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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

AUGUST 15, 1975  
THE BIRTHDAY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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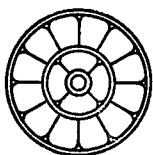
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XXVII

No. 8

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."*

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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
AUGUST 15:	
SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTHDAY AND INDIA'S DAY OF INDEPENDENCE	<i>The Mother</i> ... 619
THE MASTER (Poem)	<i>K. D. S.</i> ... 619
THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE: A TALK BY THE MOTHER IN 1953	... 620
AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF SRI AUROBINDO	... 622
SRI AUROBINDO ON REINCARNATION	... 622
SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND ON SRI AUROBINDO: A LETTER OF 1941 AND A BOOK-REVIEW OF 1942	... 623
KRISHNA (Poem)	<i>Arvind Habbu</i> ... 627
SRI AUROBINDO, OTHER TEACHINGS AND THE BUILDING OF AUROVILLE: A LETTER	<i>K. D. Sethna</i> ... 628
SHE HAS DONE ALL FOR THEE (Poem)	<i>Har Krishan Singh</i> ... 630
SOME COMMENTS ON <i>Savitri</i>	<i>Amal Kiran</i> ... 631
A TALK BY VASUDHA	... 639

CONTENTS

OUT OF THE DARK (Poem)	<i>Gill McInerney</i>	... 644
TWO SONNETS BY NIRODBARAN WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS		... 645
THY LOVE (Poem)	<i>Kamalakanto</i>	... 649
PASSAGE (Poem)	<i>Loretta</i>	... 650
FACETS	<i>Girdharlal</i>	... 652
RECONCILIATION OF THE AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE TEXTS IN THE SCRIPTURE: SHANKARA AND SRI AUROBINDO	<i>N. Jayashanmukham</i>	... 653
MERRY MONK (Poem)	<i>Peter Heehs</i>	... 659
FRANCIS THOMPSON AND THE METAPHYSICAL POETS	<i>S. N. Chakraverty</i>	... 660
Us (Poem)	<i>Ajit Rao</i>	... 666
A MODERN MYTH: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS	<i>Bina Bragg</i>	... 667
EUROPE 1974: A TRAVELOGUE	<i>Chaundona &amp; Sanat K. Banerji</i>	... 675
"LIFE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL": AUROVILLE — THE IDEAL CITY	<i>Narayan Prasad</i>	... 679

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**AUGUST 15:  
SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTHDAY  
AND INDIA'S DAY OF INDEPENDENCE**

SRI Aurobindo belongs to the future; he is the messenger of the future. He still shows us the way to follow in order to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will.

All those who want to collaborate for the progress of humanity and for India's luminous destiny must unite in a clairvoyant aspiration and in an illumined work.

THE MOTHER

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**THE MASTER**

(Lines Written in 1943)

BARD rhyming earth to paradise,  
Time-conqueror with prophet eyes,  
Body of upright flawless fire,  
Star-strewing hands that never tire —  
In Him at last earth-gropings reach  
Omniscient calm, omnipotent speech,  
Love omnipresent without ache!

Does still a stone that cannot wake  
Keep hurling though your mortal mind  
Its challenge at the epiphany?  
If you would see this blindness break,  
Follow the heart's humility —  
Question not with your shallow gaze  
The Infinite focused in that face,  
But, when the unshadowed limbs go by,  
Touch with your brow the white footfall:  
A rhythm profound shall silence all!

K.D.S.

# THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

## A TALK BY THE MOTHER IN 1953

*Q: You once said: "All that happens to us has been decided in advance."*

It is a manner of speaking. It is because in order to express something I cannot speak all the words at the same time. I am obliged to speak them one after another; if one spoke all the words at the same time they would make a huge hubbub and nobody would understand anything. Well, when one tries to explain the universe one has to do as one always does in speaking. One says one thing after another, but to utter the truth it is necessary to say everything at one stroke. How is that to be done? If I have somewhere spoken what you have quoted to me, I am bound to speak also its contrary. When you say, "All that happens to us has been decided in advance", it is as if you in the time-consciousness in which you are were to say, "Yesterday was decided what was going to happen today. This year is decided what will occur next year." It is thus that things get translated in your consciousness — naturally because it is thus that we see, think, understand and, above all, speak and express ourselves. But matters are not really like that. I could say there are people who have felt very forcefully that there was no reason why one should not speak in terms of "after" instead of in terms of "before", because the past, the future and the present are all at the same time and are only on different planes. If I tell you that what happens has been decided in advance, then indeed I should also say that what happens here has already happened elsewhere. This would be both true and false because it is impossible to express it with words.

I shall give you an example which will perhaps make you understand. It was in 1920, I think, that one day, as every day, I was meditating with Sri Aurobindo. We were on the verandah, he sitting on one side of a table and I on the other. I entered into a deep meditation; it was as if I were lifted very high or rather gone clean out of myself. I reached a place or a state of consciousness where I said to Sri Aurobindo very simply, "India is free." Remember, this was in 1920. Then he put me a question, "How?" And I replied, "Without a struggle, without a fight, without a revolution. The British themselves will leave because the state of the world will be such that they will not be able to do anything except leave." India's freedom was accomplished, even when I was talking to Sri Aurobindo in terms of the future; it was when he asked me the question that I spoke to him like that, but there where I had seen, I had just said, "India is free"; it was a fact. At that moment in 1920 India was not yet free, and still the freedom was there, a fact accomplished. Here the freedom happened in 1947; that is to say, from the outer physical point of view, I had seen 27 years in advance. But what I had seen was something really done.

*Q: Were you able to see Pakistan?*

No. Because freedom could have come without Pakistan. If one could only have listened to Sri Aurobindo there would have been no Pakistan. Oh well, outwardly

everything has the air of taking time, but really it happens as I have said.

*Q: If you see some catastrophe coming, can you change it by an effort?*

That depends on the nature of the event. A lot of things have to be considered. It depends also on the plane where one sees. There is a plane where there are all the possibilities, and on this plane, since all the possibilities are there, there is also the possibility of changing these possibilities. And if one sees on that plane a catastrophe, one can have the power to stop it. In other cases, a thing is foreseen and yet one cannot act on the event. And even here all depends on the plane where one sees. I have been told the story of a case in which merely to see was to stop the coming event. There was an American who was coming down in one of those big hotels of America where they have lifts, elevators. You never use the staircase, you always take the elevator for going up or down. Well, he had dreamt, in the early morning before waking, a dream which he clearly remembered. He had seen a boy dressed like the lift-boy and making the same gesture as the lift-boy to show you into the lift. There he was and then at the end of the gesture, there was, instead of a lift, a hearse. I mean the kind of carriage in which the dead are taken to the cemetery. When one doesn't burn them one bears them away with a catafalque and with black cloths, etc. Well, there was a carriage like that, a hearse for carrying the dead. And the boy signed to him to climb into the carriage. When now he actually left his room to go out, the boy was waiting with the elevator to take him down, exactly the same boy, the same face, the same dress, the same gesture. The American remembered the hearse and did not enter the elevator. He said, "No, no", and went down on foot. Before he reached the ground-floor, he heard a terrible noise: the elevator had crashed to the earth and all who were in it were killed. It was because of his dream that he had not got into the lift; he had understood the meaning. As a result, in this case, to see was to be able to avoid the disaster.

There are, as I have said, other cases where one simply foresees. The foreseeing happens in order that you may inwardly prepare yourself for what is to happen, that you may inwardly take the attitude suitable for facing the event. It is like a lesson telling you, "this ought to teach you." You cannot change the thing but you change your attitude and your inner reaction. Instead of having a bad reaction, a bad attitude, *vis-à-vis* the experience which occurs, you have a good one and draw as much profit as possible out of what happens. Both kinds of cases depend absolutely on the plane on which you see. When you have control over your nights and are conscious of your sleep and your dreams instead of these visions, you see also the difference between the two things. You can determine the difference between what is given you as an instruction for you to intervene and what is given you as a notice for you to take the fitting attitude face to face with the coming event. It is always a lesson but it is not always the same lesson. There are times when you can act with your will, there are times when you have to learn the inner lesson which the event is coming to give you in such a way that you will be ready to get from it the full favourable result.

## AN UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF SRI AUROBINDO

*(This letter dated 3-1-1950 was in connection with an editorial for Mother India in the days when it was a fortnightly dealing with all national and international problems, even political ones, from the viewpoint of Sri Aurobindo's thought.)*

THE article can go as the editorial as you propose and the other arrangements are all right. But I must insist that the last words "till we put ourselves in the care of some Rishi among leaders" shall go out. I do not know of course who may be acclaimed as the Rishi in question, — the only one with a recognised claim to the title is not likely to be called from Tiruvannamalai to Delhi and would certainly refuse his consent to the transfer. But it is evident that the eyes of your readers will turn at once towards Pondicherry and consider that it is a claim for my appointment either to the place filled so worthily by C.R. or the kindred place admirably occupied by Nehru. I am a candidate for neither office and any suggestion of my promotion to these high offices should be left to other announcers and the last place in which it should occur is *Mother India*. So out with the "Rishi". You may say if you like "till the eyes of India's leaders see more clearly and we can take our place at your side" or any other equally innocent phrase.

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## SRI AUROBINDO ON REINCARNATION

... THERE are certain lines that the reincarnation follows and so far as my experience goes and general experience goes, one follows usually a single line. But the alteration of sex cannot be declared impossible. There may be some who do alternate. The presence of feminine traits in a male does not necessarily indicate a past feminine birth, — they may come in the general play of forces and their formations. There are besides qualities common to both sexes. Also a fragment of the psychological personality may have been associated with a birth not one's own. One can say of a certain person of the past, "That was not myself, but a fragment of my psychological personality was present in him." Rebirth is a complex affair and not so simple in its mechanism as in the popular idea ...

The Mother only speaks to people about their past births when she sees definitely some scene or memory of their past in concentration ...

*(The Centenary Edition, Vol. 22, Letters, pp. 448, 457)*



# SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND ON SRI AUROBINDO

A LETTER OF 1941 AND A BOOK-REVIEW OF 1942

I

24 Lansdowne Road, London, W-11 Dec. 17-1941.

Dear Mr. Dilip Roy,

You will be glad to hear that after a very careful study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* I have to-day written to the Royal Swedish Academy recommending him for the Nobel Prize. It so happens that I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature so that my recommendation is accepted though that does not mean that the Nobel Prize will be given to him; other recommendations will have to be considered.

I am indeed grateful to you for having sent me the book. I really do quite genuinely consider it the greatest book which has been produced in my time and I have learned some very valuable things from it which I would much like to have known before — all the arguments for re-birth for instance. I am so very happy in the present life I have never troubled much to think of any other. Then all he has said about the different planes of existence has greatly interested me. In my two books *Life in the Stars* and *The Living Universe* I have written much on life on other planets of other stars and on some of the inhabitants being on a higher level of being than we are. But I had not then realised all that I have now learned from *The Life Divine*.

I well remember hearing you sing in Calcutta in March 1937 and often wished I could meet you again. It was a great delight therefore to hear from you. This war has been a terrible catastrophe and we here in London suffered badly. I have been all through it and helped in Air Raid Precautions. But bad as it is the calamity has had one good effect; it has turned men's mind to God. Men realise now the value of religion as they never did before. And *The Life Divine* could not have appeared at a more opportune moment. Some time must elapse before its importance can be appreciated. Then slowly and surely it will make its influence felt.

With very many thanks and every good wish for the New Year, believe me.

Yours very sincerely,

Francis Younghusband

## AN INDIAN SEER

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

**The Life Divine:** by Sri Aurobindo. Calcutta, Arya Publishing House, £2.12.6.

Mr. Aurobindo has been known in India for many years. In Europe and America only a few have heard of him. Now, however, in three volumes of closely reasoned exposition in a fine English prose, he has summed up what for many years he has been pouring forth in India in articles, booklets and poems. They may do for India in the combination of religion with philosophy something of what Tagore has done in saturating poetry with religion, and what Mr. Gandhi has done in combining politics and religion.

Mr. Aurobindo has special qualifications for interpreting the East to the West and the West to the East, for he was educated in England and won a classical scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, in 1890; and besides learning English and French, Latin and Greek, he then also studied Italian in order to appreciate Dante, and German to understand Goethe. He is more of the type of St. Thomas Aquinas than St. Francis, and while remaining Indian to the core, and rooting his philosophy deep in the Sanscrit classics, he has so clearly expounded the fundamental truths of every religion that followers of each may draw enlightenment from him and become all the more ardent worshippers of God in their own particular way. On Hindu philosophy he has grafted much of the best of European thought and to Hindu religion he has imparted much of the Christian spirit. Christ he looks upon as an Incarnation of God, — as an Avatar like Krishna and Buddha. And the European philosopher with whom he has closest affinity is Bergson. With this combination of Eastern and Western thought and religion he is able to show the vast possibilities of a spiritualized, divinized human life on this earth.

#### Materialism Rejected

He will have nothing to do with the philosophy which would make physical science the final arbiter. Nor will he accept the precisely opposite view that ultimately all is spirit. Rather does he accept both matter and spirit as real. The body and mind are not the creators of the spirit; the spirit is the creator of mind and body. There is no body without soul and no body that is not itself a form of soul. Mind and life are too different from matter to be products of it. Matter itself is a product of energy, and mind and life must be regarded as superior products of the same energy. In Mr. Aurobindo's view, then, whatever may be the outward material form of our being, there is behind it a greater, a truer existence of which the material form is only

the external result and physically sensible aspect. Behind our gross physical being are other and subtler grades of substance with a finer law and a greater power, which support the denser body. And it is one of his cardinal principles that we can substitute their higher, purer, intenser conditions of being for the grossness and limitations of our present physical life. And if that be so, then, in his view the evolution of a nobler physical existence ceases to be a dream, and becomes a possibility founded upon a rational and philosophic truth. He, in fact, foresees "a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant" and the eventual conquest of death, — an earthly immortality.

### The Supreme Self

At the summit of being Mr. Aurobindo sees the Absolute, the Supreme Self, of whom cosmic Joy and Beauty and Love are the most intimate revelations. And this God is both Impersonal and Personal. We can say that God is Love, God is Wisdom, God is Truth or Righteousness. But if God is Love He is also the Lover. He is not an impersonal state. He is at once absolute and universal and individual. The Impersonal and the Person live in each other and are obverse and reverse of the same Reality. This Creator and Ruler of the Universe Mr. Aurobindo looks upon as a World Mother and of this divine Being we ourselves, he holds, are not merely the children: we are parts. "The soul is an eternal portion of the Supreme and not a fraction of Nature; it is not a perishable cell or a dissoluble portion of the Cosmic Spirit but has its original immortal reality in the Transcendence." This soul, subsisting in a subtle body, or case, or sheath, which is the subtle physical support of the inner being, survives death, carries forward mind and life with it on its journey to other planes of existence. And it is in this subtle body that the soul passes out of its material lodging. But if it survives death, it has pre-existed: it has had a long succession of re-births in lower forms of life upon this earth. And after a period of existence in other planes it will return to earth, not indeed again to animal form, as some Hindus have supposed, but in new human forms. The soul has not finished what it has to do by merely developing into humanity: it has still to develop that humanity into its higher possibilities.

What then are these higher possibilities? What will the higher being into which man may evolve be like? If after strict spiritual discipline in great stillness of soul he will open himself out to the descent of God into him, he will find his whole way of being, thinking, living, acting, governed by a vast universal spirituality. He will feel the Divine Presence in every centre of his consciousness, in every vibration of his life-force, in every cell of his body. And the power and expression of the Spirit will be seen in the joy of a satisfied being, the happiness of a fulfilled nature, in the beauty and plenitude, the hidden sweetness and laughter in things, and in the sunshine and gladness of life. But even the exaltation and the ecstasy of the first mystical experience will not be the highest state. It will only be a step upward. In the highest ascent there will be a beatific tranquillity of eternal peace. Peace and ecstasy will cease to be different and become one. There will be a calm and deep delight of all existence. Then "the

calm and peace will rise together, as one state, into an increasing intensity, and culminate in the eternal ecstasy, the bliss that is the infinite”.

### **A Transformed Humanity**

This is the culmination to which we may aspire and reach. But having reached it and made it our own, Mr. Aurobindo does not bid us remain apart in solitude uninterested in our fellows. On the contrary, he urges that he who has attained to this perfection should, with the light and power and bliss of the Spirit, which are now his, enter into life and transform it. The calm should give place to a fiery ardour, to a golden drive, a greater dynamic and a vehement impetus of rapid transformation. The illumined one should bring into being the possibilities of the Divine that are already in the world. He should bring to pass that perfection which has been dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity. Thus Mr. Aurobindo does not look upon life on the earth as a preparation for a life in some distant heaven above the clouds. He would make heaven of earth. He would raise men to the Divine level. Again and again would those who have once lived here be re-incarnated in some new body and work to raise human life to the Divine. And besides the rising of man into the Godhead there would be the descent of God into humanity, — the Incarnation of God into human form, — to show man what he is capable of becoming, and thus give a proof which all can see that man can become God without even leaving the body. Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect, is an injunction which evidently Mr. Aurobindo would have us take quite literally.

### **Individual Synthesis**

Space does not allow of any reference to the author's views on intuition, on the Subliminal Self, on other worlds. It can only be said that the touch of a powerful and subtle mind is evident everywhere in the exposition of his philosophy. He absorbs and digests the past. But he retains his own individuality, and, in freedom from all ties, expresses his own distinct self with sharpness, precision and courage.

The reading of his book leaves us with a doubt and a regret. The doubt (leaving on one side the difficulty inherent in the author's conception of the “subtle body”) is whether evolution is a one-way process up and down, — whether it may not rather be a rhythmic process, devolution alternating with evolution, waxing and waning in everlasting undulation, now on the planet of this Sun, now on the planets of other suns throughout the universe. The regret is that the author of this work should remain in such seclusion. Though all who see his photograph are struck by his Christ-like appearance he has not been seen in public for thirty years. He is personally only known to the little group of disciples who have collected round him, and the influence of this personality is the ruby lost to the world. In any case, however, there does issue from him and his group an inspiration which should greatly serve the New World order.

The kingdom of God without will have to be built upon the kingdom of God that is within us. And in awakening that spirit the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo may play a striking part.

*(The Times Literary Supplement, London, Saturday, January 17, 1942)*

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## KRISHNA

I SAW a child face look out at me  
Rich with the joy of an azure calm,  
A smile of beauty patterned his lips.  
His eyes were a gleam with the twinkle of stars,  
His breath was linked to the gentle breeze,  
His features were a loveliness softly hewn  
From the splendour and magic of creative Light.  
No word was spoken but a feeling came  
Deep and vibrant, entrancing all.  
He gazed in my eyes. I came to know  
A something urgent escaping my thoughts;  
And I played with a Largeness not yet my own ...

Still I linger in that wordless joy,  
Still I breathe that mystic breath,  
Still I wonder, and still I hope  
To see again those world-wide eyes.

ARVIND HABBU

# **SRI AUROBINDO, OTHER TEACHINGS AND THE BUILDING OF AUROVILLE**

## **A LETTER**

YOUR circular is full of goodwill and a sincere desire to bring about harmony. You seem to have come across Aurobindonians who tend to be religious rather than spiritual in their attitudes. It is the typical religious mind that sets up one alleged revelation in opposition to the approaches of other religions towards God. But one who claims to do an Integral Yoga cannot be exclusive in this fashion or come out with cudgels against people who are not yet aware of what Sri Aurobindo stands for. No true Aurobindonian tries to bully or brow-beat anyone into becoming an Aurobindonian.

However, one must realise what is meant by saying, as you do, that a newcomer from an old Teaching has to be brought to a point where Sri Aurobindo can take over and that the old Teaching should be given its due as the newcomer's starting-point. If the old Teaching is a "starting-point" and if Sri Aurobindo has to "take over", surely it is admitted that there is something in Sri Aurobindo which exceeds the old Teaching and effects a consummation not possible with the old Teaching. When this is admitted, one cannot just say: "It has all been said before two thousand years ago and in other ages too." One cannot remain simply a Christian, a Buddhist, a Judaeic, a Zoroastrian, a Mohammedan, a Bahai or even an adherent to the Vedantic Hinduism which served as the base and background to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga — one cannot just be any of these things and still be an Aurobindonian. One does not "exclude" the old Teachings, for exclusion would run counter to integrality, but one certainly cannot keep them as they were. You have yourself understood Sri Aurobindo to imply that his Yoga "goes beyond Buddha, Christ, Krishna and other Teachings". If Sri Aurobindo "includes" all the Teachings of the past and yet goes beyond them, why does one have to keep them at all in their old recognisable forms instead of plunging whole-heartedly into Sri Aurobindo?

If we keep harking back to the great figures from whom the old Teachings emanated and to the terms in which they have chiefly gone home to humanity, we shall merely be using Sri Aurobindo to give a new look to the religious forces of the past. No doubt, we must not disdain these forces, but there must be what I may paradoxically call a sympathetic good-bye to them, a friendly break-away. Those forces have their own counterparts in Sri Aurobindo: so there will be no real loss, but they will now work in a wider context and be infused with new meanings. If that context and those meanings are to yield their full life-value and bring us a pull from the future in addition to a push from the past, the old associations need to disappear, however gently and gradually. Otherwise we shall never get the total benefit of the light which Sri Aurobindo embodied for us. I may specifically make it clear that I do not mean

only an adapting of the old Teachings to changed modern conditions. I mean something more than old wine in new bottles or even new wine in old bottles. In a certain important sense there have to be both new wine and new bottles. Two basic instances in point are the Aurobindonian concepts of "Supermind" and "Transformation".

Sri Aurobindo says that he brought the term "Supermind" into general use and now it is employed in various ways quite far from his intention. Similarly he remarks that people talk of "Transformation" in senses that are very different from what he wants. Sri Aurobindo's "Supermind" makes a fundamental difference in our vision of God's activity and purpose in the world, and Sri Aurobindo's "Transformation" carries us far beyond all previous ideals of sagehood, seerhood, sainthood. Time and again he has explained the precise content of these two key-terms of his Integral Yoga and how they make this Yoga very new on the whole in spite of old aims, methods, disciplines and experiences forming part of it, especially in the early stages.

Now I come to what you write on love of one's fellows as a builder of Auroville. There is a fundamental truth in what I may call the essence of your message. For, the love you speak of is a mighty idealism and a forgetfulness of oneself. Your vision answers in its own way to Sri Aurobindo's in those glorious lines of *Savitri*:

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;  
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,  
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here;  
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.

But you will observe that Sri Aurobindo's definition of love is openly charged with a sense of "heaven", the "Transcendent", the "Absolute". Unless these high realities are made an active force in the lover's consciousness, the unity towards which love drives will never be set on its way to consummation. Unquestionably, if one is not capable of loving the human, one will not have the capacity to love the Divine, just as one's love of the Divine will not be complete if cut off from love of the human. But the converse is even truer and more basic: one cannot fully and freely love the human without rooting oneself in love of the Divine.

What we name love of one another is as much coloured — whether grossly or subtly — by egoism as any other movement of our nature, however high-pitched it may be. The gospel of love of one's fellows has been preached repeatedly but it has never brought about the hoped-for results. As long as no attempt is made towards an inner wideness and tranquillity which would lead us to an already existent Universal Being, the single infinite Self in all — as long as no turn is there towards the deep-hidden "psyche" in us to whom God the beatific Super-Person is ever real as its Lord and its Origin, as the Master and Source of the whole world — we shall always have in our love a seeking for the satisfaction of our desires, a feeling of disgruntlement at things not going as we might wish, and even a resentment if the sort of response we want is not forthcoming. Our fine dreams and grand hopes will invariably founder on

the blind rock of our divided egos.

A conscious Yoga must accompany the movement of love for our fellows, an intense turn both to the Cosmic Presence and to the Personal Divinity beyond all beings as well as within them. Then alone will love bring heaven to earth. Then alone shall Auroville be the City of Dawn built from the Light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

K. D. SETHNA

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## SHE HAS DONE ALL FOR THEE

IF thou wouldst view the world with eyes of dust  
 Whose vision does not cross the bounds of colour,  
 Which pierce not bodied forms and moulds of crust,  
 Thy gaze will broken be and multi-polar,  
 Confused, wrong-focused, judging by the rust  
 Of things that hides the truth, unprobed by solar  
 One-centred sight. O seeker, if thou must  
 Win verity, be then such sight's controller.

She has not left thee, seeker, all alone,  
 Thou dost not truly seek but shut thy eyes.  
 First purify thyself, stand empty grown  
 Of self-deception, pleasures, tricks and lies.  
 Rinse free of mud thy being's unclean bowl,  
 She has done all for thee. Look deep, O soul.

HAR KRISHAN SINGH



## SOME COMMENTS ON SAVITRI

### I

THE opening passage of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* — the block of the first 78 lines from

*It was the hour before the Gods awake*

to

*All can be done if the God-touch is there —*

is often regarded as the most difficult, the most obscure in the whole epic. Its obscurity lies precisely in its description of an obscurity, a darkness, a night which covers the world. What is the nature of the tenebrous phenomenon pictured in lines 2-4 of the passage in relation to the 1st? —

*Across the path of the divine event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.*

The common impression is that the very beginning of the universal manifestation is spoken of. According to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy, the manifestation, of which earth's history is a part, begins with a stark Inconscience in which all that we understand by the Supreme Divine is submerged and concealed. From the total Involution cosmic Evolution starts: the submerged qualities of the Supreme Divine gradually emerge, the concealed powers of the Superconscience come out of the Inconscience, grade after grade. First, organised Matter takes shape — next, Life with its sensations and desires springs forth — then, Mind perceptive and conceptive appears — and, finally, there will be a disclosure of all that lies beyond mentality, the various phases of the Supreme Divine culminating in the quaternary: Supermind (*Vijñāna*), Bliss (*Ānanda*), Consciousness-Force (*Chit-tapas*), Existence (*Sat*).

Now, does the Night, which features in *Savitri*'s opening passage, stand for this Inconscience at the commencement of things?

The initial clue to the right answer is in the very title of the Canto: "The Symbol Dawn." The title refers to the dawn of the day which is characterised in the line which occurs at the end of the first canto:

*This was the day when Satyavan must die.*

The dawn in question serves as a symbol. The symbolic content is stated in the verses picturing the occult power that has the natural daybreak as its suggestive front and communicative medium:

*A glamour from the unreached transcendences  
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,  
A message from the unknown immortal Light  
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,  
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues  
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.*

A further pointer follows:

*It wrote the lines of a significant myth  
Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns ...  
Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed  
Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares ...  
A lonely splendour from the invisible goal  
Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.*

In short, what is symbolised is the descent of the Supramental Godhead into the world's mental human consciousness for a total transformative purpose. A brief fore-glimpse is given of the invasion of Cosmic Ignorance by the Transcendent Knowledge. This Cosmic Ignorance, whose highest term is the mind groping towards Truth, is itself an evolute from the basic Inconscience. If the Transcendent Knowledge is the Reality of which the symbol is the dawn of the last day in Satyavan's life, this basic Inconscience would be the Reality of which the symbol is the night preceding that dawn. And actually the night and the dawn are connected by Sri Aurobindo when he first brings in the dawn motif:

*A hope stole in that hardly dared to be  
Amid the Night's forlorn indifference.*

These two lines come immediately after the opening passage of *Savitri* has closed with

*All can be done if the God-touch is there.*

Thus "the huge foreboding mind of Night" is linked with the Symbol Dawn. And already before the opening passage ends we have the mention of this dawn:

*Insensibly somewhere a breach began:  
A long lone line of hesitating hue  
Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart  
Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep.*

What arrives in the wake of the hesitating hue is an illumining outbreak of the divine vision:

*An eye of deity pierced through the dumb deeps;*

and the eye is called

*A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun.*

Nowhere do we find any disjunction between the symbol dawn and the night preceding it. All that we find is different phases of this night. From a condition which Sri Aurobindo describes by saying

*A fathomless zero occupied the world*

and later

*The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still*

we pass to another state about which he says:

*Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;  
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea  
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,  
Something that wished but knew not how to be,  
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.*

In other words, the symbolised Inconscience shades off into the less stark symbolised Ignorance — a state comparatively closer to the hesitating hue's "long lone line".

So much for the initial clue of the Canto's title. It has led us to several points in the whole passage driving home its suggestion. But in fact we do not need to go far afield to prove that the night is the particular period of darkness prior to the particular period of light during which Satyavan is going to die. We have only to consider turns of expression like the following, which occur on the heels of "the huge foreboding mind of Night":

*Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,  
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse  
The abyss of the unbodied Infinite ...  
As in a dark beginning of all things,  
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown ...  
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force ...*

Here directly the word "symbol" is used about the night and we are told that what is happening is "as if" at the time when the original Inconscience started to disgorge an evolving universe from its depths. We have an explicit comparison in either instance. Again, there is the obvious word "semblance" telling us that this night is not the

“Unknown” itself but only something like it in muteness and featurelessness. And the line,

*Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,*

matches the two later ones commencing with “Almost”, which we have already quoted. Just as these declare the unmanifest Superconscience in the dawn-glamour, this one provides an inkling of the original Inconscience in the dark hour upon which that magic light breaks. It is this hour, and not anything else, that is spoken of in *Savitri’s* opening line. And in the line itself a subtle sign that we are not at “the dark beginning of all things” is caught from the difference in the tenses:

*It was the hour before the Gods awake.*

Why does Sri Aurobindo not write “awoke”? The reason is that he is pointing not to an event which once happened but to one that constantly and repeatedly happens. It will hardly do to say that the Historic Present—a literary device to secure vividness—is being used. If such is the case, what is the idea of not employing the same narrative device in the first half of the line? Why are we not told: “It is the hour ...”?

We get again a significant present tense slightly later when Sri Aurobindo tells us of the cosmic drowse of ignorant force

*Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns  
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.*

A situation covering a long span of ages, including the continuous cosmic phenomenon of stars shining and the continuous terrestrial phenomenon of human history, finds an allusion in “kindles” and “carries”. The night described is not the primeval inconscience but an image of it such as comes numberless times in that long span of the ages during which the kindling of suns and the carrying of lives are ever present. The coming, time and again, of the primeval Inconscience’s image in the form of night preceding day is clinched for us by Sri Aurobindo writing:

*Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,  
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs  
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.*

“Once more” is unmistakable in its implication. Nor is it an isolated locution. Its occurrence fairly early in the Night-passage links up with a reiteration of it at almost the conclusion of the passage and in the middle of the Dawn-passage following it:

*But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,  
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,  
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt  
And old experience laboured out once more ....*

*Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;  
Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm  
Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;  
A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.*

Evidently what happened several times in the course of things is indicated — what is painfully recovered after each oblivious sleep which represents the primeval Inconscience, an obtruding on the night's vacancy by the advent of the Dawn-goddess who momentarily lets the transcendent Light through. We may add that just a little before the one passage's end we have a preparation of the next passage with the mention of the scout from the Sun. About the "message" of this "eye of deity" which "pierced through the dumb deeps" Sri Aurobindo continues:

*Intervening in a mindless universe,  
Its message crept through the reluctant hush  
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy  
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,  
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.*

Mark the adjective "renewed". The "consent to see and feel" comes not just on one occasion but on a series of occasions as dawn follows night time after time.

What, in fact, Sri Aurobindo posits in

*It was the hour before the Gods awake*

is a religio-mythic concept, that has been part of India's temple-life for millennia: the daily awaking of the Gods.

The Gods are the Powers that carry on the harmonious functions by which the universe moves on its progressive path. According to an old belief, based on a subtle knowledge of the antagonism between the Lords of Falsehood and the Lords of Truth, the period of night interrupts the work of the Truth-Lords by its obscuration of sight and by its pulling down of the consciousness into sleep. Each day, with the onset of darkness the Gods are stopped in their functions by the Demons: the Gods pass into an oblivious slumber. Each day, with the advent of light they emerge into activity and continue their progress-creating career. Traditionally the moment of their awaking, termed "Brahma-muhurta", is 4 a.m. Every temple in India rings its bells and clangs its cymbals at 4 a.m. to stir the deities, no less than the devotees, into

action. The "hour", therefore, which *Savitri* depicts at its start may be taken, if we are to be literal, as 3-4 a.m. The termination of this hour is "the divine event" mentioned in the second line.

That this is so and that a particular religious custom which points to a local and temporal occurrence is in view are most aptly indicated by the 4th line, stating the place where Night's mind was alone:

*In the unlit temple of eternity.*

Connecting the event of the Gods' awaking after the hour between 3 and 4 a.m. every day in Indian temples, there is the hit-in-the-eye word "temple" used by Sri Aurobindo.

Yes, the common impression that the very beginning of the universal manifestation is depicted is definitely off the mark. But we must not overlook the background of such an impression. The original primeval Inconscience from which all manifestation has sprung is certainly a looming enormity visible through the Night-passage. If it were not so the passage would not be as symbolic as the Dawn-passage. The exaggeration we must guard against is the forgetting of the symbolic act: we must refrain from mixing up the Symbol and the Reality.

Perhaps we may effect a species of reconciliation between the common impression and our explanation by another manner of presenting the symbolisation — a manner which also can be justified from Sri Aurobindo. Here we have to say: "There is in each night a small temporary Inconscience, a passing snatch of the Great Darkness that is the divinely ordained womb of our cosmos. In this snatch we can glimpse the movement by which the Darkness grew less and less impenetrable and passed into what we may call Dimness awaiting illumination: the phenomenon which Sri Aurobindo tersely catches in the phrase about the Inconscient being teased to wake Ignorance. The symbolisation consists in each night being the primeval Night itself in a local transient miniature."

Before we close our discussion we may warn against the temptation to say: "Sri Aurobindo is sketching the old Indian conception of the Cosmos passing into *laya*, non-manifestation, again and again and emerging repeatedly out of that Darkness into phenomenal existence." First of all, *laya* is not Darkness: it is simply non-manifestation. Secondly the emergence of Ignorance from the Inconscient, the appearance of half-knowledge or finite consciousness, on the way to plenary knowledge or Super-consciousness by means of a progressive evolution, is not considered by Sri Aurobindo a repetitive process. He conceives it to be one extreme possibility of self-revelation adopted by the Divine in the course of His varied "adventure of consciousness and joy" in terms of time and space. For, as Sri Aurobindo says in *The Riddle of This World*,<sup>1</sup> "once manifestation began infinite possibility also began and among the infinite possibilities which it is the function of the universal manifestation to

<sup>1</sup> The 1933 edition, Calcutta, p. 101.

work out, the negation, the apparent effective negation — with all its consequences — of the Power, Light, Peace, Bliss was very evidently one.” Here is a unique dire experiment, a horrific wager with Himself that the Almighty makes because this too must appear at some point as a mode of phenomenal self-projection. Besides, an actual full repetition of “a dark beginning of all things” would never be called a “symbol”, a “semblance” and introduced by “as if”.

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So far we have gone by internal evidences and general considerations. Now for a couple of quotations from Sri Aurobindo’s letters on *Savitri*, providing an indirect elucidation of the problem. When we say “indirect”, we do not mean that they leave any doubt lingering: we merely mean that they are not directly meant to solve the difficulty. The solution emerges in the course of answers to other questions.

The first excerpt<sup>1</sup> runs:

“...do you seriously want me to give an accurate scientific description of the earth half in darkness and half in light so as to spoil my impressionist symbol or else to revert to the conception of the earth as a flat and immobile surface? I am not writing a scientific treatise, I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal. One who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is Night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness. If I sacrifice this impressionism and abandon the image of the earth wheeling through dark space I might as well abandon the symbol altogether, for this is a necessary part of it. As a matter of fact in the passage itself earth in its wheeling does come into the dawn and pass from darkness into the light. You must take the idea as a whole and in all its transitions and not press one detail with too literal an insistence...”

Obviously the objection to which Sri Aurobindo replies is that the opening passage of *Savitri* suggests the whole earth to be plunged in darkness whereas the actuality disclosed by post-Copernican science is half-earth experiencing night and half-earth experiencing day. The very terms of the objection imply the view we have presented in our comments — namely, that Sri Aurobindo’s immediate subject is one particular earthly night. If this view had been wrong, Sri Aurobindo would at once have criticised it. But his reply proceeds on the same view and thereby supports our presentation and, while thus proceeding, he has several expressions which leave no room for the notion that the original Inconscience prior to the earth was the explicit vision. The explicit vision is: “the image of the earth wheeling through dark space...” Through this image a number of profound insights are conveyed, but

<sup>1</sup> The 1972 edition of *Savitri*, pp. 733-34

nowhere does it lose its central and frontal position. And we have to mark the adjectives in the phrase: "a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature" — as well as to observe the clear pointers everywhere that it is the earth's partial and temporary night that impressionistically serves for the symbolisation.

Our next excerpt dwells further on the symbolisation, in answer to a critic's feeling that the poet is drawing out his description to an inordinate length. Sri Aurobindo's defence<sup>1</sup> goes:

"His objection of *longueur* would be perfectly just if the description of the night and the dawn had been simply of physical night and physical dawn; but here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised; here it is a relapse into Inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind the 'day' of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement. So understood there is nothing here otiose or unnecessary; all is needed to bring out by suggestion some aspect of the thing symbolised and so start adequately the working out of the significance of the whole poem."

The chief operative turn of speech for our purpose in the above is: "a relapse into Inconscience." The term "relapse" indicates indisputably a new setback, involving in the case before us a particular occasion for the unconscious condition such as happens each night in the course of the 24-hour cycle through which the earth passes repeatedly. We may also note that what makes the symbol of an inner reality and so takes us beyond the merely physical in import is, after all, the physical night and physical dawn constituting the earth's daily phases. The Inconscience that is there is primarily the one in which the soul and Nature sink during the recurrent nocturnal phase. Even though "the main purpose" of the description is to conjure up the "dark beginning of all things" as a presence, it is only through an instance of the earth's recurrent nocturnal phase that this presence is conjured up.

AMAL KIRAN

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 792-93.



## A TALK BY VASUDHA

*(This is the second talk given by Vasudha on 4.4.1975 at 10.40 a.m. in the Hall of Harmony to the students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The first talk appeared in the June issue of Mother India.)*

I HAVE been asked to tell you something about the Darshans. I can tell you how the Darshans used to be from the 21st February 1928 only, because that was the first Darshan I had of Sri Aurobindo.

There were three Darshans a year. We called them Darshans because we used to see Mother and Sri Aurobindo together. We saw them on 21st February, 15th August and 24th November. We saw Sri Aurobindo only thrice a year but from very close. We went near him, did Pranam to him and he blessed us with his hand on our head.

My first Darshan was in the Meditation Hall upstairs.

There is a big sofa there even now — Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to sit on it and give us Darshan. At that time we were very few in the Ashram, and very few visitors were permitted for Darshan. The day previous to the Darshan, or two days in advance, the list of the names of all those who would be going for it was made and put up in the hall downstairs for everyone to read. One copy of it used to be with Sri Aurobindo at Darshan time. According to the order in which the names were written in the list, we had to go, and when Sri Aurobindo saw a new person coming he took up the list to see who that person was. I have still with me the list of the names of the people who went for Darshan on 21st February 1928. I should have brought it to show it to you.

I was to go for Darshan with my brother. We took flowers — we could offer flowers. From outside the Hall, from the staircase steps we could see what the previous person was doing but we would enter the Hall only individually. Each one was allowed some time to make his offering and do Pranam to both Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Generally the Darshan would start at about 6 or 6.30 in the morning. It did not last very long as there were not many people, but still it lasted two or three hours as people were allowed some time. Since we used to see Sri Aurobindo only thrice a year, we were not hurried on.

On the day of my first Darshan there were about 65 people — Sadhaks plus visitors. In the afternoon Mother would distribute among the Sadhaks the garlands received at Darshan time. She gave each one of us a garland. And then at night we used to get soup from her, as on all other days. But on Darshan days we used to decorate with flowers a canopy over her seat.

That very year or the next the Darshan room was changed. The Darshan was held in the small room at the further end of the upstairs Meditation Hall. There is still the sofa there with Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Darshan photo on it. You must have seen it.

These Darshans thrice a year went on till November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo had an accident. We did not have Sri Aurobindo's Darshan on the 24th November that year. Until Sri Aurobindo recovered we had only Mother's Darshan.

After he had recovered, the Darshan was no more as before. We did not go near Sri Aurobindo as we had done formerly. The number of people also had increased and as Sri Aurobindo was unable to sit for a very long time the Darshan was made simpler; we had to pass before him and Mother in a line outside the small room, without going inside individually to them.

As we had Sri Aurobindo's Darshan only three times a year and since we had missed two Darshans (November 24, 1938 and February 21, 1939) on account of the accident, the need to see Sri Aurobindo was felt very acutely and, August being still far away, another date in the calendar had to be found before that month. Thus 24th April, the date of Mother's final arrival here (1920), was decided upon.

After that, there wasn't much change, except that, much later, in April 1949 and 1950, after the groups got their coloured uniforms, in addition to the regular Darshan all the groups had the privilege of marching past Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Is there anything more I can tell you? Many of you may not have ever seen Sri Aurobindo. In those days generally we used to see Mother once in the morning — this was 'Pranam' time; then, in the evening when she went out for a drive, we stood on the road and saw her go; and then again at night when she gave us soup. These three times all those who wanted to see her could do so.

Sometimes Mother called people for a meditation or for an interview with her individually in the morning. Some she called once a month, some twice a month, some once a week, and some even more often.

In the evening before going for her drive she would sometimes go to some Sadhaks' rooms on a visit. These were her activities mostly.

There was another thing (which of course I have not seen myself though I was here). In 1928 the Dining Room was where we have now Prithvisingh's room and Ravindra's cold-storage. The Dining Room was for men only. Lunch would be served and the plates kept ready; Mother herself would take each plate and give it to each sadhak. One plate was served for Mother also, from which she would taste a little and give the whole plate to a sadhak as prasad by turns. The women were few at that time but, as Mother did not like men and women sitting together for food, the food was sent to their rooms. Later on she arranged for a dining room for women in the Ashram compound—the room which is the cartonnerie at present.

*Q. When did the Balcony Darshan begin?*

It seems it started sometime in 1938 after Sri Aurobindo had the accident and we could not see Mother for Pranam in the morning. She was busy then. I don't remember details because I never noted down these things. Also, perhaps the

Sadhaks wanted to see her before starting their daily work. And so she started the Balcony Darshan.

*Q. Did she give flowers every time?*

At Darshan time she did not give them. When she called us for an interview or meditation or on a birthday she used to give flowers. And also at Pranam time.

*Q. Say something about the Terrace Darshan.*

Mother's new room upstairs was not there then. The second floor was a flat terrace. She used to go to that terrace, specially after a hair-wash to dry her hair in the sun. She used to go with a parasol—I remember I had embroidered parasols for Mother. To match her sari I had embroidered one with suns on white satin. What is usually known as Terrace Darshan used to be on the top of Dyuman's room. She used to walk there accompanied by Chinmayi. There was a time somewhere in 1944-5 when Mother used to come and stand on the terrace in the evening and give a short meditation. Down below, in the courtyard, the sadhaks would occupy each a square of the concrete floor and sit and meditate.

*Mahendra: Tell us the story of the "supramental fish".*

Oh! Supramental fish? (*laughing*) You all know that I used to do embroidery for Mother. I embroidered many sarees for her. The design on one of the sarees I had done was fishes in the sea. The fishes were in gold and silver. After I had finished the saree, some thread was left, so I thought, "Why not make a fish for Sri Aurobindo? He must have eaten fish long ago. Now he doesn't eat it any more. So I can make one in gold, fill it up with chocolates and give it to him to eat." So I embroidered the two sides of a fish, stitched it up and made it into a fish-shape bag with the mouth open, through which I filled the body with gold-coin chocolates which we used to get in those days. I gave the fish to Mother, saying that it was for Sri Aurobindo. She took it to him. The next day I received a letter from Sri Aurobindo:

Vasudha,

It is a supramental fish surely.

Every detail so perfectly filled in.

Sri Aurobindo

I was naturally thrilled. I had not expected such a response from him.

But after that, one day I found those two sides of the fish on a "crown" of the Mother! The bag had been taken from Sri Aurobindo, the two pieces opened up and stitched on a band which she wore round the forehead to keep the saree in place there. My first feeling on seeing it was not too happy, though it was on *her* crown! I thought I had made it for Sri Aurobindo; then why did she take it away? (*laughter*)

*Q: Please recount some reminiscences of your long association with Mother.*

There are so many incidents. If you remind me of any like the one recounted just now, I can relate it to you. Otherwise I shall have to prepare beforehand. On the spot it is not possible to say much, and everything cannot be told.

*Q: How did she teach you not to waste things?*

Yes, we were taught economy by Mother — not to waste things at all. You must have seen small notes written by Sri Aurobindo, on bits of paper, or in the margin or on any ordinary paper which we would have simply thrown away. You may have seen the envelopes they give at Prosperity — often they are used ones turned inside out, to be used again. Even old clothes, Mother said, should not be thrown away, but must be used as dusters, etc. If the clothes are a little torn, they should be mended. Mother's clothes were always mended before washing; that was one of our daily works. Before washing her clothes we had to go through each one to see if it needed any mending.

You know we used to get tins which were covered entirely with paper labels. There were some people who went too far in their economy and they would remove those labels very carefully in order to write on the other side which was blank. I do not know if it was really economical, for it helped the tins rust faster.

*Q: Will you tell us how you came here?*

I have already spoken of that at "Knowledge" in February. It will be a repetition.

*Q: It was not told to the same children.*

Yes, but for me it will be a repetition. I could very well make you hear the tape-recording. Besides, the talk will be published in *Mother India* soon — you can read it or I can read it out to you one day. To say it all over again is not interesting. I must get into that spirit — without the spirit it will sound very flat.

*Urmila: Will you tell us about your 'Bourse'?*

Bourse? (*laughing*) Caught me! O.K. So I shall tell you the story. We had no school then. My brother used to teach me mathematics. He was an engineer. He taught me mathematics in French. You know that in the French books, under some of the problems, 'Bourse' is written, which means scholarship. So these were the problems given to students in France for scholarship exams. There were many such problems at the end of the book. Out of them my brother gave me about seven or eight to do and told me that if I did them all correctly he would give me a 'Bourse.' I

was a hard-working student, and I did them all correctly. Now he was in a fix — what to give me as a ‘Bourse’? He had no money, and the little he had — a few annas — was the money left over after paying the workers; he could not use it as he liked. So he went and put his problem before Mother. Mother was pleased. He asked her if he could give to me as ‘Bourse’ the few pice that remained after paying the workers. Mother granted his request and she gave him a small purse to put the coins in. He put a few small coins in it and gave it to me as ‘Bourse.’

Then I thought this was my first earning, so I must offer it to Mother. The bag had been given by the Mother. I did not want to return it to her. I was quite young and had my childish ideas. So I took a piece of cardboard, cut it in the shape of a hexagon or octagon (I don’t remember) and set the coins in the centre and fixed them with a few stitches. And I wrote around them that they were my first earning and that I was offering it to her.

This was long long ago, in 1939. I had even forgotten about it. Years after Sri Aurobindo had left his body, one day Mother brought out this cardboard piece with the money stitched on it from her safe where she kept some of her jewels, money and other valuables. She showed it to me and said, “Do you see? I keep it in my safe, it is never empty, I am never in want of money. It serves me as a talisman.” A talisman, you know, is something that has been charged with a Mantra by someone who has the power and it carries in it a power and protection.

Many years after that, in April 1962, she shifted to the second floor and did not come down any more. There too she had a little safe in the wall, and one day again she brought out the ‘talisman’ and said, “See, it is still here with me.”

This is the story of my ‘Bourse’.

*Sumedha: Now, the story of the roses.*

Roses? My dream?

It was a very short dream. I was then very small. I had just had my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. A few days later, I had a dream:

I was standing in the Guest House in the upstairs verandah, leaning against a window. I was standing there with four country roses (meaning ‘surrender’) on a single stalk in my hand. The door of the room in front of me opened and I saw Sri Aurobindo standing in the doorway. He called me just by a gesture, without any word. I thought within me that he wanted to smell the roses, and that after smelling them he would give them back to me. So I went near him and stretched out my hand. He just took the bunch from my hand and disappeared inside the room! (*laughter*) The dream ended there.

But when I woke up I felt so delightfully happy, I felt I had really seen Sri Aurobindo! The feeling was even more intense and real than the one I had had on first seeing him physically on the Darshan day. My feeling after the dream was quite different. Constantly I kept feeling “I have seen Sri Aurobindo, I have seen Sri

Aurobindo ....” This went on within me like a Mantra. It lasted for full three days. The dream was a very short one, but its effects have been felt throughout my life. Would you like to hear more about it? All right — I’ll continue.

I had forgotten this dream completely, when suddenly after twenty-five years or so, one day I saw with Mother a similar bunch of roses. I was strangely reminded of my dream and I told Mother about the old dream. After hearing of it she said, “Oh, so Sri Aurobindo took all of them away? Now I will give you one out of them”, and saying this she plucked one out of the bunch and gave it to me. I could not refuse, so I took it in my hand, yet I told her, “No, no, it was not for giving back that he took them from me!” That very afternoon when I was waiting for Mother at the tennis court and was pondering over it, the meaning of the dream became clear to me. I saw and felt that everything I did or everything that I could do in the sadhana was actually done by my Master, Sri Aurobindo. The four roses which mean the surrender of the whole being (mental, vital, physical and psychic) is not so easy to make by one’s own effort. By my own effort I could never do it. So Sri Aurobindo himself, in his deep compassion, asked them of me, and took them. I have been really fortunate and am so grateful to him that he did it for me! It shows how much he loves us and does for each one of us everything if we are sincere and willing to do the sadhana. In everything that happens in my life — in all that has happened so far — I see nothing but his grace, his great compassion.

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## OUT OF THE DARK

OUT of the Dark a flash of Light  
 From the velvet void of forgotten dreams.  
 The heart reaches out  
 Through the soft wondrous night  
 And Life throbs quietly  
 In the child’s striving soul  
 As if from the Darkness  
 It awakes to be whole.

GILL MCINERNEY

# TWO SONNETS BY NIRODBARAN WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S CORRECTIONS AND COMMENTS

## Nirodbaran's Introduction

I BEGAN writing poems in English with the idea of coming in direct contact with Sri Aurobindo though I knew very little of English poetry and much less of its rhythm.

I thought that he, being a master of the English language and its literature, would be able to initiate me into the magic and mystery that is poetry much more easily than he could do it if I wrote in Bengali.

The two early sonnets (better to call them sonnet exercises) which I am giving below will illustrate the care and trouble he took in training me throughout my long poetic career till he succeeded and said that I had found my way in English poetry.

I believe that the corrections and comments he has made on the poems will be helpful to all who aspire to write poems in English.

## First Sonnet

BENIGHTED traveller sore<sup>1</sup>, why do you<sup>2</sup> moan  
Because a transient darkness entwines your way?  
Are you in the perilous journey<sup>3</sup> left alone  
To lurid<sup>4</sup> thrusts of the demon's sovereign sway?

Like a timid miser's concealed<sup>5</sup> scanty hoard  
Dwell not on ephemeral joys of a drunken past,<sup>6</sup>  
When the Divine like a loving friend has poured  
His luscious<sup>7</sup> grace on thee and deeply cast

A lambent light within the recess of thy soul<sup>8</sup>.  
Let petty fears and doubts assail not thy heart;  
The luminous voice on high shall guide to the goal  
Thy boat through nights of unvista'd moving desert<sup>9</sup>.

To him cling, traveller, take refuge at his feet  
Where heaven and earth in silent adoration meet.

16-2-1936

1. What is this "sore"? It sounds like a bear with a sore head! "Benighted" also sounds like an abuse.

2. You must make up your mind whether it is to be "you" or "thou". You start with one and go on with the other.

3. These two anapaests come in very abruptly and jerkily shaking the iambic foundation into fits.

4. "lurid" has too physical a sense to be applied to "thrusts".

5. You seem to stress "concealed", but that cannot be; it is <sup>o</sup>concealed, stress strongly on the last syllable.

6. Again the anapaests no less than three in number dance the iambic rhythm off its feet.

7. "luscious" is too palatal or sensual to be an adjective of "grace".

8. Again jerkily prancing anapaests.

9. "desert" please, not "desert". "Desert" means to forsake.

Belated traveller, vainly dost thou mourn  
Because the transient night engulfs thy way!  
Thou art not on the perilous road alone,  
Left to some cruel demon's sovereign sway.

Dwell not, an anxious miser over his hoard,  
On joys ephemeral of a drunken past,  
When the divine and loving Friend has poured  
His happy grace on thee and deeply cast

His light in the recesses of thy soul.  
Let fear and doubt assail no more thy mind,  
But the luminous Guide shall bring to the bright goal  
Thy boat through long unvistaed shadows blind.

O traveller, clinging take refuge at His feet  
Where heaven and earth in silent adoration meet.

I have had to recast the poem. Your poetic substance is very good, but your mania for irregularity in the metre has made a havoc of the rhythm. It is, I suppose, a sonnet with an iambic pentameter metre? But there is no iambic pentameter rhythm anywhere except in one line, the eighth. In all the rest anapaests skip freely about and make the whole scheme of rhythm stumblingly drunk. If you look at my version you will see that anapaests occur but only one at a time and so subdued that they can almost be taken for iambs. A bolder use of anapaests is possible, even of amphibrachs, but for that you must first get a complete rhythmic mastery, so as to be able to use them with skill and in such a way that the total impression of rhythmic harmony is not broken. At present you should not indulge in trailing anapaests everywhere; two or three at a time. In the sonnet form keep it purely iambic, until you get a complete mastery both of the sonnet form and the iambic pentameter.

SRI AUROBINDO



**Second Sonnet**

Mother, I hear thy intimate silent voice

And see thy deep ineffable lotus eyes

*in the darkness of skies*  
Weave like a crescent moon<sup>3</sup> in my inner sky's

*Beams of soft crescent fire and*  
Dark gloom<sup>1</sup> soft<sup>2</sup> beams of Light, O I rejoice.

*The haunting*  
That dismal cloud which haunted my days and nights

*calm transparent*  
Dissolves into a transparently<sup>4</sup> wide

*Horizon when ascends*  
Calmness, by the ascent on the black heights

*Thy in its luminous tide.*  
Of thy moon increasing in a swelling tide.

What about moon and  
tide metaphor?  
*Not very intelligible.*  
Two present participles?  
*quite wrong.*

*is there,*  
A sudden joy I feel and a love for all

Invades my consciousness as in a dream.

*"Mother, have  
you released"  
is flat, flat!*

*Oh, has thy hand*  
Mother, have you released some hidden stream  
Whose cool and fragrant rhythms at last enthrall

*You and thou  
cannot go to-  
gether.*

*hours to a new*  
My moments in a new vibration of bliss —<sup>5</sup>

*of thy flame*  
Magic touch, a spark of thy sacred kiss?

17-2-1936

1. Epithet tautological, therefore weak and conventional.
2. Epithet conventionally tender — must be deconventionalised.
3. You have got this moon inside twice, which is one too often.  
Moon has to be kicked out and its presence reduced to a suggestion.

4. It is stressed *transparent*, not transparent. What a howler! It makes me “drop into poetry” — thus

Sir, you seem <sup>|</sup> apparently <sup>|</sup> ignorant  
 That <sup>|</sup> parent is the trick and not <sup>|</sup> parent.  
 And yet the stress <sup>|</sup> transpires <sup>|</sup> transparently  
 And is <sup>|</sup> apparent to both ear and eye.  
 So you <sup>|</sup> compare and do not <sup>|</sup> compare things;  
 Your soul <sup>|</sup> prepares, not <sup>|</sup> prepares heavenly wings.

5. This final anapaest is truly very clumsy. Final anapaests are always risky, except in dramatic verse.

This is better metre and rhythm; but your use of anapaests in the iambic movement is still clumsy. The first two in the first two lines are all right; the others are all wrong, especially the anapaestic vibration of bliss — wrong because they merely crop up creasing the smoothness of the verse instead of justifying itself by a significance or music of variety in the rhythm. Note my arrangement of the last line which is highly irregular — trochee, anapaest, trochee, iamb, iamb, but it is justifiable because it brings in a significant rhythm, an abrupt and leaping motion and vibration in the sound-sense.

Again good poetic substance and feeling, but needs more perfection of form. First two lines very good, third stanza good except for the third line. The rest suffers from awkward constructions, mistakes accentual and anapaestic, tame epithets. The necessary slight changes being made it has become a really good sonnet. Note that the sense and ideas have not been tampered with, the language more rearranged in places than changed — which shows that there is no fault or defect in the poetic substance.

SRI AUROBINDO

## THY LOVE

How can I repay,  
How can I measure,  
Thy love for my clay?  
— It is a treasure.

A stark wayward child  
Playing with vain toys,  
And chasing desires wild  
Ran after fugitive joys.

Tossed and lost in grief,  
Pierced by shafts of scorn,  
My life was like a leaf  
By untimely storm torn.

Duped by chimera-hope,  
Lured by shadowy gain,  
Lashed by Pain's fell stroke  
I sank low in Life's main.

A benighted soul in dusk  
Suddenly found his way!  
Thy light blazed on sorrow's mask,  
And restored his sunlit day.

Thus cradled by Thy Love,  
Buoyed by Thy Grace,  
I live now lifted above  
Time and Destiny's evil race.

KAMALAKANTO

## PASSAGE

SOUL of my being, come out of my heart.  
Guide my search to your hidden door.  
This clumsy life, this ignorant start  
Must come to Being's inmost core.

I call you with an urgency, a need  
For all of me to be the living truth.  
I'm ready now to let the past recede;  
To leave behind the mixtures of my youth.

I've passed beyond my parent's infant growth,  
Yearning to become myself, mature,  
And find myself immersed in ways I've loathed.  
I see desire working, strong and sure.

All that was left undone is working here.  
My struggles brought me to a part-way goal.  
I face myself again, I will not fear.  
I choose to live by longing for my soul.

Each half of life, a man or woman called,  
Is born to live creation's highest love  
Yet everywhere delight and bliss are walled.  
Creation's truth is crystallized above.

Every man and woman that I see  
Who comes to meet another face to face  
Is troubled when they try themselves to be.  
It is the problem of the human race.

Imprisoned by resistance of my own  
Obscure and helpless weaknesses and pain,  
I ask and have the faith the answer's known,  
Then find that I must face myself again.

The master of creation loved, and made  
Himself a man and woman. Two He is  
To love Himself. What cunning trick was played?  
How can He lose the substance that is His?

Why must I reap this harvest? have I sown?  
Is it not He who lives this gap in me?  
Am I then love that I should love alone?  
My longings and my needs are also He!

I turn to Him, the One from Whom I came.  
I'm grateful that at least this much is known.  
I need my soul to play creation's game.  
I live, I am. Therefore this task's my own.

So I will go within to make my plea,  
For I have also erred somewhere, somehow,  
And lost the love that makes creation be.  
I only want to solve this problem now.

Each struggle that results in anguished fleeing  
Renews again my first, my only pain.  
Again I strive and seek with all my being,  
How can I live and really love again.

In ignorance my life, my world I've seen  
As troubled, dirty, ugly, full of grief.  
I want to change the person that I've been;  
To know the truth, to live my own belief.

I must remove the sorrow and the ache  
To live fulfilled the longing love in me.  
My soul, release me from my own mistake,  
Arise out of my heart and set me free.

My aspiration burns, a blazing flame  
Of rage against my evolution's pace.  
Release me from my self-constricting frame;  
Solution must emerge in problem's place.

With everything I am I pray and strive.  
I cannot wait for anything at all.  
I give my life to bring that love alive.  
My soul must come in answer to this call.

For life is what I have, and love must live  
In every impulse of my being's flow.

My soul, hold back no longer, only give  
The love that makes the whole creation grow.

Lord, you are my strength, my vision clear  
To live this life in fullness absolute.  
In you there is no one who is not near.  
You are the source of love, which is my root.

Please make of me that flame, forever pure,  
That blazing truth, all-love and all-delight.  
Then I will know that I belong here, sure  
Of my own truth of being, my birthright.

Then everyone, regardless of his pain,  
Can find in me the fullness of the whole,  
And nothing else between us will remain,  
For there will only be the loving soul.

LORETTA

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## FACETS

I

Do I command life  
Or does life command me?  
On the answer depends  
What freedom means.  
And what does 'I' mean?  
If 'I' means ego  
Freedom means a passage from bon-  
dage to bondage.  
But if 'I' means the soul  
Freedom means  
Full life in God.  
The meaning of 'I'  
Is not less important  
Than the meaning of 'freedom',  
For we live a complex existence.

2

I have  
Nothing to say  
Against anybody  
But that does not mean  
The duck and the swan  
Are the same to me.  
That only means  
I accept a hierarchy,  
Not one grade  
But many grades.

GIRDHARLAL

# RECONCILIATION OF THE AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE TEXTS IN THE SCRIPTURE: SHANKARA AND SRI AUROBINDO

*(Continued from the issue of July 1975)*

## III. Shankara's Methods of Interpretation: the Axiological and the Ontological

To show that the Upanishadic texts do not really conflict with each other Shankara adopts two methods of interpretation: (1) the axiological method and (2) the ontological method. The axiological method is called so because it says that the scriptural interpretation should be guided by the practical value of the texts in question, *i.e.* the result to which their knowledge leads. Likewise, the ontological method is called so because it tells us that in interpreting the texts we should take the truth-declaration into account. They may be stated as follows: the axiological method — between two conflicting texts the text having an independent result of its own is of greater force than the text which does not have such a result; the ontological method — between two conflicting texts the text which declares the truth of Brahman is of greater force than the text which does not do so. Both these methods also point out, regarding the texts of lesser force, that the latter have to be so suitably reinterpreted as to become subservient to the texts of greater force.

(1) There are texts which talk about Brahman as changeless, without part and without act (Svet. 6. 19): there are other texts which say that Brahman undergoes modification in order to create the world (Taitt. 2.6.1). Calling attention to this discrepancy Shankara writes:

Brahman is known to be changeless from the Upanishadic texts denying all kinds of change, such as “That great birthless Self is undecaying, immortal, undying, fearless, and Brahman” (Bṛha. 4-4-25), “This Self is that which has been described as ‘Not this, not this’” (Bṛha 4-4-22), “Neither gross nor minute” (Bṛha. 3-8-8), etc. For one cannot comprehend that Brahman can be possessed of the attributes of change and changelessness.<sup>26</sup>

Having raised the issue Shankara makes a distinction between the knowledge of Brahman, as non-dual reality, which brings about a result, namely, liberation, and the knowledge of Brahman, as a reality transforming itself into the world, which does not do so. And in this context he shows how to resolve the conflict:

It cannot be argued that ... the knowledge of Brahman ... as an entity transforming Itself into the world is intended to lead to some independent result; for there

is no evidence in support. The scripture reveals only the result arising from the realization of the unchanging Brahman as the Self: for instance, the commencement is made with, "The self is that which has been described as 'Not this, Not this'" (Bṛha. 4.2.4), and then it is said, "You have attained that which is free from fear" (Bṛha. 4.2.4); there are also other texts of this kind. That being so, the conclusion to be drawn is this: Since in a context speaking of Brahman it stands proved that the result (*i.e.* liberation) accrues only from the realization of Brahman, devoid of all distinctions created by attributes, therefore when in that context some other fact is heard of that has no result, as, for instance, the modification of Brahman into the world, that fact has to be interpreted as a means leading to that realization. And this has to be done on the strength of the adage, "Any act enjoined without mentioning a result, closely on heels of some other act having a result, has to be accepted as forming a part of the latter"; but it is not imagined to bear a separate result.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the axiological method asks us to give superior status to the negative text and reinterpret the affirmative text so that it becomes a *means* to the truth of the former text. If so, how to reinterpret it? Where the affirmative text is about transformation of Brahman it has to be interpreted as not stating a fact but presenting an *initially acceptable thought* which ultimately generates the idea of Brahman beyond all phenomenal processes.

This text about transformation is not meant to establish transformation as a fact, for no fruit is seen to result from such a knowledge. But this is meant to establish the fact that all this (*i.e.* the phenomenal world) is in essence one with Brahman that is beyond all phenomenal processes; for some fruit is seen to result from such a realization.<sup>28</sup>

(2) Again, there are texts which refer to Brahman with qualifications and Brahman without qualifications (Svet. 6.16 and 6.11), texts which talk of Brahman with form and Brahman without form (Katha 2.2.12; Mund. 2.1.12;). In dealing with these texts a different method is used by Shankara: the ontological method. Asking whether it is proper to hold that Brahman is with and without qualities, he writes:

The supreme Brahman, considered in Itself, cannot logically have both the characteristics; for it cannot be admitted that the very same thing is naturally possessed of attributes like form, etc. and that it is also without these; for that is self-contradictory.<sup>29</sup>

If both the aspects cannot be accepted, which of them is preferable? He says that the aspect without attributes like form should be preferred, for the texts which speak about this aspect alone declare the real nature of Brahman. The other texts, the texts which



talk about Brahman with attributes, do not declare the true nature of Brahman.

(a) Those that have the formless Brahman as their main purport are more authoritative than the others which have not that as their main purport.<sup>30</sup>

(b) It is the Brahman that is absolutely attributeless and unchangeable that has to be accepted and not the opposite.<sup>31</sup>

(c) It cannot be held that the scriptures support the view that Brahman is possessed of diverse aspects.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the negative text about Brahman without attributes is shown to be of greater force than the other. But then how to reinterpret the affirmative text whose aim is not declaration of the truth of Brahman? Where the affirmative text is about Brahman with difference, duality, attributes, etc. it should be reinterpreted as provisionally referring to difference, etc. with a view to ultimately speak of Brahman beyond them.

The Upanishads declare non-difference alone as the view to be established, while with the idea of speaking of something else (*i.e.* non-difference) they merely refer to difference as a thing already conventionally recognised<sup>33</sup>

An explanatory note about the ontological principle will not be out of place. The ontological principle proceeds on the assumption that the denial of duality, etc. constitutes the real nature of Brahman or that non-dual Brahman is the real import of the scripture.<sup>34</sup> On what basis does it assume so? Evidently it is on the basis of the axiological principle, for it alone tells us why non-dual Brahman is the real import of the scripture: it is the real import because its knowledge alone produces the result, *i.e.* liberation. It follows therefore that the axiological principle is the source of the ontological. Not only that, the latter is essentially the same as the former both in its conception and application. But it cannot be denied that there is a difference between them. Only the difference is due to distribution of emphasis which depends on whether the determination of the real import of the text is *insisted on* or such a determination is *taken for granted*.

#### IV. Inapplicability of Shankara's Methods

Whether or not Shankara's interpretation is acceptable depends on how far he fulfils in *practice* the conditions laid down for the scriptural interpretation.

(A) Let us examine if the axiological method has succeeded in reconciling the Upanishadic texts. Its success depends on two things: (1) how far is it a suitable method? (2) how far is it self-consistent? As for the first question, if the method is

really a suitable one, then the division of the texts into those that lead to an independent result and those that do not do so must be true. In other words, the division of the texts must be a division supported by the Upanishads themselves. Upholding the division Shankara claims that the affirmative texts should be assigned a subordinate position since none of them mentions a result of its own, *i.e.* none of them says that a knowledge of Brahman in terms of positive descriptions is capable of granting freedom. He argues that there "is no evidence in support"<sup>35</sup> of their mentioning such a result. In short, he contends that the division of texts on the above basis is sanctioned by the Upanishads themselves. But a scrutiny of the Upanishads points to the contrary. Consider the following texts:

(a) The One who rules every source, in whom all this dissolves (at the end) and comes together (at the beginning of creation), who is the lord, the bestower of blessing, the adorable God, by discerning Him one goes for ever to this peace.<sup>36</sup>

(b) By knowing Him, the auspicious, hidden in all beings like the film exceedingly fine that rises out of clarified butter, the one embracer of the universe, by knowing God one is released from all fetters.<sup>37</sup>

(c) The one, controller (of all), the inner self of all beings, who makes one form manifold, to the wise who perceive him as abiding in the soul, to them is eternal bliss — to no others.<sup>38</sup>

Like the negative texts, the affirmative texts too assure us of complete freedom arising from the knowledge of Brahman having attributes. Needless to say, Shankara's division of the texts on the axiological basis is *artificial* and *totally unwarranted*.

As regards the second question, *i.e.* how far the axiological method is self-consistent, let us assume its suitability and see how it works. Axiologically, the negative texts are of greater force than the affirmative texts; hence the latter should be reinterpreted to serve as a means to the knowledge arising out of the former. The purpose of reinterpretation may be challenged thus: since the negative text is capable of producing the result, *i.e.* liberation, independently, why should the affirmative text be subordinated to the former? Axiologically, the negative text is capable of producing the result independently, and so by treating the affirmative text as a subordinate one *nothing* is really achieved. If it is argued that the negative text produces the result only in collaboration with the affirmative one, then the very division of the negative and affirmative texts presupposed by the theory of subordination is *surrendered*.

(B) The ontological method also can be subjected to similar tests of suitability and self-consistency. As for the first test, suitability, the ontological method divides the texts into those that declare the truth of Brahman and those that do not. As we have already pointed out, the above division of texts presupposes the division introduced by the axiological method (*vide* section III). Hence the present division of

texts also, like the other one, is to be dismissed as *artificial* and *unwarranted* (*vide A*).

As regards the second test, self-consistency, let us see how far the ontological method is consistent. Ontologically, if the aim of the scripture is to declare the truth of Brahman, the knowledge of non-dual Brahman, the negative texts are sufficient for that aim, and the existence of the affirmative texts is unnecessary. The subordination theory says that they exist with a view to teach the same thing indirectly and gradually. This does not solve the original difficulty. If it is possible to impart the knowledge of non-dual Brahman directly and immediately through the negative texts, then why should the scripture resort to the roundabout way of imparting the same indirectly and gradually through the affirmative texts? Shankara himself anticipates this question and replies thus:

For the sake of people of dull and medium intellect, *hīna madhyama dṛṣṭyāḥ*.<sup>39</sup>

He argues, following in the footsteps of Gaudapada, that it is easy for people of superior intellect to grasp the non-dual nature of Brahman. But it is not so in the case of people of dull and medium intellect, and hence a different and more suitable mode of teaching is called for. And the existence of the affirmative texts is in fulfilment of this need. In short, the affirmative texts are a *concession* for the weak-minded. Though this may sound reasonable it is not still free from defects. If the concession theory is true, then there is the danger of the scripture defeating its own real aim. The weak-minded, by virtue of being so, may come to think wrongly that what the affirmative texts teach is the real knowledge of Brahman. They may miss the point and continue to be where they were, much to the disappointment of the best intentions of the scripture. There is no guarantee that this mistake will not be committed by the weak-minded. It is difficult to imagine the scripture would ever subscribe to this theory so unwisely.

It is now evident that the axiological and ontological methods, as principles of the scriptural interpretation, are neither suitable nor self-consistent. If we work out the consequences of this conclusion we can surely detect the points at which Shankara failed to conform to the conditions of the scriptural interpretation.

We may now recall that the axiological method, as also the ontological, is not supported by the Upanishads, though Shankara does not seem to think so. Hence to apply these methods is to impose a standard external to the scripture. Shankara has a preconceived view that nirguna Brahman is the true import of the Upanishads. He is using the scripture only to justify his view of the Vedanta. Likewise he invokes the axiological and ontological methods with a view to vindicate his exclusive preference for one class of the Upanishadic texts. The real authority for the knowledge of Brahman is therefore his own preconceived view of the Upanishads and not the Upanishads themselves. It means he has disregarded the *first condition* of scriptural interpretation. Nor is the theory of subordination supported by the view of concessionism without its share in undermining the supremacy of the scriptural authority. In fact

the subordination of the affirmative texts is a clever device calculated to practically annul them under the guise of reinterpretation, as they conflict with the negative texts. Our exposure of the defects of the subordination theory is sufficient to show that it is an attempt to hoodwink the alert mind. This clearly amounts to a violation of the *second condition* that the scripture as a whole is authoritative. As a matter of fact, Shankara himself discloses in one place that he will not hesitate to invalidate scriptural texts if they do not conform to his test, thus making his fidelity to the supremacy of the scripture doubtful.

The test of the authority or otherwise of a passage is not whether it states a fact or an action, but its capacity to generate certain and fruitful knowledge. A passage that has this is authoritative, and one that lacks it is not.<sup>40</sup>

All this clearly shows that in actual practice Shankara has thrown to the winds the theory of subordination of reason to the scripture, the *third condition* of scriptural interpretation. For at every step he permits himself frequent departures from the attitude of subjection to the scriptural text and allows his reason to assert its supremacy over the authority of the scripture. Hence Sri Aurobindo very rightly remarks:

Shankara... has dealt with the Upanishads ... as a master of the Sruti and not its servant.<sup>41</sup>

Asking why Shankara is not what he professes to be, Sri Aurobindo points out that he does not deal with the Upanishads with an exegetical aim:

A commentary on the Upanishad should be a work of exegesis; Shankara's is a work of metaphysical philosophy. He does not really approach the Sruti as an exegete; his intention is not to use the philosophical mind in order to arrive at the right explanation of the old Vedanta but to use explanation of the Vedanta in order to support the right system of philosophy. His main authority is therefore his own preconceived view of Vedantic truth — a standard external to the text and in so far illegitimate. Accordingly, he leaves much of the text unexplained because it does not either support or conflict with the conclusions which he is interested in establishing; he gives merely a verbal paraphrase or a conventional scholastic rendering. Where he is interested, he compels the Sruti to agree with him.<sup>42</sup>

*(To be continued)*

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NOTES

- 26 SBS., p. 332.      27 *Ibid.*, pp. 332-33.      28 *Ibid.*, p. 356.      29 *Ibid.*, p. 609.  
 30 *Ibid.*, p. 612.      31 *Ibid.*, pp. 609-10.      32 *Ibid.*, p. 611.      33 *Ibid.*, p. 632.  
 34 *Ibid.*, p. 612.      35 *Ibid.*, p. 332.      36 *Sveta.*, 4.11.      37 *Ibid.*, 4.16.  
 38 *Katha.*, 2 2.12.      39 Shankara's com on *Mandukya Karika*, 3.16.  
 40 Shankara's com. on *Brhad. Up.*, Tr. Swami Madhavananda, 1965, 1.4.7.  
 41 *Supplement*, p. 303.      42 *Ibid.*, p. 304.

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**MERRY MONK**

I SING not sorrow,  
 You know not what you say.  
 I only borrow  
 The mystic shades of night  
 And limn with patience  
 The blank page of the day  
 With illuminations  
 Of intense delight.

I give the glosses  
 That show to those who look  
 The secret clauses  
 Too subtle to be found  
 By those who peer at  
 The letters of the book  
 And miss the spirit  
 Behind them and around.

I may seem serious  
 Here in my barren cell  
 Singing mysterious  
 Songs of sacred lore,  
 But while I am singing,  
 If you listen very well,  
 You may hear a ringing  
 Laughter you missed before.

## FRANCIS THOMPSON AND THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

(Continued from the issue of July 1975)

It is not wrong to call Thompson a child of the seventeenth century since like the Metaphysical poets he has made religion the main theme of his poetry, and has written exquisite poems of divine and human love, of birth and death, sometimes with the intimate simplicity of a philosopher. The Metaphysical influence, particularly of Crashaw, is more distinct in some of the contents of *New Poems* (1897)<sup>1</sup> Thompson's leaning towards the Metaphysical poetry is visible in his effort to fuse the 'Metaphysical' element and the conceits together. In *From the Night of Forebeing* he deals with the time of dryness and barrenness in the spiritual life with the help of analogy, the similar periods of preparation before the flowering in the natural world (winter heralding spring) and in the whole plan of the creation (death as a prelude to rebirth, the cosmos arising out of chaos, the life of Heaven being prepared for in the life on earth). The symbolic significance of the sun in *Orient Ode* is also in the manner of the Metaphysical poets. In *The Mistress of Vision* the employment of symbolism is significant. The Mistress of Vision (Queen of Heaven, Queen of the realm of Grace or Queen of the realm of Poetry) sits at the heart of a secret garden (paradisical state arrived at in moments of vision) and Life is its Warden and it is to be reached only by passing over the fosse of Death. The Sun (Christ) illumines the garden by its light which is low in the sky (Incarnation) and the Lady's body (primarily Virgin Mary) is flooded with light. Again, in *An Anthem of Earth*, Thompson deals with the theme of life and death in an emblematic way and proclaims Christian faith which dispels the gloom of the poem. This symbolic way of looking at the natural world links Thompson with the Metaphysical poets.

Thompson would have us believe that he was not inventing conceits, but showing correspondences between different levels of being, correspondences which really exist. It should be borne in mind that a conceit is not empty stroke-play, but a serious means of persuasion or illustration. The conceits are, in fact, the action of the poem in many of the best cases either with the Metaphysical poets or with Francis Thompson. At his best, as in *The Hound of Heaven*, *Ode to the Setting Sun*, *The Fallen Yew*, *Orient Ode*, *From the Night of Forebeing* and *The Mistress of Vision*, Thompson's poetry shifts from image to image along a line of development that states the theme through the implications contained in the imagery.

Further, the element of drama is an important characteristic of Metaphysical

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Paul van K. Thompson, the author of *Francis Thompson — A Critical Biography* (Nelson & Sons, New York, 1961) and Vice President of *Academic Affairs*, Providence College, Providence, (U.S.A) in a letter to the present writer (Jan. 10, 1967) remarked on the question of influence on Thompson:

"I think that you will find that the influence of Crashaw is more evident in the odes and especially in the poems of 'Sight and Insight'."

poetry. Donne's *Songs and Sonets* are in many respects dramatic monologues. They seem to represent Donne's conflicting ideas and paradoxical views. But his conception and technique are essentially dramatic. It is rather a realistic expressiveness of the kind developed by the dramatists in the 1590s, above all, by Shakespeare, and nothing quite like it had previously appeared in lyric poetry, in spite of certain foreshadowings in Wyatt. The dramatic quality of Donne's rhythms and diction is his controlled variety of tone. It is a speaking voice that strikes us in the *Songs and Sonets*, it is a voice with many inflections and intonations, from the assertive forthrightness of *The Broken Heart*:

He is starke mad, who ever sayes,  
That he hath beene in love an houre,

to the meditative musing of *Love's Growth*:

Me thinks I lyed all winter, when I swore  
My love was infinite, if spring make it more.

With the *Holy Sonnets* the tone deepens and the style expresses the torment and struggle in the mind of the poet with dramatic vividness:

I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,  
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast  
Such terrour ...

(*Holy Sonnet I*)

Herbert and Vaughan are equally dramatic on occasion and all the poets often use the first person. Here is Herbert:

I struck the board, and cry'd, No more,  
I will abroad.

(*The Collar*)

or,

The harbingers are come. See, see their mark.

(*The Forerunners*)

and here is Vaughan:

They are all gone into the world of light.

(*They are all gone into the world of light*)

The dramatic element in these poets is most immediately apparent in the opening lines of poems and it is designed to serve religious purposes. So is the case with Francis Thompson. The following lines remind us of a modern stage direction:

Cast with the folding doorways of the East,  
For now is light increased.

(*From the Night of Forebeing*)

And here is the dramatic style with which Thompson begins his poem on Coventry Patmore:

Look on him. This is he whose works ye know.

(*A Captain of Song*)

*The Mistress of Vision* has been greeted by critics as 'Metaphysical' in character since it fuses thought and feeling in the Metaphysical manner but they have missed its dramatic setting and atmosphere. The poem opens with a dramatic description of a mysterious garden which adds suspense to the reader's imagination:

Secret was the garden;  
Set i' the pathless awe  
Where no star its breath can draw.  
Life, that is its warden

Sits behind the fosse of death. Mine eyes saw not, and I saw.

Within this mysterious garden all things are suspended in trance and at the garden's heart, in the Land of Luthany, is the Lady of fair weeping. The introduction of the Lady in the garden is no less dramatic than the setting and atmosphere. At the very beginning of the poem we are reminded of the trance-like atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the enchanted land of Prospero in *The Tempest*. Thompson, as we read in Everard Meynell's biography of the poet, was enamoured of Shakespeare and he experienced profoundly the sense of trance, of dream-like dimness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and was absorbed in the atmosphere of *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *The Tempest* and *Coriolanus*.<sup>1</sup>

Thompson called *A Narrow Vessel* a "dramatic sequence". It is a sequence of eight poems prompted by his abortive relationship with Maggie Brien whom he had met at Pantasaph. No one can call in question the psychological truth of the episode described. *A Narrow Vessel*, like Donne's *Songs and Sonets*, reveals Thompson's different moods at the different stages of his love affair with Maggie Brien. It describes with dramatic vividness his desire, Maggie's fear and reaction, the conflict in her mind and the poet's incapacity of acting as a normal lover. *Love Declared*, one of these poems, begins with a highly dramatic scene:



I looked, she drooped, and neither spake, and cold  
 We stood, how unlike all forecasted thought  
 Of that desired minute! Then I leaned  
 Doubting; whereat she lifted — oh, brave eyes,  
 Unfrighted:— forward like a wind-blown flame  
 Came bosom and mouth to mine!

But Thompson's concern is not with action but with the situation and motive which lead to action. Primarily a poet, Thompson makes use of the dramatic in such a way that it does not look grotesque or irrelevant in *A Narrow Vessel*.

However, the dramatic element is most strikingly evident in Thompson's famous poem *The Hound of Heaven*. Generally critics speak of the influence of the Metaphysical poets, especially Crashaw, on *The Hound of Heaven*, but except a chosen few they have failed to discern the dramatic element in the poem. Rev. T. L. Connolly, S. J. thinks that though "the poem is primarily a lyric there is in it a decidedly dramatic sequence of thought".<sup>2</sup> He gives an outline of the dramatic sequence which can be reproduced here briefly with certain modifications:

The dramatic action is forecast in the opening lines of the poem, *I fled Him* (in the manner of the Metaphysical poets). The *development* of the action can be seen in the soul's escape from God through love of man, love of external Nature, the heavens and through the pursuit of *all swift things*. Continuing on its vain flight, the soul turns now to love children and back again to the love of Nature. With the end of the soul's flight, the dramatic action reaches its *climax* — the soul surrenders itself completely to God, *Naked I want Thy love's uplifted stroke*. The *crisis* shows God's victory and His final assurance to the soul, *Rise, clasp my hand and come*. The *dénouement* sums up the whole dramatic action when the race is over, *Halts by me that footfall*, and a new vision dawns upon the wayward soul, *Is my gloom after all, | Shade of His hand, out-stretched caressingly?* In the *conclusion* the soul sees itself as God sees it, *Fondest, blindest, weakest*; and then finally the soul discovers God as the real though formerly unrecognised object of its quest and learns at last, *Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me*. Further, the *refrain* plays an important part in the development of the dramatic element. God's pursuit of the soul is introduced in the first refrain and the progress of that pursuit is indicated in the second refrain, *Come on the following Feet*, until at last, *Halts by me that footfall*. "As a technical point," remarks Rev. Connolly, "notice the contrast of the lines of the refrain with the swiftly-moving lines that invariably precede it."<sup>3</sup> The dramatic pattern in *The Hound of Heaven* has been used very carefully and beautifully by Thompson aiming at serving the religious purpose and expressing his intended desire and craftsmanship.

The dramatic element in the Metaphysical poets appealed to Thompson because, firstly, he was a great admirer of the Elizabethan drama, particularly the plays of Shakespeare, and secondly, as a man, he was fond of self-dramatization. Though the dramatic element in Metaphysical poetry did not necessarily result directly from the

excellence of the Elizabethan drama, yet it was probably related to it. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the English language made great strides and it was generally accepted at court, and, more important, received the attention of scholarly wits and poets. Shakespeare and Donne, whose writing years were almost exactly the same (1590-1612), between them had a great influence upon the manner of subsequent poetry — Shakespeare in the sphere of vocabulary, and Donne in the use of conceits and stanza-form. A study of Thompson's use of poetic diction and imagery shows that he was greatly influenced by Shakespeare and the Metaphysical poets. Moreover, he shared with the Metaphysical poets their paradoxical mode of expression, seriousness, emotional excitement, the fusion of the creative power and the intellectual energy and a deep religious fervour.

But to an impartial critic the difference between Thompson and the Metaphysical poets is well marked. Thompson lacked the neatness and conciseness which is the common feature of all the Metaphysicals. He is commonly over-elaborate and complicated in expression. One looks in vain for simplicity in his odes and this is the reason why several of his poems suffer from obscurity. Another important characteristic of the Metaphysicals which Thompson lacked was the sense of humour. The sense of humour in the Metaphysicals was not laced with malice but embroidered with humanity. A subtle smile peeped through their poems. Jim Hunter, commenting on the sense of humour of the Metaphysicals, says that "the wit and drama, the bold paradox and ingenuity, of Metaphysical verse could not exist without this subtle smile".<sup>4</sup> Thompson's life and letters show that he was not devoid of humour altogether, but in his works he is very serious, which sometimes makes the reader uneasy.

Generally critics speak of Thompson as if he were born two centuries late. But, in reality, the influence of the nineteenth century and of his own age is quite distinct in his poetry. As a poet, Thompson is, mainly, in the Shelley tradition; he is one of those later Victorian poets who cut across the Tennysonian line of poetic diction to infuse some verbal vigour in poetry and this he does by means of imaginative splendour. He is thus to be linked with the Spasmodics (who too were sworn to Shelley) and the Aesthetes, although he felt that there was an exploration of the possibilities of imagery in the seventeenth century poets, markedly in Crashaw. In fact, both the seventeenth century and the nineteenth century meet in him, and George R. Hamilton in the *London Mercury* article rightly remarks, "...Had not the nineteenth century been in him as well as the seventeenth, he could not have been the poet he was."<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly a product of his own age, Thompson's affinity with the Metaphysical poets cannot be denied. Like the Metaphysicals, he has brought to the expression of the mysteries of human life and of the creation of God a profound religious faith, deep intellectual concepts and a language new to the uses of poetry. But as with these poets at their best, his intellectual quality and his freighted language do not exclude feeling, but are infused with it, sublimated into rare forms of beauty. "In English letters," says George N. Shuster, "no verse since Browning possesses the

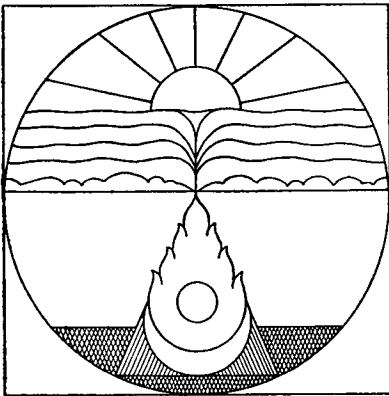
quality of metaphysical bravery excepting the best pages of Francis Thompson, Coventry Patmore, Alice Meynell and other Catholic poets.”<sup>6</sup>

(Concluded)

S. N. CHAKRAVERTY

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## US

HERE on Earth  
the real and the unreal clash  
Up in the Sky  
there's a starry blue flash

Earth looks up  
shocked at the Sky  
wondering what was  
that just went by

The Sky looks down  
in answer to the Why  
the starry blue vastness  
its only reply

In the space between  
the Earth and the Sky  
the echo remains  
no longer a Why

Joining the Earth  
joining the Sky  
making them One  
making them fly

Up goes the Earth  
down comes the Sky  
we in the middle  
are happily high

We are the echo  
we are the Why  
we are the children  
of the Earth and the Sky

AJIT RAO

# A MODERN MYTH

## A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

*(Continued from the issue of July 1975)*

### Act II

#### Scene I

*(The Woman is striding triumphantly about the stage in front of her throne.)*

THE WOMAN: At last the time has come — the child has reached the age when he can launch into the play. My world awaits this fresh wonder as the latest stimulant for its tired nerves ... But I must plan my strategy, for I fear the boy may have a cursed will of his own — all the young ones have got a bit that way nowadays — and that we cannot tolerate, can we, my pet? *(addressing Dragon and patting it on the head)*. No, he must be led, persuaded ... educated. Yes — an education is what we must devise. *(She walks about the stage a bit, gesticulating to herself)*. But I sense him approaching now — I must be quick — of course, my plan of action is becoming clear.

*(Enter the Son)*

THE WOMAN: Come to my arms, my darling boy! We have much to discuss together.

THE SON: What about Mother?

THE WOMAN: Let us seat ourselves here comfortably and I shall tell you ... *(They seat themselves, the Woman on the throne, the Son at her feet, the Dragon behind.)* There.

Ah, but how beautiful you are, my child ... all that I had hoped for these seventeen years since you first came to me. You shall lionize my new age, indeed.

THE SON: New age? What new age?

THE WOMAN: Why, on my own earth, of course.

THE SON: How wonderful, Mother, I have always wanted to see the earth. Until now, you've only shown it to me in picture books. But you must tell me much more about it first — if I went there, I wouldn't know how to begin.

THE WOMAN: Precisely, my child! And that is what I must show you — describe to you ... till you feel the thrill and excitement of it all bubbling up in your blood. Then you'll be ready to rush headlong into the midst of it and we'll all have the time of our lives.

Now for a few elementary lessons.

THE SON: Yes, do go on, Mother. Oh, how keen I am to learn about the earth!

THE WOMAN: Because you were destined for it, child.

THE SON: Yes, I feel it in my bones.

THE WOMAN: Excellent. Now let us proceed. The first thing you will have to do when you get there is to gather a following around you. You must be charming,

brilliant, witty. You must be able to capture hearts wherever you go — people must flock to you in troops because you are so magnetic, attractive, like this —

*(A large picture is brought in of a very egotistical young man surrounded by adoring people, and is propped up to one side of the stage. The Son gets up and studies it critically.)*

THE SON: But what are all those people doing, Mother? Do they love that man?

THE WOMAN: Love? They adore him! They are magnetized by him.

THE SON: Yet he doesn't seem to love them back.

THE WOMAN: Ah, but that is the beauty of the thing, he doesn't have to. All he has to do is to use them as he pleases, as his baubles, his playthings.

THE SON: But ... But ...

THE WOMAN: No "buts", my little fellow. That is the law of life on earth. Either you use or are used; either you devour or are devoured. And you, my pride, are destined to be one of the eaters and not one of the eaten.

*(At the sound of the word "eat", Dragon looks up with great interest and shuffles forward.)*

DRAGON: Eat, eat, Dragon eat too. Dragon loves to eat *(he rubs his stomach and goes in front of the picture.)* Pretty ... very important man, very important man-eating-man. *(Strokes the picture then shuffles back.)* Dragon hungry.

THE WOMAN: Come here and eat some of these dresses then. They are all so old and I won't be wearing them again. That should keep him quiet for a while.

*(Dragon goes to the piles of clothes and starts chewing them contentedly.)*

THE WOMAN: *(Continuing)* And now for the second part of the lesson. Pleasure! The earth is full of pleasure, my boy, especially for those as favoured as you will be. You can find pleasure in everything — pleasure in a Roman orgy: oh, yes, we had plenty of those — until man, that weak little creature, simply *wailed* for respite *(she laughs)*. Pleasure in conquest of proud men and exquisite women, of walled cities and defiant nations, of the hoarded treasure of the world's rich ... What infinite pleasure to see these fall and gather at one's feet! Then, child, there is the ultimate pleasure of conquest through Death — the pleasure of the kill. It is a pleasure which man shares with every hunting creature that lives — with the lion and the shark, the hawk and the wolf pack.

THE SON: *(Hesitant, aghast)* Mother, I don't know whether I could kill anything if I tried, and as for finding "pleasure" in it ...

THE WOMAN: Ah, my little fledgling, what can one who has never tasted the joys of earth life know of these things? Try and you will understand. Feel just once the heady pounding of your blood that comes from the thrill of the earth's delights. See, once again, I will show you a beautiful picture to make you understand better — a picture of the successful earth man surrounded by all his pleasures ...

*(A second tableau is brought in of a typical modern-advertisement type, in which a man is surrounded by all the symbols of wealth and success — an adoring woman, a flashy car, a magnificent house, etc. The Son once again examines it critically.)*

THE SON: *(Pointing to the man in the picture)* he doesn't look very good-natured.

THE WOMAN: Good-natured? Bah, one doesn't need to be good-natured when one has everything. In fact, the less so the better. Good-natured people are no good at *commanding* and to enjoy a position like *that* (*she points at the picture with a flourish*) you have to command.

THE SON: (*Feebly*) Oh.

DRAGON: (*Coming forward again, after putting down a half-eaten piece of clothing*) Command. I too command. All the dark little things that creep — all the scaly, horny things, all the grubs and slugs that live in mud. Juicy, oozy, bubbly mud. (*Suddenly lights up as though remembering something and turns to address the Woman*) *Dinosaurs!*

THE WOMAN: No, you imbecile. (*Exasperated*) Let's not go through all that again. We finished with those long ago, remember?

DRAGON: (*Unperturbed by scolding, starts to weep*) Dinosaurs — Dragon commanded dinosaurs (*spreading his arms wide and blubbing through his tears*) huge, fat dinosaurs — now all gone, all gone. (*Weeps noisily for a few more seconds, then suddenly cheers up.*) No, no — not all gone — not all gone! (*Looks around him with a smile as though he is surrounded by invisible dinosaurs.*) There they are — there, there (*makes stabbing motions in the air with his paws.*) Dinosaur thoughts everywhere — not gone, not dead — everywhere, everywhere! Dinosaur thoughts frighten everybody. Only Dragon not afraid — Dragon commands ... and eats.

THE SON: (*Aside, recoiling*) Loathsome animal!

THE WOMAN: (*To Dragon*) Of course, my pet, nothing ever really dies in this world of ours, does it? Dinosaurs will live forever. Their thoughts are *so* very helpful for some of our games. Come now, back beside my chair. How about a nice tasty bite of this crown? I forget whom it belongs to. That's right — now where were we? Yes, yes, the lesson isn't over yet. But we've arrived at the final part:

To be the top man on earth nowadays one must be cultured. The times of the Huns and Vikings are over — a pity, perhaps, Dragon sometimes mourns over that too, you know — but I suppose one must move on. Anything becomes a bore after a while. So now you have to be cultivated in the modern way. And the first thing you should know is that appearances are not always what they seem. Beauty is ugliness. Ugliness, beauty — it has taken man two world wars and the age of industry to come by that extraordinary revelation. After all, how banal is a flower next to a can of tomato soup! We've been seeing flowers through the ages but tomato soup is something else again. How simpering the strains of a minuet next to the bursting discords of a modern symphony. One's senses must no longer be tickled but attacked, overrun! How trite, how *déjà vu* a Greek Apollo — poor effort of man's infancy — next to the latest creations of twisted metal and junked household appliances!

THE SON: Mother, whatever are you saying? Can you be serious?

THE WOMAN: Perhaps I exaggerate in showing you the extremes, my dear, but what you must understand is the spirit behind it all. Then you will feel enthused — you will identify with the frantic excitement of it — the thrill that leads forever on to

the next thrill and the next and the next .... Look — at our last picture:

*(A big picture of the centre of some large city at night full of jammed traffic, neon signs and restless crowds, is brought in and propped up like the others.)*

THE WOMAN: *(Continuing)* Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it my most unparalleled triumph? See how it pulses with life, how it throbs and jumps with it. See the colour, the movement, the mystery it contains! The people caught up in it like shoals of fish between the tentacles of an octopus — how delectably *dangerous!* What would life be without danger, peril! Oh, dull, so ridiculously dull — it makes me die just to think of it. But here *(pointing once again with a great flourish to her last picture)*, here is perfection! Here is life! Gorgeous, splendiferous, vibrating *Life!*

THE SON: *(Looking at the picture, covering his eyes and groaning)* Oh-oh-oh, Mother, I don't know what's the matter with me, but I just can't take any more. Do let's stop for today. I've never felt so tired in my life and I feel as though my head is being sawn in half. I've just got to lie down, got to rest .... I didn't know it would all be so difficult. *(He goes on groaning and holding his head.)*

THE WOMAN: My poor boy, I've overtaxed you — but it will pass. *(Aside)* Heavens, when *are* they going to build these humans a little stronger? The slightest breath of air and poof! I can't even invent a decent game any more before they all collapse. *(Turning back to the Son)* Lie down here, child, and don't worry so about your head. Let everything sink in slowly, and you'll be up in no time. When your strength comes back, you'll just be dying to get started. Oh yes, it's going to be marvellous.

Of course that's the proper place to recuperate *(arranging some old clothing to cover the Son who has stretched out at the foot of the Woman's throne.)* Dragon has always found this the most comfortable place in the world to take a nap.

I have many arrangements to make meanwhile. *(Pompously)* Ahead of us, the Future waits! *(Exits)*

## Scene II

*(The Son is still in the same position lying at the foot of the Woman's throne. The throne itself is empty and the Son awakening finds himself alone. He yawns, shakes his head from side to side like someone trying to rid himself of a bad dream, and looks slowly around him while rubbing his forehead.)*

*At this point, his father, the Man, enters).*

THE MAN: Well, well, my boy, how is it that I find you awakening from a nap at this time of day? You should be about and busy with ... *(his voice trails off as he sees the Son's condition)* but wait, surely you're ill, child! How pallid you look and how you frown. Never before have I seen a line or wrinkle on your face, but now .... *(He sits down and places his hand on the boy's shoulder.)* Tell me immediately what's



the matter and I'll bring you the cure. Nothing is incurable nowadays and I've never had such a stock of medicines in my cupboards in all my life.

THE SON: Father ... Father ... (*shaking his head despairingly*) I doubt that you have any medicine for what I have inside my head —

THE FATHER: Any medicine? But of course I do, my son. Simply describe the symptoms ...

THE SON: Yes, yes, I'll describe everything, even though it may be difficult. (*He gets up and walks around a bit*). (*Aside*) How am I to begin and where? How am I to describe the shock? (*He comes back and kneels before the Man.*) Father, you know how I have loved Mother all these years; you know too how well she has looked after me, loved me, indulged me — not spoken the least harsh word to me ever. And how much I have trusted and believed in her all this time because of that. But today ... (*he struggles with himself*) today, somehow, everything was different. I saw a side of Mother I had never seen before. Oh, how she changed in front of me! Or was it I who changed and suddenly saw her through different eyes? I don't know. I just don't know.

THE MAN: (*Very puzzled*) What on earth do you mean, Son?

THE SON: Well ... do you see those pictures there?

THE FATHER: Yes, yes, of course. They are familiar images of our earth life. Your Mother has had them in her collection for quite some years now.

THE SON: But — but do you like them?

THE MAN: (*Still more perplexed*) Like them? Well really, the question hardly arises. They represent the life we lead and one has to accept existence as it is. And then, uh-h-h, what's wrong with them anyway? They look all right to me.

THE SON: (*Crinkling up his nose*) Oof.

THE MAN: "Oof"?

THE SON: Yes, Oof. I can't agree with you, Father. I just can't, and as for living that kind of life, which is what Mother wants me to do — I don't think I could — ever.

THE MAN: Not lead that kind of life? What else is there to do child? You have no choice. After all, you are soon to be a man, and there is no life for man than on that earth your Mother has arranged so nicely for us. And then look at the advantages she has to offer with never a dull moment all the while — you can be sure it hasn't been easy for her to organise all that — just think of the difficulties, the complexities, the challenges —

THE SON: (*Shaking his head again*) Perhaps . . perhaps ... perhaps I'm too young to appreciate it all. But I have an uneasiness inside myself that won't go, a fear, a repulsion — I don't know what — that I can't explain away.

THE MAN: Explain? There's no need for explanations. It's clear that you are simply overwrought with the fresh challenge of life. Perfectly normal for a boy of your age. But I'll give you a tranquillizer all the same. It'll steady your nerves. Just wait here, my child, and I'll have it for you in a moment. (*He exits.*)

THE SON: "Nerves, tranquillizers, never a dull moment, challenge." Am I mad or are they?

### Scene III

*(The Son, in a corner of the stage, is pruning a flowering bush and humming to himself. Suddenly, the Woman sweeps in and flounces up to her throne at the centre. She is closely followed by Dragon.)*

THE WOMAN: My darling boy! — *(he jumps)* I see you have fully recovered from your little malaise. Splendid, I'm sure your Father's tranquillizer did the trick. If you ever feel anything like that again just take another. All my most modern medicines are the final answer to perfect health.

*(She crosses the stage and fusses over him. While she is at it, Love, Joy, Beauty and Unicorn come in to one side.)*

UNICORN: *(In stage whisper)* I think we are just in time.

JOY: Yes, it's now that he'll need us.

LOVE: Let's listen and await our moment.

BEAUTY: Dear heaven, look at those pictures!

UNICORN: We'll deal with them too, but see — she's started to speak —

THE WOMAN: Today is a great day, my boy. I have finally completed all the arrangements for your triumphant and spectacular entry into the Earth Life.

THE SON: *(Shocked)* The Earth Life? *(Dejectedly)* Oh yes, I'd forgotten.

THE WOMAN: *(Ignoring his reaction)* Come, let's dress you properly. *(She approaches him and he shrinks back.)* Now, now — no more of your baby ways, no more shy shrinking eh, my little rabbit! *(She laughs and holds out her arms to him. He begins to look more and more frightened.)*

UNICORN: It's time — I must stand behind him and give him courage.

BEAUTY: But the Old Woman?

UNICORN: With those eyes of hers she won't even see me — I fly!

*(He leaps noiselessly across the stage and goes to stand behind the Son. With the Unicorn's force at his back, he suddenly stiffens. Meanwhile, as predicted, the Old Woman has seen nothing. But it is clear that the Dragon can and has seen — he starts to growl in his throat and goes to stand behind his mistress as an opposing force to Unicorn.)*

THE SON: *(Vehemently)* No! Never! Never will I go to that Earth of yours. *(passionately)* If those pictures of yours are true, and Father says they are — just look at them! Look at that pompous peacock over there — look at those fools fawning at his feet. Why, they are even too ridiculous to be human.

THE WOMAN: You little upstart! You little cut-off bit of nothing! You dare to speak about humanity like that to its very maker and motive spirit?

THE SON: That's not true. I'm human myself, but you didn't make *me*.

THE WOMAN: Precisely your mistake. *You* are not human *yet* — only I could

permit you to be so. (*Sarcastically*) At this very moment, you are nothing more than a scrap of cosmic debris.

THE SON: Very well, so be it. But I'm a scrap of debris with a voice and thoughts and feelings of its own. (*Aside*) My God, I had thought her to be my mother, but she's really nothing but a hideous old woman. (*Taking still more courage*) And that picture there — it's a miracle the fellow in it hasn't suffocated from conceit. As for that woman with him, she'd best turn herself back into the cat out of which she's grown. Even animals have their beauty, but animal-humans are just plain disgusting!

THE WOMAN: (*Fuming*) O-o-oh! I'll kill you, you little pipsqueak — with my bare nails till your blood runs! But where is the wretch? I can't see (*shrieking*), I can't see. (*She tries to tear an invisible veil from in front of her eyes.*)

THE SON: Very well, then I'll see for you. Your third picture is as atrocious as the rest. A city street choked with traffic and neon lights is *not* my idea of surpassing loveliness. Keep your world, Mother. Keep it and destroy it in your own good time. Then give it to Dragon to swallow piece by piece. But I defy you to lay a finger on me. I don't belong to you any longer.

THE WOMAN: Raving idiot! We'll soon see who belongs where — just wait, you juvenile horror, I have my methods. I have my methods and they never fail. (*Exits in a pitch of fury, followed as always by Dragon.*)

(*Son sighs with great relief and sinks down in front of the empty throne. Unicorn beckons to the others. They appear one after another, dancing slowly onto the stage. Son rubs his eyes, looks at them carefully, then lets forth another huge sigh of relief.*)

THE SON: Oh how marvellous, how life-giving — my friends, my beloved friends .... Yet, yet how can I call you that? I've never seen you before — still, you are as familiar to me as my own hands, and a thousand times more dear than my own so-called Mother and Father.

LOVE: We visited you when you were an infant.

JOY: (*Mischievously*) And bewitched you quite unfairly while you were still too young to defend yourself.

THE SON: (*Admiringly*) What a splendid fate!

BEAUTY: And now that we are all together again we have a little work to do. Come, Unicorn, we have need of your horn!

UNICORN: With pleasure! (*He charges at the first picture and pierces it. It falls in fragments.*)

ALL FOUR: And what have to put in its place? Open, Heaven's Magic and sing of Love!

(*Love dances and a beautiful picture of the God of Love embracing a forest of flowers and creatures unified by love appears in place of the old picture. When Love finishes they cry again:*)

ALL: Open, Heaven's Magic and sing of Joy!

(*Joy dances and a picture of the God of Joy above a boy running beside two frolick-*

*ing colts appears centre stage to replace the picture of "Pleasure".)*

ONCE AGAIN ALL: (*As Joy finishes dancing*) Open, Heaven's Magic, and sing of Beauty!

(*Beauty dances, and the third picture is carried in of a sage standing before a landscape dominated by the Goddess.*)

*All the dances complete, the three Gods and Unicorn retire to one side of the stage, while the Son remains sitting in the centre feasting himself on the wonder of the new pictures.*

*After a brief interval, the Man returns, sees the new pictures and gasps.)*

THE SON: (*Suddenly noticing him*) Oh, Father, Father, isn't it wonderful? Isn't it all you've ever dreamt of?

THE MAN: Dreamt? Why, I don't know. (*He takes a long time looking at the pictures.*) I must say I've never seen anything like it — so different ... impractical, somehow — could anyone ever live in such a world?

THE SON: In such a world and no other!

THE MAN: Well, it certainly isn't the way I was brought up — where are all the comforts of civilization? I don't see a single one .... Yet, I must say there is something appealing, something that relieves the eye in it all. (*Extremely puzzled*) But what does it all mean?

THE SON: It means that your beloved earth life when put next to something better is really rather revolting.

THE MAN: Good heavens, boy, what is this unheard-of impudence?

THE SON: (*Earnestly*) No, Father, I mean no impudence, but please try to see it my way for a minute. Just study the pictures once again and *then* tell me what you think.

THE MAN: Hmmp. (*He shuffles back to the pictures and peers at them one by one. When he has finished he steps back shaking his head.*) Don't know. I feel something coming over me — something from inside — but how unreal it all is — how strange and terrible, unbearable and fantastic at once. (*Then in sudden and growing panic*) A-a-ah, the Gods have bewitched this poor human frame! What will become of me now? I can't bear it, oh no, I can't bear it!

THE SON: (*Jumping up*) Oh yes, you can, Father. There's no turning back for you now.

THE MAN: Help me, child, I'm fainting ... fainting ...

THE SON: We'll all help you. (*The Gods and the Son carry him off.*)

(*To be continued*)

BINA BRAGG

# EUROPE 1974

## A TRAVELOGUE

(Continued from the issue of July 1975)

(6)

As we sailed along the Grand Canal the taste and magnificence of a bygone age came to view in its full splendour. The Grand Canal is the *grand boulevard* of Venice. Although the city is intersected with a network of smaller canals broad and narrow on which numberless houses big and small have been erected, and gondolas are seen in profusion tied to their basements like private cars and taxi cabs—most of the city's population naturally live in those side streets—it is the Grand Canal that provides the main attraction. It is perhaps the longest boulevard in the world, and certainly the widest; it measures more than half a mile in places. On either side, almost throughout its length are huge palatial mansions and churches and other public buildings built with meticulous care. They have been planned in their ensemble with such care and every piece of stone or stucco seems to fit so beautifully into the scheme that one gets the impression of well-wrought ornaments studded lavishly with pearls and bright precious stones. There is a touch of the Orient about them which one misses in the more massive Renaissance buildings one sees elsewhere, a delicacy of touch and ornamentation that the later Baroque and Rococo sought in vain to revive.

Venice had come in close contact with the Byzantine Empire in the course of the Crusading expeditions. Venetians had special quarters reserved for them in Constantinople. And Oriental influence was bound to be reflected in her manner. The Doge was head of state, originally endowed with autocratic power, which came gradually to be limited by the appointment of a ducal council of six. By the end of the 13th century, the Great Council, nominally open to all citizens at first, became the monopoly of nobles who were rich commercial men and who secured the right of electing the head of state. Venice thus became a close oligarchy with the Doge as its nominal ornamental head, a situation that has had many parallels in the history of the Orient. But, unlike other Italian cities, Venice remained singularly free from riotous scenes on the streets. For, after all, it is a little difficult to indulge in sword play on gondolas.

They say that the islands are slowly sinking. That seems to be apparent, for we noticed that the ground floor of many a mansion is no longer fit for use owing to the water seeping into it. That is rather symbolic of the change that has been coming over the fortunes of this fabulous city. Much of the old glory and magnificence that money could buy began to wane when the Ottoman Turks deprived her of her possessions in Dalmatia in the 15th century and in the eastern Mediterranean. Piracy would have robbed her of valuable trade in any case, but when Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and opened the all-sea route to India and the Far East, Venice lost her monopoly of the eastern trade. Long before the Suez Canal was opened a

hundred years ago, she had been reduced to the status of an Austrian dependency; and she lost the right to separate existence when the Italian kingdom came into being with Rome as its capital. And yet she still retains the mellow charm and faded grandeur of an aged Empress who has lost her power and much of whose youthful beauty has suffered the ravages of age. There is nothing jazzy about the city, nothing that is modern and cheap.

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One may no doubt be inclined to describe the world-famous glass-ware of Venice as modern, because it caters to modern taste. Granted, but it is not showy and it dazzles not by any attempt to impress, but by the sheer perfection of technique. And the technique is not by any standards to be described as modern—every individual piece turned out by hand, with blow-pipes and oven that may have been in use when the Great Council ruled for all that we know, and the “factory” is located among the winding alleys behind St. Mark’s that remind one of old Benares in India. And cheap? The prices are fantastic, as they deserve to be. Venetian glass-ware is the Rolls-Royce of the industry.

We were shown the process in detail when we visited the “factory”. It looks so simple. A quiet unassuming middle-aged man takes a lump of clay (or what looks like clay), mixes some colouring material and puts it into the oven, takes it out when it is red-hot, and blows and blows into it with a long thin pipe. And we watch in amazement as this amorphous mass slowly grows into a beautiful vase with a fine pink shade. And then, before it has had time to cool, the man does a few deft movements with his fingers and, lo and behold, a handle has come into being and is attached to the side of the vase, a handle that looks like a mythical horse in an old armorial design. The master craftsman was too busy at work and his swollen cheeks were in no mood to talk. But the attendant by his side quietly explained that this thing that we saw being done in less than five minutes had taken twenty years to master and perfect. We could readily believe what he said.

Next we were taken to the showrooms upstairs. And what showrooms! Coloured glassware of every description jamming the showcases and providing a feast for the eyes, and calling the purse-strings to open wide. They would have to open wide indeed: a tea-set for six would cost merely five thousand rupees. They were guaranteed unbreakable, but obviously needed delicate handling. One of the show-room attendants took out a pair of cups and hit one against the other just to prove his point. But, when one of our slap-dash young men started fiddling with them in a dangerous sort of way, the attendant had to give a polite warning, “Be careful, sir.” If there was any damage to the set, would he have the dollars to replace it? That sobered our young gay-lords. We left the showrooms with a sigh; it is no use trying to vie with millionnaires who alone can patronise this exquisite Venetian glass.

Venetian glass reflects something of the quality of Venetian painting represented

by such masters as Bellini and Titian, Tintoretto and Giorgione whose works adorn the walls of the Doge's Palace and most of the great museums of the world. There is a touch of Oriental magnificence in its colouring, a charming fantasy, a luminous atmosphere; there is a feeling of serenity and often of joyousness which it probably derived from the opulent citizens who patronised the masters. The great cathedral of St. Mark's, as we already had occasion to observe, clearly bears the imprint of the East.

Before we left the spacious Place in front of this great cathedral, we were regaled with a show that is not easy to forget. Punctually at five, two huge iron men suddenly appeared in front of a clock high up on top of one of the buildings by the side of the cathedral and struck the clock five times with the hammers they carried in their hands, and equally suddenly disappeared into nowhere. Was this too a legacy of old contacts with the fantastic East? I do not know. But this clock with its iron men must be counted among the priceless treasures of Venice. However, they are not meant for sale and cannot be carried away ...

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If ever there was a motor-road I should like to traverse a hundred times without tiring, it is the Autostrade between Venice and Innsbrück nestling among the hills on the northern slopes of the high Alps. We soon leave the plains as we course along the valley of the Piave and reach the foothills to the south of the Italian Alps. This part of the country is the Italian Tyrol — there is also the Austrian Tyrol where Innsbrück is, and there is the Bavarian Tyrol in Germany. The Tyrolian Alps are famed for their magnificent scenic beauty, hardly paralleled elsewhere, and of course for the “yodelling”, the songs sung by these mountaineers in a peculiar combination of the ordinary voice and falsetto. Austro-German influence was strong in this part of Italy for a long time, and its traces are still left in the bilingual notices along the road, and perhaps to some extent in the dress of the people.

But what attracted us most was the wonderful motor-road they have built through these giddy heights, wide enough for two luxury coaches to pass each other and without too many of those hair-pin bends that are a nightmare. And the villages through which the road winds! There was nothing dirty or ugly or even poor about them. The cottages were of course not in marble or precious stones, but they were beautifully decorated with flowers on every window and every window had a lace curtain to match. They looked like doll houses, and their owners seemed to be proud and independent people, like those we were to meet in Switzerland later.

The rugged Dolomites were the first to catch our view and there were many clicks of the camera. As we climbed higher, the pines covered the rock and there were beautiful valleys below, among which lay stretched in blue serenity the lake of Santa Croce. We got down from the coach to have some time with the lake — a wide parking place right on the brink is provided with wire-netting — and we could move

about and take a long look at the colony of caravans that dotted its shores, caravans belonging to holiday makers who have come in their cars from the plains of Italy or elsewhere for a change.

We too would have liked to stay there on holiday. But we must reach Cortina before lunch. Cortina is among the most fashionable winter resorts in the Alps. Skiing is the main attraction of this little wayside village. The skiing season was over when we came, but the long bare slopes where the Olympic sessions had been held were there for us to see and imagine the thrills — and the accidents — provided by the snow when the champions performed their daring feats of strength and skill. It was June when we came, and yet the teeth chattered in the icy cold wind as we got down from the air-conditioned coach, and entered the beautiful café on the outskirts of Cortina to have our lunch. The lunch was excellent.

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We soon crossed the border and were in the Austrian Tyrol. The high Alps were around us and unforgettable scenery. We drove through the Brenner Pass and, after an extremely delightful afternoon spent in the coach, Innsbrück came within sight. I do not know if it was intentional or just sheer luck that on arrival at the hotel we were shown into one of the most beautiful rooms we have ever lived in. Right in front through the windows we had a magnificent view of the snow-capped mountains we had just crossed, and far below was the township of Innsbrück with the river Inn meandering about the valley. And when we were told it was too late to go about sightseeing that evening, we were only too happy to be left alone in that beautiful room. The eiderdown quilt and the spotlessly white linen gave us all the rest we needed and time to ruminate. The yodelling show could come later.

Innsbrück is a beautiful town, especially the upper part on an elevation where our hotel stood. It reminded me strangely of being in Mussoorie, what with the cold bracing wind and the ups and downs of the roads. The roads, however, were spotlessly clean. And there was a remarkable thing about a shop we chanced to visit, which was, — well, truly astonishing. It was a grocery shop and we went there to buy some tea. The time was about eight in the morning. The shops had not opened yet, and the street was deserted. We saw piles of bread and other provisions stacked in front of the closed shop and there was nobody to guard them — yet nobody pilfered even a little bit! I had of course been familiar in my student days with milk bottles lying unprotected and unstolen in front of doorsteps of private houses in London. But whole heaps of provisions lying thus in front of a shop, this was something new.

There is little to wonder that Europe prospers.

*(To be continued)*



## **“LIFE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL”**

*(Continued from the issue of July 1975)*

### **AUROVILLE — THE IDEAL CITY**

“THE whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species.” Auroville is an attempt towards this adventure. It is not for comfort and satisfaction of desires that one comes to Auroville — it is for the growth of consciousness. It invites people for an experiment.

Auroville can claim to be an Ideal City if its life is centred in the New Consciousness, just as the old world is centred in the mental consciousness. All efforts in this town, entirely dedicated to the education and evolution of man, should tend to the discovery of a method, a process, that promises to the people of all stages, young and old, an easy access to the realms of Intuition. Once a means to develop the intuitive faculty of the children is discovered, reliance on reason will give place to the soft and serene voice of the inner truth.

But unless all the weeds that clog the being are rooted out, one cannot hope to hear the prompting of the intuitive mind. Despite various projects, novel educational schemes, the academists in Auroville have not so far passed the stage of experimentation. Their quest continues and must continue till the true life opens. It cannot be done in a day. They must wait for the fateful hour.

Thus this Educational City  
needs a new kind of students,  
a new kind of teachers;  
in whom there will be the combination  
of dedication and realisation.  
For all Knowledge in Auroville  
will be for the Service of the Truth —  
and not for worldly careers.  
The whole life of the Aurovillians will be an expression  
of Divine Inspiration!

American genius, American technique  
have fulfilled all the needs of life,  
educational, social,  
industrial, individual, physical —  
all the needs  
the ego could conceive of; yet life  
seems an empty dream.

Why?

It is the psychic need  
that is crying for fulfilment.  
Until the need of the soul is answered,  
life will not feel the joy of fulfilment.

As physical education has become  
the child of the modern age,  
so spiritual education must be allowed  
to occupy its legitimate place.  
Then life will not be a playfield  
of misery and misfortune  
but will become

a song, a poem!

Progress in this field may not be spectacular  
for years to come!

Why should a student of spiritual science  
treading a razor's-edge path  
grudge time?

Was the speed of modern science, three hundred years before,  
as fast as today?

Without the labour of mighty minds for three centuries  
could it reach this stage?

Today the movement of spiritual science  
might be as that of a snail on the wall.

But success in this path is a certainty—  
provided one does not break the inner journey  
in the middle—

exhausted and frustrated,  
for sheer lack of iron will.

Only by the golden keys  
of patience and perseverance  
the doors of heaven  
can be opened!

Look at the adventurous spirit of Max Mueller. At a time when Sanskrit was considered a dead language in its own native land, he ventured to explore its lost glory and won the eternal gratitude of India by revealing to the West the beauty of India's soul.

The first 1000 pages of the English version of the *Rig Veda* were published from the Oxford University Press when he was barely 23. And what inspired him to embark on this tremendous task?—After finishing his education in Berlin he went to

Paris. There he happened to hear the scholarly lecture of Burnouf on the Hymns of the *Rig Veda*; and he was consumed with the passion of an explorer to discover the mystics of the new language.

What courage must have been there in him to declare the *Rig Veda*, then wrapped in obscurity, the first book of mankind! It was this that roused world-wide interest in the Sanskrit language.

“‘The discovery of that real India, of that new intellectual hemisphere, is to my mind a far greater discovery than that of Vasco da Gama’s,’ wrote Mueller to Gladstone, trying to invoke the British Prime Minister’s interest in Sanskrit literature. Max Mueller worked for 50 years on his translations of the *Rig Veda*.<sup>1</sup> When he died the whole world press published editorials. He had gone to Oxford as an unknown and poor youth.

In Sri Aurobindo’s estimation, as said earlier, humanity is on the point of achieving a new knowledge, a new power, a new capacity. The New Force is biding its time to make itself felt. It must find at least a few *ādhārs* to be operative in the earth consciousness.

To gain anything substantial in Yoga, the single-minded zeal and will must surpass even the heroic spirit of a Napoleon. Will not at least five daring, dashing youths of Auroville, with indomitable will, be ready to take the plunge with the zest of Max Mueller? It is by their *tapasyā* that the earth can be flooded with the heavenly waters of the New Consciousness.

The long way the Aurovillians have to go in filling the gap between precept and practice cannot be minimised, but what great deeds in the world have been accomplished by brooding over a situation and beating the breast in despair?

If the organisers and pioneers of Auroville fail to respond to the call of the future, they will be guilty of losing a great opportunity. The children of tomorrow will never forget them, they will call them grave-diggers not builders of a New Future.

Today we may be in mid-stream, but our hearts await the supreme hour when we shall reach the golden shore, mounted on the high waves of evolution.

( Concluded )

NARAYAN PRASAD

<sup>1</sup> An extract from an article by Nirad Babu on Max Mueller.