was barely two decades ago that they began to attend international book fairs, in the early days looking for subsidies to make it possible for them to do so.

Another entrant into this field was Tulika, of about the same vintage and also based in Chennai. Tulika focused on children and worked hard to make connections with publishers in the Indian languages: today, several of their books are simultaneously translated into four or five Indian languages. Few international publishers have this kind of reach.

If Tara and Tulika tried one kind of experiment (and a smaller publisher, Karadi Tales, also from Chennai, took

this further by publishing audio and 'touch' books), Seagull in Kolkata tried a different sort of experiment. Set up initially to publish books on the performing arts, Seagull rapidly expanded its list and recently positioned itself as not merely an Indian publisher, but an international publisher based in India. Today, its list boasts names such as Slavenka Drakaulik, Andrei Tarkovsky, Tariq Ali and a host of others, and it holds the world rights to well-known writers like Mahasweta Devi, who will only publish with Seagull first, and then look elsewhere.

Some years ago the OUP found it difficult to continue to employ two of its senior academic editors because they decided to marry, and Company policy did not allow for married couples to be employed. This became the catalyst for Anuradha Roy and Rukun Advani to set up Permanent Black, one of the most prestigious academic imprints in India today.

The history of feminist pubishing in India is by now well known—Kali for Women, founded in 1984 by two women, Ritu Menon and myself, was the trailblazer in publishing books by and about women, an area that was all but ignored but that today forms one of the most profitable parts of most publishers' lists. Combining both academic and trade publishing, Kali, and its two later avatars, Zubaan and Women Unlimited, continue to hold their own in a market that is increasingly dominated by the big players. Navayana, a young publishing house set up recently, focuses on the area of caste, another area that has not seen much attention in Indian publishing. And of course there is Ravi Dayal's own imprint, set up under his name, that has published some of the finest books in India and that continues to be run after Ravi passed away, by Penguin.

This is only a taste of the richness and variety of independent publishing in India. I have not even begun to speak of the work of several others, such as Roli and Rupa, or Westland and New Horizon. More, these publishers have not remained inactive in terms of distribution and one of

the most interesting aspects of such publishing is the kinds of connections that publishers are making. A few years ago Penguin India and Zubaan set up a collaboration which has today become a model to be followed by others—the publication of a joint list to which both houses bring their unique strengths. It would be difficult to find in the world of publishing this kind of collaboration where the actors recognise their strengths and weaknesses and pool together their resources to explore the same market. There are already four such collaborations in place and several more in the offing (the four are the Zubaan-Penguin list, the Mapin-HarperCollins list, the Ravi Dayal-Penguin list and the Ratna Sagar-HarperCollins list). As well, a group of independent publishers have come together to set up a collective to work on distribution and marketing. Will they give the big players a run for their money—it's difficult to say, but what is certain is that so much that is exciting in the market is because of the independents.

But although the independents are at the cutting edge of change, there is no denying that in the present day scenario, the entry of large foreign companies is something to contend with. When the publishing sector began to open up, like everything else in India, publishers' associations fought hard to prevent this, and even today there are petitions pending with the government in which publishers who see themselves as 'Indian' have questioned the presence of foreign publishers in India, and many have accused them of being here illegally. The illegality or otherwise of multinational presence is a thing for the courts to decide but the questions that lie behind this age-old debate are important. Can we really, as publishers, prevent the entry of multinational publishers into India? Can markets remain protected in these days? Patently not, and the more so because some of our own houses are now expanding into international arenas. If we want our presence to be strong outside, we cannot exercise different standards for people within India. But this brings then another question: is the presence of foreign houses a new

form of colonialism? Will Indian publishing be able to hold its own in the face of competition from people who have established reputations and whose resources are much more abundant? One of the things that has already begun to happen in Indian publishing is the offering of an advance. While there is nothing wrong with this per se, the fact of the matter is that advances make sense in well-developed publishing markets, not in what are called 'emerging' markets. Here, if you have publishers who are able to offer large amounts of money to authors (and I am not saying authors should not get this money but simply that not everyone can make such offers), you are pushing up the bar to a point where the local, small, independent publisher will inevitably be pushed out and the old colonial pattern be set again. Further, foreign direct investment, foreign businesses are now a reality in India, so the real questions should be: how do we deal with them? This question is complicated by the fact that many of these businesses are in joint ventures with Indian companies, for example, India Today with HarperCollins, Penguin with Ananda Bazar Patrika, and so on. So Indian publishers need to be clear about whether they are against the *foreign* part of the business or whether they are against all *big* businesses. The Tatas, for example, recently entered into a joint venture with Landmark Bookstores and Westland Publishers, and the question is: is a totally Indian partnership (and the Tatas, though an Indian company are very much a multinational company) better than a foreign-Indian one?

A further issue complicates this picture. Much of the material being published by the foreign publishers, in fact virtually all of is, is by Indian writers, and although they began by publishing Indian writers in English, that has now expanded and changed. Penguin publishes in three or four Indian languages, Harper publishes in Hindi and English, all of them translate writers from Indian languages into English, and increasingly, they, and other smaller, independent publishers, have begun to work together with

Indian language publishers to share and exchange rights on their books. Plus, with their resources, they are able to take Indian writers out of India to international book fairs etc which helps to put Indian writing on the map although it has to be said that the exposure remains limited mainly to authors writing in English—for the most part.

So the questions become more and more complicated as we go on. There is no doubt that the international recognition for Indian writing (even if it is mainly for Indian writing in English) has come about largely—though not wholly—as a result of the presence of many of the 'foreign' publishers. But equally, there is no doubt that in the international arena the interest in India will last only until it remains the flavour of the month or the year. For publishers within India, however, Indian writers and their works are what they are committed to, and the commitment is not temporary, and there needs to be both a recognition of this and a way to provide support to Indian publishing so that it can develop to its full potential. There are very few countries in the developed or developing world today where book markets are not saturated, and where there is still potential for expansion. India is one of them—all statistics tell us that the middle classes are growing and expected to grow at a phenomenal rate, literacy is on the rise, and if this is combined with the availability, at suitable prices, of good books, there is no reason why the book market in India should not become healthy.

While the growth of the middle classes provides some reason for hope, there are other things that are important to note. R. Satyanarayan, a Chennai-based publisher, on a post on his publishing house's website (www.newhorizonmedia.com) reminds us that the per capita book title output for the whole of India is about 8 titles per 100,000 population, far lower than what it ought to be when compared to the per capita book title output in the mature publishing markets like UK, USA, France and Germany. Of all the Indian languages, English tops at 23 titles per 100,000 speakers of English in India followed

by Tamil at 11, Malayalam (8.7), Marathi (6.9), Bengali (6.3) and Gujarati (6.2), are all higher than Hindi at 5. Kannada (4.8) is higher than Telugu (4.2) and Urdu (3.9). Assamese at 7.7 is much higher than most other languages.

He goes on to remark that while Hindi may top the list in terms of the number of titles published (and there is no guarantee that these figures are indeed correct—they come from a publication by the Federation of Indian Publishers, and relate to the year 2004 and we are now in 2010) in terms of the potential size of its market, Hindi publishing needs to do much more than is currently being done. Tamil and Malayalam are the most active of the Indian languages with the other larger languages (in terms of speakers) like Marathi, Bengali, Telugu, Gujarati and Kannada lagging behind. Despite the number of titles published in Assamese being lower than all other major languages, Assamese publishing seems to be far more active than one would expect given the fewer number of speakers. Sanskrit, Sindhi and Kashmiri have too few speakers compared to the other languages for their per capita output to be comparable.

Long years ago, Robert Escarpit, researching on book reading habits across the world defined India as a region of 'book hunger'. Exciting though the publishing scene in India is today, as we stand poised on the brink of many changes and new developments, it's worth remembering that in a country where there are still millions of people who can't read, and millions who do not have access to education, there's much that remains to be done.

About the Speaker

Urvashi Butalia is a publisher and a writer based in Delhi. She is co-founder of Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house, set up in 1984, and is currently Director of Zubaan, an imprint of Kali. She has long been connected with the women's movement in India and writes and publishes on a wide range of issues to do with feminisms, gender and social movements in India. Over the years Butalia has written for a wide range of publications both at home and abroad. Key among these are *New Internationalist* (for which she writes a regular column), the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the *Times of India*, the *Hindu*, the *Hindustan Times*, *Tehelka*, *Outlook*, and others.

Among her publications are the following edited volumes: *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (1995); *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* (2001); *Inner Line: Stories by Indian Women* (2006); *Katha: Stories by Indian Women* (2007). Her best known work is her award-winning history of the Partition: *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, which won the Oral History Book Association Award (2001) and the Nikkei Asia Award for Culture (2002). She is recipient of the Pandora Award for Women's Publishing and the French Government's Chevalier des Artes et des Lettres. She is currently finishing work on two new books, *A Reader on History, Politics and Culture in India* (forthcoming from Duke University Press) and a book on sexuality and citizenship told through the life of a eunuch.

ANNEXURE I

Memorial Lectures 2007–08

Name	*Date*	*Venue*	*Speaker*	*Theme*	*Chairperson*
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	17 January 2007	India International Centre, New Delhi	Professor Christopher Winch Educational Philosophy and Policy, Kings College London, UK	Individuals, Workers or Citizens: Reflections on the Limits of School-based Educational Reform	Professor Mrinal Miri *Former Vice Chancellor* NEHU, Shillong
Zakir Husain Memorial Lecture	19 January 2007	RIE Mysore	Dr Radhika Herzberger, *Director* Rishi Valley School Chittoor Andhra Pradesh	Religion, Education and Peace	Prof. B.L. Chaudhary *Vice Chancellor* Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur Rajasthan
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	17 August 2007	RIE Bhopal	Prof. Karuna Chanana *Former Professor* Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies School of Social Sciences, JNU	Women in Indian Academe; Diversity Difference and Inequality in a Contested Domain	Prof. R.S. Sirohi *Vice Chancellor* Barkatulla University Bhopal
B.M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	11 March 2008	Laitumkhrah Women's College Shillong	Shri Ratan Thiyam *Chairperson*, Chorus Repertory Theatre Imphal	Theatre Language and Expression	Professor T. Ao *Dean*, School of Humanities, NEHU Shillong

Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	8 April 2008	RIE Ajmer Jawahar Rang Manch, Ajmer	Ms Medha Patkar *Social Activist*	Socialisation vs Politics of Education	Professor M.S. Agwani *Former Vice Chancellor* JNU
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	2 July 2008	Dorozio Hall Presidency College Kolkata	Shri Manoj Das International Centre of Education Sri Aurobindo Ashram Puducherry	Education for a Faith in the Future	Professor Sanjib Ghosh *Principal*, Presidency College, Kolkata
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	19 July 2008	RIE Bhubaneswar	Professor N.R. Menon *Member*, Commission on Centre State Relations	Realising Equality of Status and of Opportunity: Role of Government, Judiciary and Civil Society	Professor Chandrashekhar Rath *Eminent Writer*
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture*	11 September 2009	RIE Mysore	Shri U.R. Anantha Murthy Jnanpith Awardee	My Writing My Times	Professor G.H. Nayak *Kannada Literary Critic*
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	12 December 2008	Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Mumbai	Dr Sunderaraman *Director* State Health System Resource	The Educational Institution as a Health Facility	Dr (Ms) Vibhuti Patel *Professor, Head and Director* PGSK SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

*Lecture was delivered in 2009 because the speaker was ill in 2008.

ANNEXURE II

Memorial Lectures 2008–09

Name	*Date*	*Venue*	*Speaker*	*Theme*	*Chairperson*
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	28 January 2009	National Institute of Education NCERT New Delhi	Shri Anupam Mishra Gandhi Peace Foundation Delhi	Raj Samaj Aur Pani	Professor M. H. Qureshi *Former Professor* Geography, Centre for the Study of Regional Development JNU
Zakir Husain Memorial Lecture	30 January 2009	RIE Mysore	Professor Padmini Swaminathan Madras Institute of Development Studies Chennai	Literacy and Levels of Formal (General and Professional) Education of the Indian Population: A National Report Card	Professor B. Shaik Ali *Former Vice Chancellor* Mangalore University and Goa University
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	5 January 2009	RIE Bhopal	Ms Kalpana Sharma *Former Chief of the Bureau, The Hindu* Mumbai	Can Media Teach us Anything?	Dr Pushpendra Pal Singh *Head*, Department of Journalism, National University of Journalism and Communication, Bhopal

Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	14 January 2009	RIE Bhubneswar	Professor Swapan Majumdar *Director, Culture and Relations* Visva Bharati	Education as Empowerment : Twins in Search of an Alternative Education	Professor Shantanu Kumar Acharya *Eminent Writer*
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	20 January 2009	MIDS Chennai	Professor T. S. Saraswathi, *Former Professor*, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University Baroda	Culture and Development Implication for Classroom Practices	Professor S. Janakarajan *Director* Madras Institute of Development Studies Chennai
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	29 January 2009	SNDT Women's University Mumbai	Professor Sharmila Rege *Director* Kratijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Study Centre, University of Pune	Education as Tritiya Ratna: Towards Phule Ambedkarite Feminist Padagogies	Professor Chandra Krishnamurthy *Vice Chancellor* SNDT Women's University Mumbai
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	27 March 2009	Presidency College Kolkata	Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, *Former Professor* Jadavpur University Kolkata	Education for Women and Women for Education: the Case of Bengal	Professor Sanjib Ghosh *Prinicipal* Presidency College Kolkata
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	27 March 2009	Don Bosco Youth Centre Shillong	Shri P. Sainath *Rural Affair Editor* The Hindu, Mumbai	India in the Age of Inequality: Farm Crisis, Food Crisis and the Media	Ms Patricia Mukhim *Editor* *Shillong Times*
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	28 October 2009	RIE Ajmer	Professor Kamal Datta *Former Professor* Department of Physics University of Delhi	What should we Teach? An Examination of Issues Uderlying the College Curriculum	Professor Bhagirath Singh *Vice Chancellor* MDS University Ajmer

ANNEXURE III

Memorial Lectures 2009–10

Name	*Date*	*Venue*	*Speaker*	*Theme*	*Chairperson*
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	9th Feburary 2010	India International Centre New Delhi	Shri Jatin Das *Chairman* J.D. Centre of Art	Art at Home, School, University and in Public Life	Shri Ashok Vajpeyi *Chairman* Lalit Kala Akademi Delhi
Zakir Husain Memorial Lecture*					
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	11 Feburary 2010	RIE Bhopal	Shri Arvind Gupta	Science through Activities	Dr. M.N. Buch I.A.S. (Retd) *Chairman*, National Centre for Human Settlement and Environment, Bhopal
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	9 October 2009	N.E.C.A. Nongrim Hills Shillong	Professor Nandini Sundar *Professor of* Sociology Delhi School of Economics Delhi University	Social and Political Exclusion, Religious Inclusion: The Adivasi Quest in Education	Dr Kharkonger Glen *Vice Chancellor* Martin Luther Christian University Shillong
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture*					
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture*					
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture*					
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture*					
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture*					

*These lectures are yet to be organised.

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