

# MOTHER INDIA

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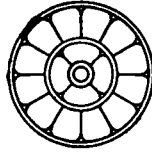
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVII

No. 10

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*"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"*

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## DISCIPLINE AT WORK

### WORDS OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

...even in ordinary life there must be a control .. otherwise life would be impossible. Even many animals, those who live in groups, have their strict rules imposing a control on the play of the ego and those who disobey will have a bad time of it. The Europeans especially understand this and even though they are full of ego, yet when there is a question of team work or group life, they are adepts at keeping it in leash,... it is the secret of their success.

\*

Without discipline no proper work is possible.  
Without discipline no proper life is possible.

\*

Rules are indispensable for the orderly management of work; for without order and arrangement nothing can be properly done, all becomes clash, confusion and disorder.

\*

The ancient legend meant among other things that everything in the world is made to be arranged in an orderly way; that the earth will truly become a place of rest, a reasonable place, and a dwelling fit to live in, only when each thing has found its right place. Indeed, how could one enjoy even the best things, salt, milk, butter, wine, sugar, water, if instead of being kept apart in an orderly way they were to form the frightful mixture you can imagine?

\*

It is the glory of man to create order and to discover it everywhere.

\*

The astronomer looks up towards the stars and makes a map of the heavens; he studies the regular paths of the heavenly bodies and names them, he calculates the motions of the planets around the sun and forecasts the moment when the moon, passing between the earth and the sun, will cause what we call an eclipse. The whole science of astronomy depends on a knowledge of order

\*

The life and work of men, and even the wealth and prosperity of nations, all depend on this same principle of order.

See how the whole routine of the house is disturbed simply when a clock stops giving its charming example of regularity and begins to go slow or else to go madly fast. If it cannot be put right, then the best thing to do is to get rid of it.

\*

How greatly orderliness increases the power in each thing! Are not the most powerful machines the ones in which each part, each cog, each lever fulfils its function with order and precision? And in a machine like that, even the smallest screw, when it keeps to its proper place, can claim to be as useful as the majestic flywheel.

*Compiler: G. P. GUPTA*

*(SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 861, 862 & MCW, Vols. 13 & 2, p 168, pp. 226-229.)*

## PASSAGES FROM SRI AUROBINDO

### WORK AND IDEALS

WE are being advised by many nowadays not to quarrel over ideals but to attend to the work lying nearest to our hands. We must not talk of faith and hope, or revel in Utopian visions but run to the nearest scene of work, be one of the drudging millions, try to improve their lot and set ourselves to the task of mitigating human sufferings. The old villages are so many pictures of desolation and distress, they are the hot-beds of malaria, the sepulchres of our greatness; so go to them and try to reinstate our tutelary angel in his ancient seat. Or we must erect mills, start small industries, educate the masses, do philanthropic work and not talk of free and united India till this is done. When the spade work has not yet begun, why talk of a fine superstructure and create difficulties in the way of solid and substantial work? You have not yet put the plough to your land, why quarrel over the prospective produce and sow seeds of dissension amongst yourselves before you have sown the seed that is to yield any good to the country?... They want us to take note of our limitations, environment and not to tempt the country to the skies with wings so heavily weighed down. Common sense, it is said, should be our guide and not imagination.

All this is well, and we would be the last to deny the necessity of the work so much insisted upon. But the work is nothing without the ideal, and will be fruitless if divorced from its inspiring force. Which is common sense? To tread the right path or to avoid it because it promises to be thorny? Which is common sense? To mislead ourselves or to speak the truth and do the right? The uplifting of the nation cannot be accomplished by a few diplomatic politicians. The spirit to serve, the spirit to work, the spirit to suffer must be roused. Men in their ordinary utilitarian course of life do not feel called upon to serve anyone except themselves.

The daily duties are engrossing enough for the average man. His own individual prospects in life generally become his sole concern. He is propelled by the inertia of his own individual needs, and if any other sort of work is expected of him a different and more intense force must be continuously applied to him to produce the necessary energy. Or, in other words, we must continuously appeal to his better nature, we must evoke the spiritual in him, we must call forth his moral enthusiasm.

These may not be human nature's daily food, they may not be necessary for our daily life, they may not have their use in the ordinary selfish pursuits, but they are essential for working a change in our social or political life. Buddha only preached and lived a holy life, Christ only preached and lived a holy life, Shankar only preached and lived a holy life, and they have each worked a mighty revolution in the history of the world. Inspiration is a real work. Let the true

inspiring word be uttered and it will breathe life into dry bones Let the inspiring life be lived and it will produce workers by thousands. England draws her inspiration from the names of Shakespeare and Milton, Mill and Bacon, Nelson and Wellington. They did not visit the sickroom, they did not do philanthropic work in the parishes, they did not work spinning jennies in Manchester, they did not produce cutlery in Sheffield, but theirs are the names which have made nationhood possible in England, which have supplied work and enterprise with its motive and sustaining force. England is commercially great because Adam Smith gave her the secret of free-trade England is politically great because her national ideals have been bold and high, not because of her parish work and municipalities. He was no fool or Utopian who wished to be the maker of songs for his country rather than its lawgiver Wolfe had Gray's elegy recited to him on his death-bed, and said he would rather be the author of these lines than the captor of Quebec. These are the utterances of great workers and heroes, they have given the greatest credit to the givers of ideas and ideals, because they have felt in their own life where the inspiration for work comes from. Work without ideals is a false gospel

(*Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, 1972, Vol 1, pp. 703-4)

### SILENCE AND SPEECH

There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech. Silence prepares, speech creates. Silence acts, speech gives the impulse to action. Silence compels, speech persuades. The immense and inscrutable processes of the world all perfect themselves within, in a deep and august silence, covered by a noisy and misleading surface of sound—the stir of innumerable waves above, the fathomless resistless mass of the ocean's waters below. Men see the waves, they hear the rumour and the thousand voices and by these they judge the course of the future and the heart of God's intention; but in nine cases out of ten they misjudge. Therefore it is said that in history it is always the unexpected that happens. But it would not be the unexpected if men could turn their eyes from superficialities and look into substance, if they accustomed themselves to put aside appearances and penetrate beyond them to the secret and disguised reality, if they ceased listening to the noise of life and listened rather to its silence.

... But there are two kinds of stillness—the helpless stillness of inertia, which heralds dissolution, and the stillness of assured sovereignty which commands the harmony of life. It is the sovereign stillness which is the calm of the Yogin. The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action. In this calm, the right knowledge comes.... The activity of the mind must cease, the *citta* be purified, a silence falls upon the restlessness of the



Prakriti, then in that calm, in that voiceless stillness illumination comes upon the mind, error begins to fall away and, so long as desire does not stir again, clarity establishes itself in the higher stratum of the consciousness compelling peace and joy in the lower. Right knowledge becomes the infallible source of right action. *Yogah karmasu kausalam.*

.. The desire-driven mind is enmeshed in the intricate tangle of good and evil, of the pleasant and the unpleasant, of happiness and misfortune. It strives to have the good always. It is elated by the fortunate happenings, disturbed and unnerved by their opposite. But the illuminated eye of the seer perceives all that leads to good, for God is all and God is *sarvammangalam*. He knows that the apparent evil is often the shortest way to the good, the unpleasant indispensable to prepare the pleasant, misfortune the condition of obtaining a more perfect happiness. His intellect is delivered from enslavement to the dualities

. The inaction of the tamasic man is a stumbling-block to the energies around him, the inaction of the Yogin creates, preserves and destroys; his action is dynamic with the direct, stupendous driving power of great natural forces. It is a stillness within often covered by a ripple of talk and activity without,—the ocean with its lively surface of waves. But even as men do not see the reality of God's workings from the superficial noise of the world and its passing events... so also shall they fail to understand the action of the Yogin, for he is different within from what he is outside. The strength of the noise and activity is, doubtless, great,—did not the walls of Jericho fall by the force of noise? But infinite is the strength of the stillness and the silence in which great forces prepare for action.

(*Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, 1972, Vol 3, pp. 366-68)

# LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

## A PERSONAL LETTER

YOU have asked me only two questions, but they have set up quite a world of cerebral coruscation. You will have to be patient and tolerant with me, for I am answering in the manner of a wind which “bloweth where it listeth”.

Your first question is: “How should one react to circumstances until the Psychic Being takes over? Should we live entirely within and ignore events, or observe all without evaluating?”

We certainly can't ignore events altogether. One may shut out some aspects of the outer world, but one shouldn't take the attitude of that line of Keats's—“Standing apart in giant ignorance”. I for one actually stood thus in the early days of my stay in the Ashram. I would go to the Ashram's Reading Room every morning to pick up only the “Literary Supplements” of the *Hindu* or the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. I used to see the race of the sadhaks, with Nolini generally first at the winning post, when the bag of dailies from the GPO was emptied on the mats. I was placidly unaware that Hitler had come to dangerous power and that Stalin was unleashing his reign of terror—until on October 12, 1936, nine years after my arrival in Pondy, there was put on the Ashram library table a typed copy of a poem by Arjava (originally John Chadwick) entitled “Totalitarian”, dated October 11 of the same year and accompanied by Sri Aurobindo's comment: “Exceedingly original and vivid—the description with its economy and felicity of phrase is very telling.” The term “Totalitarian” was a prodigious poser to me and seemed to be such also to the librarian, my diminutive friend Premanand. Our situation was comparable in puzzlement more than in wonderment to that of Keats's “stout Cortez” and “all his men” when with “a wild surmise” they first gazed at the Pacific, standing

Silent upon a peak in Darien.

Our stunned silence did not last long. We remembered Arjava's own admonition to one of his students face to face with an unknown word: “God may not have given you brains but surely He has given you a Dictionary!” We resorted to the “Concise Oxford” and its equivalents and found that “totalitarian” denoted a dictator who wanted everybody to be stamped with his own mind or a State permitting no rival loyalties or parties and demanding the entire subservience of the individual to it—a State headed by such a dictator. I took the poem to have a topical air and my inquiries brought to light for me for the first time the darkneses that were National Socialism in Germany and Marxist Communism in Russia.

Though my 9-year long ignorance was quite blissful, I cannot dangle before

you my example. You have to keep abreast of events, both domestic and extramural (pedantic term, meaning “outside the walls”, for happenings beyond the Ashram’s “charmed circle”). Even Sri Aurobindo, in his roomy cave of tapasya, used to cast a glance at newspapers no less than at literary journals such as the *New Statesman*, which Arjava regularly sent him and which our Lalloobhai, born malapropist, called the New Testament. Arjava also sent the *Manchester Guardian*, apropos of which Premanand and I speculated a little lewdly about a companion weekly, *Womanbreaster Guardian*. So sustaining a touch with the current world-chaos along with the ups and downs of Ashram-life is quite *de rigueur*. But, as you rightly guess, it should be free of evaluation—that is, favourable or unfavourable personal judgment. I have put in the adjective “personal” because some kind of evaluation cannot be helped. We are not a scientific instrument of “pointer-readings”: some implicit or explicit standard comes into play. However, I would say that an initial stage of “pointer-readings” has to be there: we have to get our facts right. After this stage an assessment is in order. But how shall we start assessing? If the Psychic Being is in action we shall automatically arrive at the correct evaluation. Here I may remark that the psychic evaluation—the sheer soul’s estimate—is not in terms of truth-knowledge but in those of truth-feeling. Truth-knowledge is a gift of the planes of consciousness which Sri Aurobindo labels as “overhead”: it is a knowledge reached not by discursive thinking but by illumination and intuition or at the least by a large spontaneous many-sided unifying play of ideas, the work of the overhead plane nearest to our intellect and named by Sri Aurobindo “Higher Mind”. This knowledge percolates into our mind with a sudden sense of wideness and peace accompanying it. The soul’s truth-feeling brings a sense of depth which at the same time holds delight and strength and a love which I can only describe as a quiet intensity or a passionate purity. Short of the Psychic Being’s intervention, we have to go in for a detached mind which, for all its aloofness, is yet ever sympathetic, ready to understand all human movements without being caught up in any. I may add that the detached mind can be not only receptive, helpful to people who come in for advice: it can also be active on its own and, as you put it, “interfere in what is happening around one in the Ashram”. Of course, there are limits to one’s sphere of action and there are ways and ways of acting. Furthermore, every way of acting has to be first dedicated to the Mother and sought to be infused with her consciousness by being inwardly uplifted to her. One must also know where to stop acting. Beyond a certain point one’s outspreading action is liable to slip into an enthusiastic egoism: one may develop the notion that one alone is right in every sphere.

By the way, it may be worth while to distinguish between egoism and egotism. In practical matters, egoism connotes selfishness whereas egotism signifies a too frequent use of “I” and “me”, the practice of talking about oneself. I know people who are egotists while being the opposite of egoists

There can be a curious blend of the two. one may be naturally inclined to be unselfish, go out of one's way to help and serve others and at the same time be disposed to tomtom one's good deeds. People are complex, we must know how to sort out their intricacies. This can be best done when we stand aloof without getting wrapped up in ourselves

You write: "The more I step back, the more things I can laugh at. What does that mean? Logically, then, the Divine must be laughing at the entire universe. What is the significance of this entertainment? Surely the Divine does not need entertainment. So why put all that entertainment in? Is it just incidental or what?"

You have touched on a big theme here—I may dub it the Big Bang of philosophers, the problem of world-manifestation. The Big Bang of the physicists has always left me dissatisfied. Things within the universe have their start but to say that the universe itself started raises a host of questions. St. Augustine was once asked by a sceptic: "What was God doing before he made the world?" The Bishop of Hippo smiled off this hippopotamus of a query by saying: "Preparing hell for sceptics like you!" St. Aquinas in the course of his *Summa Theologica* (or was it *Contra Gentiles*?) answers that philosophically we can think of God the Creator as perpetually putting out his Will-force to manifest Nature: there need be no beginning and no end. The great Schoolman believed in a beginning only because scripture taught it. Stephen Hawking in his recent best-seller gloats over the idea that if science could show a perpetual cosmos there would be no call to introduce God. Of course, the argument for God's existence does not confine itself to this line of discourse, but narrowly speaking Hawking cannot be easily faulted. What he does not realise is that God is not incompatible with such a cosmos: as Aquinas reasoned, God's creative power is not tied down to projecting a universe with a starting-point. However, Hawking may pull out "Occam's Razor": *Entia non sunt multiplicanda* ("Entities are not to be multiplied"). This means: why drag in God if science can do without Him by positing an ever-existing cosmic process? Hawking does not seem to have wakened up to the question: "How from a neutral purposeless cosmic process can a figure like Hawking with a keen purposive intellect—even if it be anti-God by purpose—arise?" Surely there are paradoxes lurking about us? Even if we postulate a transmogrified divine Hawking ultimately behind the human specimen, we do not reach the end of the road. There has been throughout philosophical history the spectre of the problem of Evil in the world. It has led the human mind to spawn Hormuzd and Ahriman, Jehovah and Satan and, in less starkly ethical and more comprehensive terms, Brahman and Maya. The ingenious Indian mind got round the glaring antithesis further by declaring that Maya is really a non-existence that appears to exist. Sri Aurobindo does not gloss over the riddle of this world but says that the only answer that can be offered to the limited instrument of knowledge that is the human mind is, in effect: "In the

endless range of possibilities of manifestation, the possibility had to come up of a world starting from the very opposite of the divine existence, consciousness-force and bliss and such a possibility was accepted as a challenge to this existence, consciousness-force and bliss to develop out of it with a rare richness the original perfection in the very milieu of this perfection's contrary." Here we might say that there is no escapism which would leave the earth-field ultimately unfulfilled in itself as it would be if it were merely a passage to something beyond it. Again, here the very perfection to be evolved is latent: the dark contrary is divinity's own self in disguise. Here alone the presence of Evil in the world gets, in both the initial and the final prospect, irradiated, as it were.

Now a halt to digression, however fruitful.

When Paul Richard was in Pondi during his second visit, accompanied by his wife who was then known as Mirra, an early bone of intellectual contention with Sri Aurobindo was: "Did the world originate in Ananda (Bliss) or in Desire?" Richard argued for Desire. This is in essence the view of Buddha. The Buddhist term is *tanha*, "thirst". As long as there is *tanha* in the world-stuff of which we are made, world-existence continues with its load of *duhkha*, "suffering". Buddha has struck upon a basic truth. Desire, in the Buddhist sense, implies an endless need, a perpetual emptiness calling to be filled, a movement of grabbing at things transitory and therefore never satisfying. The result of recurring dissatisfaction is suffering. To get beyond such a result we have to renounce the world, the time-process in which we are immersed and enter that indescribable illimitable void transcending all temporary being. Nirvana. In contrast, a world originating in Bliss is secretly sustained by Bliss and meant to attain Bliss across the trials and tragedies of common living. Well has Sri Aurobindo said in his *Savitri*:

Bear: thou shalt find at last thy road to bliss  
Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives.

Not that Sri Aurobindo was at any time an ever-chuckling optimist. He was Virgilianly sensitive enough to say:

We feel the touch of tears in mortal things.

Aware that terrestrial evolution starts from the "Inconscient", he must know the tremendous barriers through which the evolving soul has to break towards self-affirmation on earth. But cognisant also that the Inconscient is of the Superconscient's own making he has the certitude of its occult challenge—

The joy that beckons from the impossible.

The ultimate fulfilment of all the heart-broken cries of earthly life was the prospect that glowed always before Sri Aurobindo's eyes—a fulfilment on this earth itself, because there is nothing ultimately in the very nature of earthly reality which needs to be escaped from. And we may discern a further vista in the Aurobindonian vision. If all that lives has bliss as its secret stuff and if that secret stuff is meant to manifest, then there must be the possibility of a manifesting power in earth's history. No such power has been in sight, though the dream of it has persisted through the ages. Because of its absence we have had on one side "the denial of the materialist" and on the other "the refusal of the ascetic". Sri Aurobindo, with the throb of a mysterious world-bliss in his heart—say, his spiritual heart's systolic beat—intuited in its diastolic counterpart the presence of a hitherto-hidden plane of the Spirit which is not only an all-creative but also an all-transformative Consciousness-Force: what he has designated as Truth-Consciousness and Supermind. Only because the Supermind can transform into a many-sided perfection the Gita's *anityam asukham lokam*—"transient and unhappy world"—can the final affirmation be made of the old Upanishadic insight that from bliss the world was born, by bliss it is supported and into bliss it shall merge. With the Supermind secretly haloing him Sri Aurobindo could oppose Richard.

So, to employ your term, the world is an "entertainment" for God, but not in any light-hearted way unless we understand "light-hearted" as meaning a way in which the heart is full of light. Perhaps the most telling word would be "delight" which can contain the suggestion of illumination within its significance of rapture. It is entertainment with a purpose and with an earth-fulfilling goal. Nor is it exclusive to the Supreme Consciousness in its aspect of unity which is usually in our mind. This Consciousness has to be viewed as multiple too. For it cannot be conceived to manifest the multiplicity that is our world unless there is a basis for it in its being. Each one of us has his or her celestial counterpart in that basis "high above". When the Supreme hid Himself as the Inconscient, forming the nether pole to His Superconscience, not only His unity but also the haloed crowd of our counterparts in Him got precipitated with a myriad-rhythmed "Hurrah!" We have forgotten that heavenly hellward cry and are disposed again and again to bewail our lot and question or deny the Divine for projecting a world of transiencies and tears. But let us not forget that deep within us dwells a memory of that "Hurrah!" and the moment we get into contact with our inmost self, our true soul, "the immortal in the mortal", we cannot help smiling psychically at all times until the day we can laugh supramentally for ever.

(28.7.1994)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

# SRI AUROBINDO AND MAHATMA GANDHI

## A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

Two eminent men of India of the 20th Century who have brought about epic revolutions—Mahatma Gandhi in the field of politics with his cult of non-violence, and Sri Aurobindo in the realm of spiritual thought with his force of God-realisation—have often made me ponder some of their diametrically opposite thoughts and actions in politics

Sri Aurobindo the Rishi reached the highest pinnacles of spirituality and the Mahatma has been acclaimed as an apostle of *ahimsa*. Sri Aurobindo in his earlier period was recognised by the British Government as the most dangerous revolutionary of his day and his secret plan was to prepare the country for an armed insurrection against the Government. He considered it the legitimate right of a subject people to fight by whatever means against the enemy to gain freedom. He became the leader of the Nationalist Party and his Swadeshi Movement received a tremendous response; but it was cut short when he was arrested and imprisoned for a year as an undertrial prisoner. He was proved innocent and came out of Alipore Jail a completely changed man. He abandoned active politics and left British India first for Chandernagore and finally for Pondicherry where he plunged himself into spiritual practice, even while keeping, as he said, a vigilant eye on what was happening in Indian politics. There Gandhi had taken up the leadership and launched his non-cooperation movement on absolutely non-violent lines. The Mahatma believed that “non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of brutes”. He was even ready to sacrifice the attainment of the freedom of the country if it could not be achieved by non-violent means, while Sri Aurobindo’s programme of passive resistance, of Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education, etc. included as integral to its success “the bow of the Kshatriya ready for use, though in the background”. Even though Gandhi’s movement had an immediate success and a spectacular influence on the people, Sri Aurobindo had predicted that it would end in a great confusion or a great fiasco. Indeed its final results were a marked disorder and even violence.

Sri Aurobindo revealed to us that his Swadeshi Movement had created the revolutionary mentality and the ideal of independence. It laid the foundation of an Industrial India and brought in the commercial class and the whole educated middle class into the political field. Though it had no time to bring in the peasantry, it had begun the work and Gandhi only carried it farther on. Gandhi took up its call of Passive Resistance and continued with some startling additions, which, though flashy and exciting, proved to be quite unsound: Khaddar, Hindi-ism, Satyagraha, Khilafat, Harijan, etc. These had a lively power of poking things up, but whether their final effects have been good is a

doubtful question. In fact, Gandhi's movement, Sri Aurobindo further predicted, had produced

- (a) A tremendous fissure between the Hindus and Moslems resulting in the formation of Pakistan and becoming permanent in our own country by communal representation.
- (b) A greater gap between Harijans and caste Hindus, made permanent in the same way.
- (c) A great confusion in Indian politics which left it a huge mass of division, warring tendencies, with no clear guide or compass anywhere, resulting in a division of India into five or six Indias: Hindu, Moslem, Pariah, Christian, Sikh, etc

We see this opposition pushed to the extreme when the Second World War broke out. The India Government asked the Congress to give its support to the War effort. Gandhi as the leader of the Congress rejected the call and started his non-violent non-cooperation with more intensity and ardour and insisted that the Government give immediate freedom to India. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, surprised and perplexed the Congress and people of India when he declared his whole-hearted support to the Allies' cause. He himself contributed to the War Fund and called upon India and his own disciples to do the same. Sri Aurobindo explained why he had taken this seemingly anomalous stand. He saw, he said, that Hitler was possessed by an Asuric anti-divine Power whose aim was to establish his hegemony over the entire world. Hitler had already occupied the whole of Western Europe and was preparing to attack England which if defeated and conquered would leave no opposition to his disastrous ambition. India would be his next victim. All hope of our freedom would be utterly dashed and Sri Aurobindo's mission too would be an utter failure. A reign of Darkness would be universal. So he saw in his Rishi-like vision that the Allies were standing for humanity and ultimately for the Divine. But his appeal fell on deaf ears. Gandhi, on his part, intensified his own non-violent programmes, the ultimate policy of which he exemplified in his letter "To Every Briton":

"I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves, man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them."



Then came the Cripps Proposal, promising Dominion Status after the War. Gandhi rejected the offer calling it a post-dated cheque on a bankrupt institution. Sri Aurobindo appealed to the Congress to accept the offer unconditionally, for he saw the Divine Hand behind it and knew that India would achieve the promised freedom. The appeal was rejected.

This was the major point of departure between the two leaders—the former and the then current one. The moral man wanted to achieve his goal as quickly as he could by taking advantage of the war-troubled Government, whereas the Rishi, in his vast spiritual vision, gave his support to strengthen the same Government, with the hope of gaining freedom after the War as promised by it.

Thenceforth Sri Aurobindo, leaving the Indian field to the Mahatma, relied entirely on his own spiritual means to help the Allies against Hitler, while the Mahatma exerted all his efforts and applied all possible methods to paralyse the British Government so that it might be compelled to concede India's demand. Thus it was as though another subtle war was going on between the two exponents of India's freedom, both standing in opposite camps. The Mahatma opposing the Allies and Sri Aurobindo supporting them in order to achieve the same goal. It is something unique in world history. It also shows the vast difference between the ethical and the spiritual standpoints.

How did Sri Aurobindo help the War effort? He wrote, referring to himself in the third person:

“In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action.... He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies.... Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo intervened because, as we have said,

“he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and specially to the spiritual evolution of mankind.... It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it.... When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor . ”<sup>1</sup>

1 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, pp 38-39

As regards Japan, he had not intervened with his spiritual force

“...until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India.”<sup>1</sup>

And when he did again intervene, there too he

“had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat.”<sup>2</sup>

And in the Indian field he

“had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.”<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi's naiveté regarding the horror of the Asuric Force that Hitler represented is evident when he expressed his confidence to be able to “melt the heart of Hitler by the magic power of non-violence”. The moral strength of his non-violent policies succeeded with the British because they were the British, with a tradition of fair play and chivalry. But the Dark Force of the Nazis was a vastly different matter. A superior Spiritual Force could alone have dealt with such an evil incarnation, never before arisen upon earth

It is wonderfully significant to note that the end of the Second World War, on the collapse of Japan, was announced by the Allied Powers in 1945 on the 15th of August, the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. I am convinced that one day the world will realise that this was a sign of the Divine's acknowledgement of Sri Aurobindo's tremendous effort in the War.

Equally significant is it that the day of India's independence is also the 15th of August, marking the Divine's seal upon Sri Aurobindo's work, open or occult, for the liberation of his country from foreign rule. We may add that the liberation on Sri Aurobindo's birthday points in the direction of India's ideal future development—a nation-wide turning towards the Supreme Spiritual Values and the basic turn of the human consciousness towards the Infinite and the Eternal.

NIRODBARAN

## SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION TO NIRODBARAN

### The Case Proceeds

WHEN I had proceeded with my case to some extent, my lawyer called me and said, “I have to be frank with you. Our case has become very difficult. The way it is going. I am afraid we have very little chance of winning it. If it is to be turned around, there is only one lawyer who can do it. You may have heard of him. He is the well-known Mr. ...”

“Oh yes, I know him very well indeed as he happens to be a relation of mine. But, for reasons I don’t want to go into now, I would rather not go to him. Is there no one else?”

“I’m afraid not. Whatever hesitations you may have, you’ll have to forget them and go to him. I am sure he’ll win it for you. You know, there is a saying in English ‘Nothing succeeds like success’. And he is a very successful lawyer indeed.”

I pondered over this for some days, then finally decided to go and see him, as my entire future and that of my son depended on the outcome of the case. I prepared myself to face him, come what may.

Accordingly, I arrived at his house without, on purpose, making an appointment. The peon received me and said, “The *Saheb* is now all alone. You’re lucky. Please write your name on this interview paper...” Instead of writing my own name, I wrote ‘Mr. Mukherjee’. I was called in. As soon as I entered, he said in a rough voice, “Who are you and why have you come without making an appointment?”

Without giving an answer, I quietly sat down, looked at him and said, “I see that you haven’t recognised me.” He then looked at me sharply, and I continued, “I am Esha.”

“Oh, you’re Esha!” he said, softening. His look changed and then he asked, very tenderly, “What brings you to me, Esha?”

“I’m sure you have guessed the reason why. You must have heard all about my case.”

“Yes, I have indeed.”

“Now my lawyer says that without your help, I have very little chance of winning. That’s why I’m at your doorstep.”

He heard me out with concentrated attention, looked at all my papers and then said, “All right. I’m ready.”

“Will you make me win?”

“I cannot say that for sure. Victory or defeat is not in our hands. All I can

say is that I give you my word that I will do my best.”

“That’s enough for me. Now I would like to make one thing very clear. You may find it strange.”

“Let me hear it.”

“I’ll be ever grateful to you for taking up my case and more so if you win it for me, but in my outer conduct and manner please don’t expect any formality from me, as is often done in society, you know I hope you have no objection—”

“No,” he interjected, “none. Those formalities, courtesies, flatteries, etc. need not bother you. I’d rather you be yourself and come in a simple and easy manner. Only,” he added, not without humour, “let me know beforehand of your coming!”

Thus I returned home thanking him, considering myself lucky for his easy-going manner with me in spite of his reputation as an arrogant lawyer.

It is true that without his help I would have lost my case and the custody of my son and I am ever grateful to him. But you’ll be surprised to hear that I kept no contact with him afterwards. Even when he had a serious accident I did not go to see him. People may think I am devoid of humanity, or that I am self-centred and things like that. But it is not so. In my heart I have always been grateful to him and had goodwill towards him. But it is not in me to be always humble with or to please or flatter my benefactor. And I appreciate his largeness of mind that he did not expect it of me or resent its absence.

Years later, on the occasion of my son’s marriage, I asked my son to go and invite him. As he was not part of my son’s circle of friends or relations he didn’t want to. I told him all that this man had done for me, for us. He then came willingly with me to give the invitation in person. As soon as we approached him, with much warmth he welcomed us. I introduced my son to him and said that we had come to invite him and his family to my son’s marriage.

“We shall most certainly come.”

“It’s an inter-caste marriage,” I warned him. “I hope you won’t mind.”

“Not at all. What does it matter? In fact, my own son has married a Muslim girl who comes from a highly placed family in Afghanistan and she studies in St. Xavier’s College with my son. He refused to change his decision in spite of all our objections and persuasions.”

“Oh him? He is your son? My son knows him. They are class-mates.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that! How interesting!”

On this happy note ended our meeting. Strange indeed are the world and its ways!

## SHATTERING A MYTH

ONE of the most important archaeological finds of our time has undoubtedly been the discovery of the Vedic river Sarasvati and the tracing of its ancient course by the late Dr V S. Wakankar. For its impact on ancient Indian history, it is comparable in importance to the discovery of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro some 70 years ago. While the discovery of the Harappan civilisation showed that it had very ancient roots, the discovery of the Sarasvati river has shown that the Vedic civilisation was pre-Harappan, and also that the idea of the Aryan invasion of India is entirely a myth.

It is not in the least surprising that the settlements being found along the ancient Sarasvati include many from the pre-Harappan era. The recently discovered site of Kunal in Haryana is probably the most dramatic of these pre-Harappan sites on the Sarasvati. All this is further evidence that the Vedic civilisation was mainly pre-Harappan.

Kunal lies on the ancient Sarasvati which again highlights the importance of Wakankar's great discovery. Equally important as the discovery is the method he followed: the discovery of this great prehistoric river is owed to his pragmatic approach of combining modern scientific techniques with a study of ancient records. Although he was a field archaeologist of international repute, he was also a deep student of ancient Indian literature. It was his study of these ancient works that allowed him to chart out a rough course of the Vedic Sarasvati which he was later able to explore.

The Sarasvati was the lifeblood of the Vedic society. Thanks to the work of archaeologists and the study of ancient records, it is now possible to reconstruct the course of the Vedic Sarasvati from before 4000 BC to 2000 BC at which date it went completely dry. Its drying up was due to a massive drought of global proportions that began in 2200 BC and persisted for some three centuries. The drying up of the Sarasvati, however, was a gradual process that took place in several stages. It was the greatest river during the period of the Rig Veda, flowing from the "mountain to the sea" as described in several places. This course is now known thanks to archaeology and satellite photography.

The Sarasvati then was indeed a mighty river with a constant width from six to eight kilometres, extending to fourteen kilometres in places. Numerous settlements have been found along its course in Haryana and Rajasthan, at places like Karnal, Jind, Somjat, Rohtak, Bhiwani, Mahendragarh, Hurgaon, Hissar, Kapurthala, Hanumangarh and several others. These are exactly the places that would be flourishing to go by Vedic accounts. A good number of these Sarasvati sites, like the recently discovered one at Kunal in Haryana, are pre-Harappan, confirming that the Vedic civilisation was also pre-Harappan. This is in agreement with other finds showing the Harappan civilisation to have evolved after the Vedic period, corresponding mainly to the post-Vedic Sutra period.

We can now see a clear pattern emerging from archaeology. Some early Harappan sites are being found on the Sarasvati riverbed itself which shows that the river in those areas must have been dry no later than 3000 BC. Pre-Harappan sites on the other hand are located along the ancient course which indicates that the Sarasvati must have been a flourishing river at the time. Since the Vedas describe the Sarasvati as the greatest river and worship it as the holy mother, only these pre-Harappan sites, established before the river dried up, can belong to the civilisation described in the Vedas.

By combining recent archaeological finds with ancient records, it is now possible to reconstruct the historical stages in which the Sarasvati river gradually dried up, and thereby obtain also a rough idea of the chronology of the Vedic Age. The Rig Veda as we have seen describes a mighty river that flowed from the mountain to the sea. It then used to flow through what is now the Thar desert in Rajasthan and join the Arabian Sea not far from the Rann of Kutch.

Rajasthan was then a fertile land that supported agriculture. In Vedic times the whole of North India from the Indus to the Ganga was a continuous tract of fertile territory with no intervening desert. This is now clear from satellite pictures, especially those taken by the French SPOT satellite.

The Panchavimsha Brahmana is later than the Rig Veda and it describes the Sarasvati that was already partially dry due to the encroaching desert. According to the Panchavimsha, the source of the Sarasvati was a place called Plaksha Prasravana in the Himalayas, not far from Ambala. It also states that the Sarasvati disappeared into the desert at a place approximately 44 days on horseback from its source. Thus by the time of the Panchavimsha account, the Sarasvati was no longer the great perennial river that flowed from the "mountain to the sea"—that is, no longer the great river described in the Rig Veda. The river described in the Panchavimsha corresponds to a date some centuries before 3000 BC according to the latest satellite and field studies. This is because some early Harappan sites dating to c. 3000 BC are found on the dry riverbed itself.

The Salya Parva of the Mahabharata preserves an account of the course of the Sarasvati which is not very different from the one found in the Panchavimsha, except that it is more detailed. What is interesting about the Mahabharata account is that the Sarasvati that disappeared into the desert reappeared at a place called Chamsodbhava where it was joined by several other streams. From this point, the flow continued and debouched into the sea via several branches at places like Prabhasa Pattana (modern Somnath), Bhriukaccha (Broach) and Dholavira. A major Harappan site has been found at the last-named place.

Further excavations are likely to reveal earlier settlements in the area. This shows that by the time the Mahabharata account was compiled, the Sarasvati followed a course interrupted by the encroaching desert. But the memory of its

former glory when it was a single great river had been kept alive in the literature. The Mahabharata account also mentions numerous sacred tirthas along the northern part of the river, all the way to its source, Plaksha Prasravana in the Himalayas.

A particularly interesting spot mentioned in the Mahabharata account is Vasistha Tirtha overlooking a gorge in the lower Himalayas. The seventh book of the Rig Veda is ascribed to Sage Vasistha. It describes the Sarasvati as flowing with great force 'cutting through the mountains'. Thus the Mahabharata account has points of contact with both the Rig Veda and the Panchavimsha Brahmana account. Wakankar's field expedition sank trial pits at various points along this course and tested for chemical composition of the subterranean water and other identifying factors. The tests showed the accounts found in ancient records to be substantially correct.

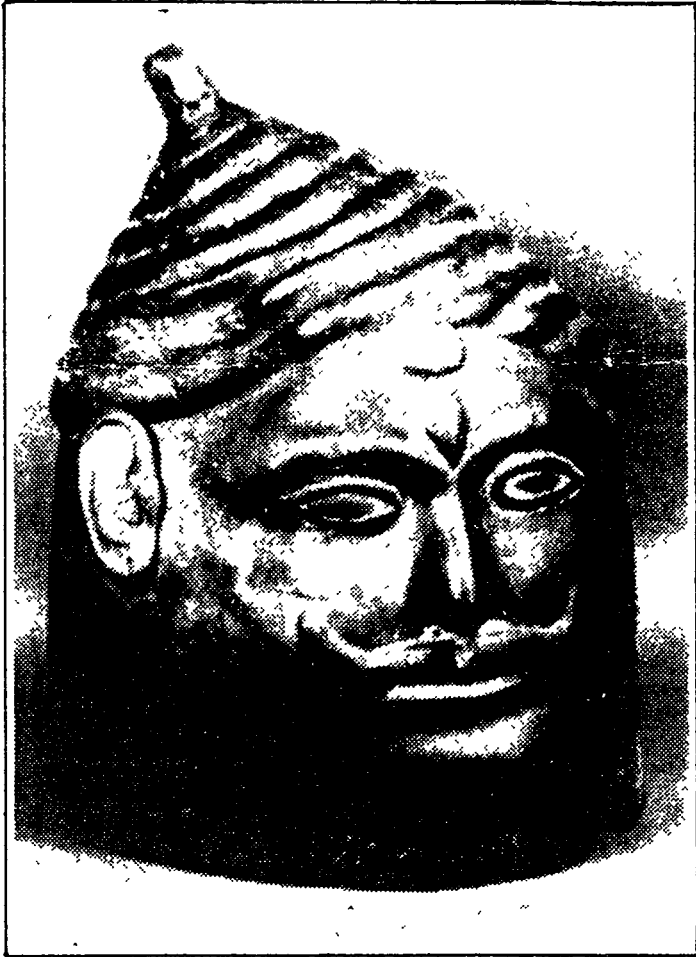
The next question is: can we correlate other scientific data with literary accounts of the Vedic period? The discovery of pre-Harappan sites along the ancient Sarasvati shows that the Vedic civilisation was predominantly pre-Harappan. It also shows that we must give up nineteenth century ideas that the Vedic Aryans were nomads. Most of these are agricultural settlements that show no signs of having been populated by newcomers to the area.

Kunal, a recently discovered Sarasvati site in Haryana, has revealed silver ornaments. This shows that their metallurgy must have been quite advanced; unlike gold, silver never appears in pure form and has to be extracted by separating it from other metals like copper. The date of Kunal is definitely earlier than 3000 BC. After proper corrections and calibrations are applied, it will probably be assigned to 3300 BC or earlier.

While this is certainly a very early date, the presence of silver ornaments at Kunal shows that it is still later than the society described in the Rig Veda. This is because the Rig Veda does not know silver. The oldest Sanskrit word for silver is rajatam hiranyam—literally 'white gold'—and it is mentioned for the first time in the Yajurveda. When Rig Vedic settlements are identified, in all probability metal artefacts occurring at those sites—like bronze and copper objects—will contain silver as an impurity indicating that separation of silver had not yet been mastered.

Based on a detailed analysis of both metallurgical and ecological data now available, I believe this date will prove to be no later than 3500 BC. Thus the presence of silver as impurity in copper and bronze artefacts may be taken as a convenient if rough guide in identifying Rig Vedic sites.

At least one such artefact has been found which encourages the hope that there must be others. In 1958, the American collector and history enthusiast Harry Hicks acquired a remarkable bronze head near Delhi that has remained something of an enigma. It had some carbon deposits (left during casting) which



*Bronze head scientifically dated 3800-3700 B C*

allowed radio carbon dating to be done. These tests carried out at laboratories in Switzerland and California showed that it had been cast between 3800 and 3700 BC.

Tests have revealed that this bronze head contains a high percentage of silver as impurity which corresponds to what we should expect in castings from the Rig Vedic period. Its very ancient date (3800-3700 BC) determined at the best scientific laboratories in Europe and America also point to the same conclusion. More significantly, this indicates that there probably exist other bronze artefacts that contain silver as impurity. All we have to do is look hard and deep along the Sarasvati and other Vedic rivers. Such sites are likely to date to 3500 BC or earlier. These when found are likely to be from the age of the R1g



Veda. The key identifying factor will be the relatively primitive metallurgy of their artefacts.

In summary, the late V.S. Wakankar's epic vision of combining science and traditional accounts is now proving to be extraordinarily fruitful. The Sarasvati sites like Kunal found so far are pre-Harappan but in all likelihood post-Rig Vedic Rig Vedic sites when identified will contain metal artefacts with silver as impurity. The Rig Veda knows gold as a precious metal but not silver. Thus both literally and figuratively, the Rig Veda belongs to the Golden Age that ended just before the dawn of the Silver Age.

N.S. RAJARAM

(With acknowledgments to *The Hindustan Times*, May 15, 1994)

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## TWO POEMS

### EGO

AN individual's desire—  
 The mirth of a surface-becoming,  
 A wild freedom from the hold of the indwelling Spirit  
 And a savage hope  
 To climb the Eternal's rapt tower  
 With loud-sounding steps.

### UNION

DRIVING tardy nature's wheel  
 Towards the Goal Supreme,  
 The awakened Self in man  
 Works out a grand Union  
 Between the pang of earth  
 And the pleasure of Heaven.

TRINATH RATH

## THE BLUE VASTNESS

WHO would measure the Blue Vastness?  
A number of fast-moving scenes vainly attempted  
To touch its fringe until they got lost.  
All human wit and strength congregated  
To look farther, but began to shake and fade  
A pack of grandiloquent desires rushed  
To grab it but proved a flop.  
The Blue Vastness, with a sweeping smile, receded,  
Remained unexplored, unavailed-of, untouched.  
At last an utter abandonment  
Turned into freedom, unfurled its sails  
And found itself at the core  
Of the Blue Vastness, synonym of Love.

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

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## A LITTLE MORE

So I may love Thee a little more, a little better,  
Lift the golden cloud of my vain imaginings  
From Thy sun-face, O Quintessence of the Infinite.  
Part, just a little, the vague veil that cruelly separates us.  
For a moment, let us hold hands, across the prism of the Manifold,  
I, from behind the bars of Time and Space,  
    Thou from Thy high Beyond  
Flood my prisoning self with Thy all-revealing rays,  
I offer my darkness at the rose-altar of Thy smile.

SHYAM KUMARI

## THE SPIRITUAL PATRIOT: SURENDRA NATH

IN the sudden and untimely death of Mr Surendra Nath, the late Governor of Punjab in a tragic air crash, the nation has suffered a grievous loss and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram one of the ardent supporters of its cause.

True to nature, Surendra Nath shunned publicity and preferred to work behind the scenes. Not an easy task for someone with the background of a distinguished career in the Indian Police Service (IPS) and a series of high profile administrative jobs that he carried out for the Government of India in the sensitive border State of Punjab.

Probably by a play of mere circumstances Mr. Surendra Nath came to establish contact with Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram rather late in his life. His early reaction to the movement was typically sceptical. Invited by the Sri Aurobindo Society, Chandigarh, to act as the patron for the events marking the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's homecoming, Mr. Nath's initial reaction was of course the acknowledgement of Sri Aurobindo's greatness as a patriot and a nationalist. "But what was special about his homecoming?" he had asked, "After all, aren't so many people returning home regularly from abroad?" It was Surendra Nath's greatness that he did not leave the question unprobed. Despite his maddening schedule as the then Governor of the three Northern States of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, in between hopping helicopter rides to the State capitals and district headquarters for the affairs of the State, Mr. Surendra Nath managed to read up, within an amazingly short time, a huge corpus of writing by and on Sri Aurobindo. And when the time came for him to preside at the State level functions marking the great event of Sri Aurobindo's "Swadeshagamana" at the spacious auditorium of Punjab University, Chandigarh, he spoke to the select audience with a conviction and authority that normally comes from a lifetime's contact with a cause. To those of us, present at the venue and subsequently at the seminar "Integration: Need of the Hour", Surendra Nath's performance then was a marvel, nay, a miracle.

Addressing a packed audience comprising some of the leading political and intellectual personalities of the land, Mr. Surendra Nath said that Sri Aurobindo's Ideal remains perennially fresh and valid. He was not there to enhance the greatness of the Ideal. Rather, as representatives of the Indian State, it was a privilege for them to be associated with the Ideal. When the State and its functionaries make the public acknowledgement of an Ideal, perhaps it gives important messages to the people at large. For someone who was the architect of restoring normalcy in Punjab against impossible odds and had earned the gratitude of the whole nation, these were modest words indeed! You might say it was the King bowing before the Rishi!

To Surendra Nath, it was significant that Sri Aurobindo was coming in such a big way to India's border States. He of course knew that Sri Aurobindo's

spirituality was for the whole of humanity. But wasn't the message going to emanate from India? Before we speak of the mission of India, we must ensure her survival, he said. With terrorism and secessionism all around, Surendra Nath's speech was a timely reminder for vigilance. Indian history teaches us that the border kings and States have always played a pivotal strategic role: King Porus, Chandra Gupta Maurya, Prithviraj Chauhan and Ranjit Singh readily come to our mind. India's future has been at stake whenever the border has been weak. Only then could a Ghazni, a Ghori or a Babur come in for pillage, plunder and occupation. Even now, the danger is real. Sri Aurobindo had issued many such warnings. In his *Foundations of Indian Culture*, his "Independence Day Message" in 1947 and the Korean War Message that he gave to the Allies, he had warned against Partition and the aims of Communist expansionism through Korea, South East Asia and Tibet. The surprising thing was not that a police officer was talking of the strategic role of the border States but that he saw spiritual force as a real bulwark against aggression.

Clearly, such words could not come out of a mere intellectual interest. It is not sufficiently known that at the bidding of friends from the Sri Aurobindo Society, Mr. Surendra Nath had made an initial trip to the Ashram. On the eve of his superannuation, late at night as he sat meditating at the samadhi, a call came from the highest authority of the land: his services were required in Punjab and a plane was standing by to take him back. Like a loyal selfless worker, Surendra Nath returned to the helm of affairs and remained there till the very end.

There are many things for which Mr. Surendra Nath will be remembered. The President's Sword of Honour that he had received as the best cadet of his IPS batch at the Police Academy was the beginning of a series of distinctions he won in his long and eventful career. But he would be valued most of all for his spirit of courage. As a supreme patriot, Mr. Surendra Nath constantly faced the bullet of the terrorist. He took over the reins of a rudderless Punjab and helped the return of the political process. When communalism and spirituality are wilfully confused by our bankrupt elite, Mr. Surendra Nath had the vision and courage to uphold Sri Aurobindo and his message in public as the greatest need of the hour.

A commission of enquiry probing into the cause of the air crash is on. It will be some time before we know for certain whether the tragic death of Mr. Surendra Nath, his wife Gargi Devi and practically his whole family was due to human error, the failure of the machine or the handiwork of the enemies of the State. But regardless of the outcome, the crash in the remote hills of North Western India, that has witnessed for centuries India's tryst with her destiny, will remain, in the national memory, a perfect metaphor for the sacrifice of Surendra Nath, the spiritual patriot.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BALAKRISHNA

WHY does the printed word inspire such demonic fury. the torching of the great Library at Alexandria, the paranoia of a Goebbels or a Stalin, the hunting of a Salman Rushdie or a Taslima Nasreen, in our own times?

The key to this mystery probably lies in grasping the nature of power and tyranny and the basic distinction marking the human world from the animal kingdom. Human society essentially replicates the drama of possession, control and domination from the animal world. But in so doing, the humans lend to this enterprise an element lacking in the animals. a viciousness that animals seldom display! The use of revenge, cunning, treachery, rapine, pillage and wanton destruction is not given to animals. Nor are they given to genocide or a holocaust!

The use of Mind to fuel our atavistic animal instincts is probably what lends an extraordinary power of evil to human affairs. Books are the products of the human Mind, our flaunted originality, ingenuity and creativity, our claims to supremacy, and our demand for a unique place under the sun! Therefore, all systems of tyranny naturally betray an admixture of fear and reverence towards the great Books. They need to ban and proscribe them, of course But they also need an alternative staple for *their* concept of the millennium: their Third Reich or Gulag Archipelago!

The more humanity “advances”, the greater is the tendency to rely upon the written word: Power must seek legitimacy. In the post-Gutenberg world, the audio-visual predominates and seems to edge out the printed medium. But we have yet to see the obsolescence of the latter. The format of the book may give way to the computer data base, disk or the microfiche, but these do not invalidate the great Book Tradition as the repository of wisdom

So, what does one make of the war of the words? How does one discern truth from the multitude of scheming impostors? Like the Virtue of The Mother’s tale that stands alone, truth must await its own moment of discovery.

One way of grasping truth is to look at the *alternate* tradition of Great Books. These, it would appear, are not the usual products of the human mind, its game with ideas and concepts, its fanciful logic and futile shadow play. They speak the voice of a Tathagata, a Mahavira, a Confucius, a St. Augustine, a Shankara or a Ramakrishna. They embody Truth that stems from the depths of our being and keep ignorance at bay Truth that harmonises and integrates and acts as a beacon light.

When grasped by the discerning few, this Truth, treasured in the Great Books, becomes a powerful driving force that can effect momentous changes. Some of these are of course fated to be wasted in the form of creeds, cults and dogmas, ideologies, systems and doctrines. But then that is the stuff we humans are made of. Our progress must remain tardy and circuitous

In any event, the written word has made a perennial appeal to the Great Beings. That may have been why Sri Aurobindo, the poet and visionary, opted for the relatively unfamiliar medium of philosophy and wrote voluminous essays in his journal *Arya*.

One power that Sri Aurobindo rediscovered and creatively used to great effect was the *Mantra*, a means not unknown to the Indian mystical tradition. Sri Aurobindo gave to his revelatory lines a Mantric quality, producing a resounding effect. That is why a seemingly obsolete Miltonic verse form was used by him in *Savitri* to depict the evolutionary epic of Love and Death.

Balakrishna probably realized all this. He must have sensed the great power latent in Sri Aurobindo's writings. How else can one make sense of his passion, indeed his madness for Sri Aurobindo's books—first and last through SABDA?

In a way nothing was more incongruous with SABDA than Balakrishna's early life, his affluent business background, his bright and promising academic career in commerce and law and the University merit scholarship that he won. But like a chosen being, suddenly he received a call and at the tender age of nineteen took up work with SABDA under the Mother's close guidance.

Paradoxically enough, it is precisely these so-called incongruous qualities that became an asset in Balakrishna's case. Unlike typical "intellectuals" or academics who would have probably made a mess of it, Balakrishna ran the organisation on sound business lines and made it a profitable venture. Even as early as 1955, he organized a book exhibition with Sanjivan at the Annamalai University at Chidambaram. Since then SABDA has not looked back. It has had a proud presence in nearly all book fairs and exhibitions. For this, no small credit ought to go to Balakrishna's untiring efforts.

Other challenges soon came. Sri Aurobindo's words had to be carried across the frontier. And in 1956, with the world in turmoil at the height of the Hungarian crisis, Balakrishna went to Africa as the Mother saw a great possibility for Sri Aurobindo's books there. He travelled extensively in the east of Central African cities carrying the books and photos in his little "Volkswagen" car. In 1960-61 the Mother gave him the task of setting up SABDA Bombay.

Returning to Pondicherry in 1967, Balakrishna plunged headlong into the publication of Sri Aurobindo's Centenary Works, its translation into as many languages as possible, pre-publication sales arrangements, travels in India and abroad. No wonder SABDA has been represented in all countries barring South America and Greenland! Even as late as 1993, Balakrishna was planning a trip to South America.

Balakrishna had a ceaseless thirst for knowledge in his field, constantly updating himself with export policies, copyright laws, book publications and sales.

And today Balakrishna is no more! He has left behind him his rich legacy,

his life of utter faith and loyalty. Two years back, on a periodical visit to the Ashram, one morning I was summoned to meet Balakrishna “What business could the Director of SABDA have with me?” I wondered. As I met him in the bright showroom of SABDA, near the Ashram. Balakrishna picked up a dozen attractive copies of the recently published collection of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry, specially meant for children. Offering the first half he said, “Here, please review them and send me the review copies!” “And the other six?” I enquired. “Well, these you must give away to the principals of schools in your city. Sri Aurobindo is meant for children too!” he stated in his gentle persuasive voice.

In an uncanny and yet simple manner that can only be the result of insight, Balakrishna Poddar knew that Sri Aurobindo was for the future and his works had to be carried far and near to humanity. Balakrishna lived the principle that great and immortal Books matter and must make a special appeal to Man, the mental being; that words have no meaning unless they are backed by vision. He also knew that such words carry Power and can effect a real change from within. Ultimately, this is the legacy Balakrishna left behind him, his supreme lesson of life.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

# THE GLORY OF LIFE IN DEATH

## A REMINISCENCE

HE was suffering from some heart-problem. Bypass surgery had been already done. Earlier, he had withstood a heart-attack. He was asked to be careful in his diet and work. A daily walk in fresh air would help. He regulated his life in such a beautiful manner that he could work and move about like a normal person. Suddenly something went amiss. His travel, though cleared by his doctor, strained him. He was rushed to the nursing home of the Ashram. Then started a long struggle between life and death. But was it really like that? Actually life faced and challenged death. He bore everything quietly and cheerfully. Heavy medication, hours under oxygen and on glucose drip made his body weak. But he kept in perfect tune with his inner being and this communion gave us a sense of light in his haggard face, in his lean body.

His condition was such that someone had to be with him constantly to keep watch, to assist in whatever way possible. Different people were on duty at different hours of the day and night. But each one was a witness to the heroic courage of life keeping death at bay. There was definitely something unique happening. One watched, observed, reflected and was inspired. The bed-ridden patient was not only full of patience despite the many physical problems and inconveniences, he was cheerful and lively. He could hardly speak but he was kept informed about the happenings in his office, in the Ashram and in the world.

There were regular ups and downs following heavy doses of medicine when he would seem to be lost in the long hours of sleep. But his inner work continued. When conditions permitted, he would sit on his bed and attend to the office work. He astonished his friends when he dared and accomplished what many in his condition would not even think of doing. He worked quietly and efficiently on the computer, finalised the year's accounts and submitted the balance sheet – his official responsibility done. During those times one would think that he was improving and would come out of the clutches of the Lord of Death whose presence dogged every day of his life.

He was fully engaged in a two-fold preparation. He was preparing himself within by finishing all he was duty-bound to do and turning himself entirely to the Divine by constant remembrance of and concentration on his Gurus—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Simultaneously, he requested and prepared his near and dear ones to bear bravely and calmly their fate when he would drop his mortal mantle. He even told which clothes they should put on his body after it was brought to his house from the nursing home. This way he was gradually snapping the threads, inner and outer, that bound him to the earth, and was consciously getting ready for a smooth, silent and serene transit to a fresh phase.



of life beyond. Six months passed by

The day of decision arrived unexpectedly. Things seemed much improved. He told the doctors and friends that he was fine. His sister was heartened by the clear change in his body. It seemed to emit a soft glow. The last session ended happily with his only child, a darling daughter whom he requested to recite all the mantras of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was the hour of sunset. He who could hardly speak for one minute at a stretch without gasping for breath joined her in chanting for full thirty minutes. Unknown to her it was his sweet parting gift, the last precious memory that would always remain evergreen in her consciousness and remind her of the spiritual link with him. He then asked her to leave as he was fine

Then came the evening when a young friend would read out to him something from the books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. But after the marathon recitation, what was there to hear? His whole being was suffused with the spiritual force of the mantras of his Gurus. It was his body's final invocation and consecration. He bade good-bye to this world silently and smilingly, with a quiet satisfaction at the accomplishment of his work, his duty, his purpose of existence. It was a spiritually uplifting sight of the victory of life shining at its end—its glory on the face of death!

SUSHILA MELVANI

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of September 1994)

THE *Bande Mataram* said. "It was the merest affectation to deny that the Muzzafferpore outrage had created a most critical situation in the country." In addition to suspecting that Barindra Kumar Ghose and other revolutionary members of the Garden's organisation were involved in the miniature bomb-making at Manicktola and perhaps even with the bomb-throwing at Muzzafferpore, the British Government suspected that Sri Aurobindo was the ringleader of the murdering plot. The police had in fact expected to surprise Sri Aurobindo at the Garden but they were disappointed that they had found only Barindra and other smaller fry. In their secret files the Government did not find any detailed or undoubtful evidence.

In this connection Sri Aurobindo reminiscences: "A month and a half before my arrest an unknown gentleman had come to see me. He said: 'Sir, we have not met, but since I have great respect for you I am here to warn you of an impending danger. I would also like to know if you are familiar with anyone at Konnagar. Did you ever visit the place, and do you have a house there?' 'No, I do not have any house there', I said. 'But I have been there once and am known to some people there' 'I will say nothing more', said the stranger, 'but from now on you should not meet anyone from there. Some wicked people are conspiring against you and your brother, Barindra. Soon they will put you into trouble. Don't ask me anything more'. I told him: 'Gentleman, I am unable to understand how this incomplete information will help me, but since you come with friendly intentions, thank you very much. I do not wish to know anything more. I have complete faith in God. He will always protect me, and it is for me needless to make any attempt to be careful'. I heard nothing about this afterward. That this stranger and well-wisher did not imagine things, I had proof the same night. An inspector and a few police officers came to pump out my connection with Konnagar. 'Is your original home at Konnagar?' they asked. 'Did you ever visit the place? When? And why? Has Barindra any properties there?'—and other questions. I answered these mainly in order to get at the root of the mystery. The attempt was not a success, but from the questions as well as the manner of the police inquiry it appeared that they had come by some information which they were trying to verify..."<sup>1</sup>

On the day previous to Sri Aurobindo's arrest, the Government of Bengal drafted a letter and submitted it to the Government of India. In the draft the Bengal Government requested to get the permission that at least three persons including Sri Aurobindo ought to be deported under Regulation III of 1818. "Disappointed by the finds at the *Nabashakti* office, Andrew Fraser decided to have the proposal redrafted and submitted to India Government for approval.

Anglo-Indian sentiments in Calcutta were strongly in favour of deportation. This public opinion was cited in the report: but it is clear that Bengal's intention to deport had more to do with the sentiments of the Lieutenant Governor, who understandably was indignant that he had three times been the target of bomb-wielding assassins."<sup>2</sup>

Bengal's lengthy report on deportation was written by E. A. Gait, chief secretary to the government. 'The facts that have been adduced against Aurobindo,' Gait wrote, 'are not such as would constitute clear legal proof' that he was what Fraser was convinced he was: 'the ringleader of the whole movement'. Accordingly 'if a prosecution were instituted it is more than probable that it would end in an acquittal.' This would be a grave misfortune for there could be no doubt that this 'fluent and impressive writer', this 'organizer of great ability and ingenuity' was 'the master mind at the back of the whole extremist campaign in Bengal'. Conviction of the other members of the society would be 'of no avail if Aurobindo were set free' for this 'irreconcilable' would then 'lose no time in starting a fresh conspiracy' and all the work of the police and the government 'would be altogether in vain'. In the 'interest of peace and good government,' Gait concluded, 'it is absolutely necessary that this man should be removed from the political arena'. He and the two men arrested with him, Abinash Bhattacharya and Sailendra Nath Bose, should forthwith be confined in 'a fortress, jail or other place' outside the province of Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

"Three days later, Fraser sent two letters to Minto. One, a confidential note running to four pages in printed form, summarized the history of the society and suggested a number of ways to contain the danger. In this note Fraser gave special prominence to Aurobindo, who, he reiterated, 'appears undoubtedly to be the ringleader of the gang'. In a covering letter, Fraser urged Aurobindo's deportation in the strongest possible terms

" 'The man,' wrote the lieutenant-governor, was 'able, cunning, fanatical. These qualities have their vigour in him which they not infrequently have in the man who is not quite sane.... He is regarded and spoken of by all as the disciples regard a great Master. He has been in the forefront, of all, advising seditious writing and authorizing murder. But he has kept himself, like a careful and valued General, out of sight of the 'enemy'. We cannot get evidence against him such as would secure his conviction in a Court. But we have been fortunate enough to get papers which show his connection with the conspiracy, and information as to his action, quite sufficient to convince the reasonable mind and justify deportation. I earnestly hope no sentiment will be allowed to prevent this."<sup>4</sup>

A number of arrests throughout the province of Bengal commenced from 2nd May. Sri Aurobindo himself along with the rest was arrested in *Navashakti's* office while he was sleeping peacefully in the early hours of May 2nd, 1908. Sri Aurobindo has given a vivid account of his arrest and prison-life and a fair

description with wit and humour of the rules and the regulations of the British Government. He describes specially the interesting characters of the British officers in his famous book *Karakahani* in Bengali (*Tales of Prison Life*). He shows also the way they treated the prisoners who were jailed for the terrorist activities prompted by their love of the country. It is an inspiring book recording Sri Aurobindo's intense Sadhana in the prison and his crowning spiritual experiences in the most unpropitious surroundings. The story of his prison life recounts:

"On Friday night I was sleeping without a worry. At about five in the morning my sister rushed to my room in an agitated manner and called me out by name. I got up. The next moment the small room was filled with armed policemen, Superintendent Cregan, Mr. Clark of 24-Parganas, the charming and delightful visage of familiar Srīman Benod Kumar Gupta, a few Inspectors, red turbans, spies and search witnesses. They all came running like heroes, pistols in hand, as though they were besieging, with guns and cannon, a well-armed fort. I heard that a white hero had aimed a pistol at my sister's breast, but I did not see it. I was sitting on my bed, still in half-sleep, when Cregan inquired, 'Who is Aurobindo, is that you?' I answered, 'Yes. I am Aurobindo Ghose'. Immediately he ordered a policeman to put me under arrest. Then, because of an extremely objectionable expression used by Cregan, there was a little exchange of words between the two. I asked for the search warrant, read and signed it. Finding a mention of bombs in the warrant, I understood that the presence of these soldiers and policemen was connected with the Muzzafferpore killing. The one thing I did not understand was why, even before any bombs or explosive had been discovered in my house, I was arrested in the absence of a body warrant. But I did not raise any useless objections. Afterwards, under instructions from Cregan, I was handcuffed, and a rope tied round my middle. An upcountry constable stood behind me holding the rope-end. Just then the police brought in Shriyut Abinash Bhattacharya and Shriyut Sailen Bose, handcuffed and roped round the midriff. Nearly half an hour after, I do not know at whose bidding, they removed the rope and the handcuffs. From Cregan's words it seemed as if he had entered into the lair of some ferocious animal, as if we were a lot of uneducated, wild, law-breakers and it was unnecessary to speak or behave courteously towards us. But after the sharp exchange the sahib grew a little milder. Benodbabu tried to explain something about me to him. After which Cregan asked me: 'It seems you are a B A. Is it not a matter of shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this?' 'I am a poor man and I live like one,' I said. 'Then have you worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man?' Cregan replied in a loud voice. Knowing how impossible it was to explain the love of motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton I did not make the attempt.

“All the while the search continued. Beginning at five-thirty, it was over at about eleven-thirty. Inside or outside the boxes, all the exercise books, letters, papers, scraps, poems, plays, prose essays, translations, nothing escaped the clutches of the all-engrossing search. Among the witnesses to the search Mr. Rakshit seemed a little put out, later, bemoaning his lot, he informed me that the police had dragged him along, and that he had no idea that he would have to be a party to such a nefarious activity. He described, most pathetically, how he had been kidnapped for the purpose. The attitude of the other witness, Samarnath, was of quite another kind, he discharged his part of the job with considerable gusto, like a true loyalist and to the manner born. Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshineswar that had been kept in a small cardboard box; he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark’s suspicions were not unfounded. In the end the decision was reached that it was a piece of earth which was unnecessary to send to the chemical analyst. I did not join in the search except to open a few boxes. No papers or letters were shown or read out to me. Mr. Cregan, for his own delectation, read out loudly a letter from Alakdhar. The friendly Benod Gupta in his natural and delightful style marched round the room, raising echoes everywhere and brought out from the shelf or some other corner papers or letters, and now and then muttering ‘Very important, very important,’ handed these over to Cregan. I was never told what these important documents might be. Nor was I at all curious, since I knew it was impossible that there might be in my house any formula for the manufacture of explosive or documents relating to conspiracy.

“After rummaging through my room the police led us to the adjoining room. Cregan opened a box belonging to my youngest aunt, he once or twice glanced at the letters, then saying that it was no use carrying these women’s correspondence left them behind. Then the police *mahatmas* appeared on the ground floor. Cregan had his tea there. I had a cup of cocoa and toast. During this period Cregan tried to argue and convince me about his political views—this mental torture I had to suffer coolly. But may I ask, one knows physical tortures to be part of the traditional police strategy, but does such inhuman mental torture also fall within the purview of its unwritten laws? I hope our highly respectable, friend-of-the-country Shriji Jogeshchandra Ghose will raise this question in the Legislative Assembly.

“After searching the rooms on the ground floor and the office of ‘Navashakti’ the police again came up to the first floor to open an iron safe belonging to ‘Navashakti’. Unable to open it after a half-hour battle, they decided to remove it bodily to the police station. This time a police officer discovered a bicycle, with a railway label bearing the mark of Kushtia. Immediately they took it as an important proof that the vehicle belonged to the man who had earlier

shot a sahib there and they gladly took it away with them.

“At about eleven-thirty we left our house Outside the gates, in a car, I found my maternal uncle and Shrijut Bhupendranath Basu. ‘On what charges have you been arrested?’, asked uncle. ‘I know nothing’, I answered, ‘they arrested and handcuffed me soon after getting into my room, they didn’t show any body warrant’. When uncle inquired why the handcuffs were thought necessary, Benodbabu said, ‘Sir, it’s not my fault Ask Aurobindobabu. I told the Sahib and had the handcuffs removed.’ On Bhupenbabu’s asking about my offence, Mr. Gupta mentioned the I.P.C. article on murder Bhupenbabu was stunned and did not say another word Later on I came to know that my solicitor, Sri Hirendranath Datta, had expressed a desire to be present on my behalf during the search. The police had turned down the request

“Binod babu was entrusted with taking us to the police station. There he behaved with us in a remarkably decent manner. We had our bath and lunch there and then proceeded towards Lal Bazar. After being made to wait there for a couple of hours we were removed to Royal Street in which auspicious locality we stayed all evening It was there that I first came to know the sly detective Maulvi Sams-ul-Alam and had the pleasure of entering with him into a cordial relation.... The Maulvi made me listen to a most entertaining sermon on religion. That Hinduism and Islam have the same basic principles: in the Omkara of the Hindus we have the three syllables. A,U,M, the first three letters of the Holy Koran are A,L,M. According to philological laws, U is used for L; *ergo*, Hindus and Musulmans have the same *Mantra* or sacred syllables. Yet one has to maintain the uniqueness of one’s faith, so a Hindu considers it wrong to eat with Musulmans.... The Sahibs say Aurobindo Ghose is the leader of the terrorist party, this is a matter of shame and sorrow for India. But by keeping to the path of rectitude the situation can yet be saved The Maulvi was fully convinced, that distinguished persons, men of high character, like Bipin Pal and Aurobindo Ghose, whatever they might have done, they would openly confess these.... I was charmed and delighted with his knowledge, intelligence and religious fervour.... But in spite of so much religious enthusiasm the Maulvi did not give his profession of a ‘tech’. Once he said, ‘You made a great mistake in handing over the garden to your younger brother to manufacture bombs. It was not very intelligent on your part.’ Understanding the implication of his words I smiled a little, and said: ‘Sir, the garden is as much mine as my brother’s. Where did you learn that I had given it over to him, or given it to him for the purpose of manufacturing bombs?’

“A little abashed, the Maulvi answered: ‘No, no, I was saying in case you have done it.’ Then the great-souled Maulvi opened an autobiographical chapter before me, and said. ‘All the moral or economic progress that I have made in life can be traced back to a single sufficing moral adage of my father He would always say, ‘Never give up an immediate gain This great word is the sacred

formula of my life, all this advancement is owing to the fact that I have always remembered that sage advice.' At the time of this pronouncement the Maulvi stared at me so closely that it seemed as though I was his meat and food, which, following the parental advice, he would be loath to give up. In the evening, the redoubtable Ramsadaya Mukhopadhyaya appeared on the scene. He expressed words of unusual kindness and sympathy, told everyone present to be careful about my food and bed. Immediately afterwards some fellows came and took Sailendra and me, through rain and storm, to the lock-up of Lal Bazar. This was the only occasion when I met Ramsadaya. I could see the man was both intelligent and active, but his words and demeanour, his tone, his gait, all seemed fake and unnatural, as if he was for ever acting on a stage. There are men like that whose words, bodies, actions are an embodiment of untruth. They are experts in imposing on immature minds, but those who know men and their ways find them out at once.

"At Lal Bazar on the ground floor in a spacious room we two were kept together. Some snacks were served. After a while two Englishmen entered the room, later I was told that one of them was the Police Commissioner, Mr. Halliday himself. Finding us both together Halliday was wrathful with the sergeant, and pointing towards me he said, 'Take care that nobody stays or speaks with this man.' Sailen was at once removed and locked up in another room. When others had left, Halliday asked me: 'Aren't you ashamed of being involved in this cowardly, dastardly activity?' 'What right have you to assume that I was involved?' To this Halliday replied: 'I am not assuming. I know everything.' At this I said: 'What you know or do not know is your concern. I wholly deny having any connection with these murderous acts.'

"The whole of Sunday was passed in the lock-up. There was a stair-case in front of my room. In the morning I found a few young lads coming down the stairs. Theirs faces were unfamiliar, but I guessed that they too had been arrested in the same case. Later I came to know that these were the lads from the Manicktola Gardens. A month after, in the jail I came to know them. A little later I too was taken downstairs for a wash—since there was no arrangement for a bath. I went without it. For lunch I grabbed, with some effort, a few morsels of pulse and boiled rice. The effort proved too much and had to be given up. In the afternoon we had fried rice. For three days this was our diet. But I must also add that on Monday the sergeant, of himself, gave me tea and toast.

"Later I came to learn that my lawyer had sought permission from the Commissioner to have my food sent from home, but to this Mr. Halliday did not agree. I also heard that the accused were forbidden to consult their lawyer or attorney. I don't know if this restriction is valid or not. It is true that though a lawyer's advice would have been of help to me, I did not quite need it; it has, however, harmed some others involved in the case. On Monday we were presented before the Commissioner. Abinash and Sailen were with me. We were

taken in different batches. Thanks to our good deeds in a past incarnation we three had been arrested earlier, and, since we had already some experience of legal quibblings, all of us refused to make any declarations before the Commissioner. Next day we were taken to the court of the magistrate Mr. Thornhill. It was then that I met for the first time Shriyut Kumar Krishna Datta, Mr. Manuel, and one of my relations. Mr. Manuel asked me, 'According to the police a good deal of suspicious literature has been recovered from your house. Were these papers or letters really there?' 'I can say without a shadow of doubt,' I told him, 'that there were no such things, it is quite impossible.' Of course then I did not know of the 'sweets letters' or of the 'scribblings.' I told my relative, 'Tell the people at home not to fear or worry, my innocence will be fully vindicated.' From that period on I had a firm belief that it would be so. In the beginning, during solitary imprisonment, the mind was a little uneasy. But after three days of prayer and meditation an unshakable peace and faith again overwhelmed the being... Before entering the jail precincts we were given a bath, put into prison uniform, while our clothes, shirts, dhoties and kurtas were taken away for the laundry. The bath, after four days, was heavenly bliss. After that they took us to our respective cells. I went into mine and the doors were closed as soon as I got in. My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. Next year, on May 6, I was released."<sup>5</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

#### *References*

- 1 *Tales of Prison Life*, by Sri Aurobindo Third Edition January 1985, pp 18-20
- 2 *The Bomb In Bengal*, by Peter Heehs, pp 172, 173
- 3 *Ibid* p 173
- 4 *Ibid* pp 173, 174
- 5 *Tales of Prison Life*, by Sri Aurobindo, pp 8-24



## TRACING MEDHANANDA'S FOOTSTEPS

THE longer one lives in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram the more difficult it becomes to say what the Ashram is—for fear of missing the most important: the inexpressible. I find myself in a similar situation when asked to say something about Medhananda, with whom I worked for forty-two fruitful years. He presented himself better than I could do, in “The Buttons” (*Mother India*, 15 August 1991) and “The Yoga of the Ocean” (*Mother India*, September 1994), and in the journal that was nearly exclusively his creation, = 1.

There he adopted many pen-names, which represented different aspects of his multifaceted personality; but the =1 editorials were always signed Medhananda, the name given to him by the Mother, as too was the research work he later took up, on the psychology of ancient Egypt.

He was born Fritz Winkelstroeter on April 28, 1908, son of a wealthy engineer and industrialist in Pforzheim, Germany. As a child, he liked to change his name often, choosing mostly ‘Red-Indian’ names, which permitted innumerable combinations and inventions. They evoked in him related psychological potentialities, which he took seriously and practised as long as his identification with a particular name lasted. When he presented his new personality to his mother, she invariably declared that she would not recognise such a vulgar name to be that of her beloved son. But if she did not call him by it, he would not answer, even at lunch-time—so that finally she felt obliged to call him by the infamous name, for fear that he would spend the night at the top of a tree in their vast garden.

He had his first spiritual experience when he was still crawling on all fours, and more compelling ones when he was three or four years old. Others followed. With the first pocket-money he received he bought a book on the Hindu gods—to the great astonishment of his family. But it was only after he fled the mounting tide of Nazism, leaving his position as a junior judge in the Frankfurt High Court and going as far away as possible, to the other side of the globe, to Tahiti, and then to its sister-island Moorea, that he found in the virgin forest there the natural conditions for his inner life to blossom profusely. His yoga was entirely spontaneous, and did not follow any book. At the same time he was building a house, catching and taming a wild horse, cultivating coffee and vanilla, attending to his cows, and making and selling cheese.

It was many years later, after the end of the war, when the Messageries Maritimes resumed their shipping service to French Polynesia, that the only bookseller in Tahiti started receiving, along with the latest novels, works by or about Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Shankaracharya... and a list of books by Sri Aurobindo which could be ordered from the publisher Adrien Maisonneuve in Paris. So eventually whatever books of Sri Aurobindo were available at that time started to arrive. Medhananda plunged into them,

saturated himself with them. Then he wrote to Sri Aurobindo. No copy of this letter seems to have survived, but we have the reply he received from Pavitra, dated 30th September 1949, which started, “Sri Aurobindo me charge de répondre à votre lettre...”.

Here is an English translation of part of it:

“Sri Aurobindo has asked me to reply to your letter.

He agrees to help you and guide you on the path to divine realisation and supramental transformation....

For you, such a long journey [from Tahiti to Pondicherry] cannot be undertaken lightly. So Sri Aurobindo advises you to wait. If you know how to use profitably the time that is given to you, it will in no way be wasted.

Do write from time to time to say how you are getting on.”

Here are some extracts from Medhananda’s answer to Pavitra, dated 17 October 1949.

“I thank you for having transmitted to me the bliss of Bhagavan and of the Mother... It was as if I had touched a high-tension wire....

For me, spiritual awakening is like an inner shower, a happiness that floods into you from above and slowly spreads down to the extremities. This is such a strong and bodily thrill that every cell of my body seems to share it—a vibration like a deep sound that is difficult to bear in the intensity of its happiness. Many books speak of ananda, but none describe it like this. Am I mistaken?...

None of my experiences are willed or provoked. For me, meditation is the presence. If She does not close the doors [of the senses] there is no meditation. I want to live only for Her. What discipline, what sadhana must be followed to keep Her constantly in oneself?...

It seems to me that I could never go beyond the first part of the first sloka of Shankara’s Vivekacudamani: I prostrate myself before Govinda whose nature is supreme Bliss. ..

What proof of my vocation can I give you while remaining here, except to say that for me it is an unshakable certitude? ‘For the Grace of the divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme, and now or tomorrow its effect is sure, a thing decreed, inevitable and irresistible.’ And what greater outer sign of this Grace is there than the fact that the Master has accepted me as a disciple... The dedication and consecration of my life can be my only answer.”

Medhananda received the following reply, dated November 19, 1949:

“Your letter of 17 October has arrived and been read to the Mother. Your description of ananda is correct....

Mother also approves of your position about meditation, and your constant aspiration for the inner Presence. The grace of this Presence is indeed the supreme blessing and the promise of an integral realisation.”

Pavitra adds, on his own behalf:

“Europeans certainly have more difficulty than Indians in following a yoga that requires complete consecration and total submission to the Divine. The western mind is pretentious and has difficulty in surrendering, even when it thinks it is doing so ”

On the 7th December 1949, Medhananda writes;

“I am learning to stop asking questions: following the yoga of the Master there are no more questions. But I appreciate your letters which, behind their words, bring into my isolation a little of the atmosphere of fervour which surrounds you, and of the force which the presence of the Master and the Mother supplies you.

Of course you are right in saying that the western mind is pretentious and surrenders with difficulty. But I have learnt that once it recognises its limitations and prostrates itself, the ecstasy of its submission is that much greater and its penetration into the Divine so much deeper because it comes from further away....”

His penetration into the Divine became integral. At the beginning of 1951, the ‘divine realisation’ promised to him by Sri Aurobindo, that described in the poem, ‘Jivanmukta’, reached its consummation.

(Some forty years later, a visiting student one day asked Medhananda, “Sri Aurobindo wrote so many books, I do not know which one to read, what would you recommend?” Medhananda answered, “If you want to become a philosopher, read *The Life Divine*. If you want to become a yogi, read *The Synthesis of Yoga*. If you want to become a mystic, read *Savitri*. If you want to become a Jivanmukta, read *The Mother*.” But no, the student wanted to become clairvoyant. The yoga followed by Medhananda himself was almost entirely based on *The Mother*.)

For several months after his realisation the Ashram heard nothing from him, except orders for new books of Sri Aurobindo as they were published. Then on 31 August 1951, after receiving a brochure from Pavitra, Medhananda wrote:

“I am enthusiastic after reading the prospectus of the University Centre

in Pondicherry. I send you my best wishes for an early start.

At the same time, I renew my offer of unconditional service, from cleaning the rooms to collaboration in higher studies of comparative mysticism. Meanwhile I could help you to lay bricks. All my aspiration lies behind these wishes. Please receive the expression of my total devotion.”

After that the Mother gave him permission to come to the Ashram. Medhananda answered to Pavitra’s announcement of this news:

‘Soma arrived at last with your letter. I am getting ready to leave....’

In French Polynesia it was impossible for him to obtain a German passport, and therefore a visa. He left without either, carrying only a letter of recommendation from the Governor of Tahiti to the Governor of Pondicherry. Each time he was asked for his passport and had to explain his situation, the officer in charge exclaimed with a smile, “Oh! it is much simpler like that!”

After travelling for two months, he reached his Mother’s home on the 15th February 1952. On the 26th of the same month she gave him his name “Medhananda”, signifying “Bliss in the Mind”, and with it a new life, a new programme, a new yoga: the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, which starts where all other yogas end.

YVONNE ARTAUD

# THE BOOK OF JOB

## A NEW COMMENTARY

*(Continued from the issue of September 1994)*

*Verses 22 to 24.*

JOB felt that God made no distinction between the perfect and wicked.

*Verse 22.*

The one thing he particularly noticed and spoke about was the fact that God destroyed the perfect as well as the wicked. There was no moral order in the universe according to Job <sup>92</sup>

*Verse 23.*

Job said that if the scourge slew the innocent suddenly God would mock at him

*Scourge* is literally a whip, figuratively an instrument of divine vengeance. Marvin Pope<sup>93</sup> comments that it apparently refers to calamities in general (war, famine, plague, etc). One cannot be sure that Job in the context could think of such calamities.

Pope<sup>94</sup> also tells us that Rashi, obviously a Commentator, unwilling to believe that Job would be making such a charge suggests that the reference is to Satan.

From the time Job began complaining and lamenting and arguing, he made no reference to Satan. All his charges, even apparently blasphemous, were only against God. Such comments only reveal how certain set ideas prevent us from seeing the text as it is. If Job had had an inkling of Satan or what had transpired in Heaven, there would have been no discussion between Job and his "friends".

*Verse 24.*

Job's point in all that he said in the context was that there was no justice in God's world. How could he obtain justice from Him?

God had given over the earth (the part of the earth, lands of kingdoms of which he had a knowledge and experience) to the wicked. He covered the faces of the judges from seeing what was just and unjust. If he did not do it, who could?

Literally, the Hebrew words mean, according to Pope<sup>95</sup>, If (this is) not (so), then who is he?

Pope tells us that Ibe Ezra and others have explained the words as a truncation of,

If this is not so, who will prove me a liar?

In any case, it was God who was responsible for all injustice and there was no possibility of his obtaining any justice from Him.

*Verses 25 to 28.*

Once again Job sank to the *tāmasic* state of despair from a *rājasic* attack on God's injustice and an absence of a moral order in his world. Perhaps there was a mixture of *tamas* with *rajas* till now—it was pure *tamas* which made him deplore the brevity of his days.

*Verses 25 and 26.*

In three images he described the swiftness with which his days were passing; the images, as noted by Hartley,<sup>96</sup> refer to the land, waters and the sky. (The three realms constitute the whole universe.) The courier on land, the ships (Egyptian reed skiffs were well-known for their high speed), and the eagle in the sky moving towards its prey (proverbial for its speed) consciously moved to a goal to achieve some object. What goal could Job think of? He was drawn to death by swift-moving days as a prey.

*Verses 27 and 28.*

First (verse 27) Job thought of a possibility: Suppose, he said, he forgot his complaint against God, he left off his sense of heaviness of life and comforted himself, would that mend matters?

He clearly saw (verse 27) that in any case God would not hold him innocent and he was afraid of all his sorrows returning. Perhaps he meant that even his friends would not hold him innocent.

*Verse 29 to 31.*

Job questioned if he was wicked (prejudged to be so without being told how or why—Habel<sup>97</sup> says *without a trial*—what was the use in his useless endeavour to prove himself innocent? Even if he purified himself and made his hand leaner than ever before, God would only plunge him in the ditch and Pope<sup>98</sup> make his own clothes abhor him for his filth

Terrien<sup>99</sup> strangely takes the words

why should I labour in vain?

as a philosophical query. His statement follows what is stranger still: he sums up

the two previous verses which, according to him, led to the philosophical query, in the following words:

When his brave resolutions to be of good cheer (Vs. 27) are broken by excess of pain he turns to God in a prayer of melancholy. (Vs. 28). ..

*Verse 28 reads:*

I am afraid of all my sorrow, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent.

Where is any prayer there? Where do we find brave resolutions in the earlier verse?

Far from being a philosophical query Vs 29 is a questioning of God's justice. *Vide* comment on the verses above.

It may be noted *en passant* that the ancient Jews were far from being philosophical. The Book of Job is a vision of a truth beyond all intellectual formulation.

*Verses 32 and 33.*

In the two verses, Job lamented the impossibility of his coming to an agreement with God in judgement because of God not being a human being. It was a pity there was no daysman or mediator between them who "might lay hands upon us both"

Many Christian commentators, especially of the past, see in the idea of a mediator an unconscious prophecy of the advent of Christ. (*Vide* comment on 5:1.)

Terrien<sup>100</sup> begins with a cautious statement which comes very near the sense of the passage:

To be sure, the image of the *umpire* still suggests primarily a juridical settlement, as if man, on equal terms with God, had rights of his own to safeguard.

But he soon adds:

But the overtone of the figure goes beyond the realm of justice. A conciliator who places his hands over the shoulders of two enemies is more than a judge who imposes a verdict. He not only mediates justice, (but) also fosters harmony and inspires love. In the words of James Strahan (*The Book of Job* [Edinburgh T. & T. Clark, 1913] p 102): The man who uses such language is ostensibly pleading for justice, but deeper down, he is seeking reconciliation, he is thirsting for love. Job is no conscious prophet,

but his instinctive cry for a God in human form, and a daysman between God and man, of an unconscious prophecy of incarnation and atonement. His faith is creative, his heart's intuitions are precursor of revelation.

Surprisingly, Terrien<sup>101</sup> is not so emphatic when he comments on 19:25 where Job declared,

My Redeemer liveth. (*Vide* comment on the verse )

More recent exegetes, commentators, tend to understand the word daysman (umpire, arbiter) in a different light. Habel<sup>102</sup> takes the term in a strict legal sense:

An arbiter would have the capacity to subpoena God and force him to appear in the court. (*Subpoena* is to serve a writ and force the person concerned to appear in a court of law.) Second, the arbiter would have the unenviable task of controlling El's (God's) violent nature and intimidating the defendant... Alas, concludes Job, that is not possible for him

Giving a similar explanation, Marvin Pope<sup>103</sup> says,

In ancient Sumerian theology, each man had a personal god who acted as his advocate in the council of the gods and pleaded his cause before the great gods who were too busy to give attention to individual cases. This idea may be in the background in Job's thought but he rejects it as unreal or unsatisfactory.

Hartley<sup>104</sup> comes to the heart of the matter when he says,

There is no way for him to settle his complaint with God. Nevertheless, the genuineness of his yearning for God shines through this line. Job is grasping after any means to restore his relationship with God. His sense of meaninglessness before inexplicable suffering is deepened from God's absence in his life. That is why his search for vindication is essentially a search for God again to make himself known to him.

With a rare stroke of insight Hartley unveils the unconscious urge of Job behind the conscious cry for justice, etc.

Commentators have begun to realise that there is no link between the Book of Job and Christianity. John C L Gibson in his Commentary on Job in The Daily Study Bible series, (The St. Andrews Press, Edinburgh, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia) has dwelt at length in pages 2 and 3 of the book on the pre-



Christian quality of the work.<sup>105</sup> For example the Book goes against the Pauline doctrine,

No one is righteous, no, not one,  
Job's suffering in no way pre-figures that of Jesus.

Life after death is not the concern of the Book at all. The pre-Christian quality of the work in no way affects the profundity or the universal and eternal value of its vision.

*Verses 34 and 35.*

In the verses Job expressed a desire to be free from the terror of God and to be able to express himself freely.

*Verse 35.*

The verse in the AV reads,

Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me.

Terrien<sup>106</sup> thinks it syntactically proper to take *him* (the second word) to refer to the daysman or the umpire. Most commentators seem to think the same way. It is quite possible to take Job to refer to God himself.

Marvin Pope<sup>107</sup> unnecessarily renders the word for *rod* as *club*. The word *rod* has an irony which *club* misses. Rod is God's staff—God is presented as a shepherd in Psalms—a symbol of protection; it could also be used as an instrument of punishment. Job, with a sense of conviction of his innocence, saw no reason why God should terrify him with his rod.

*Verse 35.*

Only if he was free from fear Job thought he could speak. The last part of the verse,

but it is not so with me. (AV)

has caused some trouble to the Commentators. Anderson<sup>108</sup> considers the words unintelligible. Hartley<sup>109</sup> referring to the line as puzzling feelings that Job's sense of anxiety might make him feel at odds with himself. The words could then mean,

I am not right with myself.

Pope,<sup>110</sup> after suggesting different possible readings in the original text, says,

Job would say either, “God does not deal thus with me” (i.e., he declines to put aside his terror), or “He is not honest with me”.

Habel,<sup>111</sup> remembering the image of litigation, says that Job thought he could not present his case as long as God’s terror was there. Terrien<sup>112</sup> trying to explain “this difficult phrase” paraphrases it,

I am left to my own resources.

“It is not so with me” could simply mean “I am not free from terror”.

*(To be continued)*

K B. SITARAMAYYA

*Notes*

- 92,93,94 Marvin Pope, p 71
- 95 Pope, p 72
- 96 Hartley, p 179
- 97 Habel, p 195
- 98 Pope, p 72
- 99 Terrien, p 983
- 100 *Ibid*, p 985
- 101 *Ibid*, p 1051
- 102 Habel, p 197
- 103 Pope, p 74
- 104 Hartley, p 181
- 105 *Ibid*, p 182
- 106 Terrien, p 985
- 107 Pope, p 75
- 108 Anderson, p 51
- 109 Hartley, p 182
- 110 Pope, p 75
- 111 Habel, p 197
- 112 Terrien, p 986

## ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (VI)

(Continued from the issue of September 1994)

### The Game is Played

THE textual evidence clearly shows that it was Karna who was really at the origin of Draupadī's ultimate trial, from which she is rescued through a miracle. Why did Karna play this evil role? Again one could venture an explanation with the help of depth-psychology. Karna was actually an elder (half) brother to the Pāṇḍavas and as such he had a first right to Draupadī after she had been won. However, due to external circumstances he was bereft of all his rights and reduced to the status of a *suta* who could not even think of marrying a *kṣatriya* princess. His command to Duḥśāsana to undress the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī would then be the revenge, actuated by a subconscious instinct, taken on those who lived a happy life and could look down on him, could humiliate him (as it happened when he was not allowed to challenge Arjuna in the arena at Droṇa's fighting demonstration). Now he brought them down and reduced them to being miserable slaves, exposed before the elders of the family: a perfect revenge, indeed, of someone who was betrayed by society and its rigid laws.

Another interesting point can be made. If we realize that Karna was actually the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, he did no wrong to them or to Draupadī within the system of family *dharma*, for he was then their master. In the same way as the four brothers and Draupadī had to suffer according to Yudhiṣṭhira's will, they all suffered now as Karna wished so. One might even argue that no blame accrues to Karna, since the eldest is not responsible or accountable for what he does to the junior members. A little later Bhīma was to state the law which also applies here to Karna:

“Had Yudhiṣṭhira the Dharmarāja not been our own guru and lord of our family we should never have suffered this! *He owns our merit and our austerities, he commands our lives.*”<sup>33</sup>

While the Pāṇḍavas took off their upper clothes themselves, Draupadī was held by Duḥśāsana who started pulling at her single cloth. The popular versions which have her wear a sari de-dramatize the scene considerably. On the other hand, if they have Draupadī call Kṛṣṇa for help, they have advantage over the constituted text of the Critical Edition which speaks simply of a miracle: “But when her skirt was being stripped off, another similar skirt appeared every time.” It is to be regretted that her prayer to Kṛṣṇa has been omitted in the Critical Edition text. Actually, even in that edition we have two quotations which support the authenticity of the popular version. In 2.60.26 we read already

the following: (Duhśāsana said to Draupadī:) “To Kṛṣṇa and Jisnu, to Hari and Nara, cry out for help! I shall take you yet ” In the Udyoga-Parva we have a scene where Draupadī complains to Kṛṣṇa about the treatment she got in the assembly hall There she says:

Yet I, a woman of such standing, was grabbed by the hair and molested in a men’s hall, while the sons of Pāṇḍu looked on and you were alive, Keśava! And while the Kauraveyas, the Pāñcālas, the Vṛṣnis were alive, I was put in the middle of them all and made a slave of vile men! The Pāṇḍavas watched it without showing anger or doing anything, so *it was you I desired in my heart, Govinda, crying, Save me!*<sup>34</sup>

(5.80.24-26)

Draupadī’s worst trial is soon over. A pile of clothes is seen heaped up in the middle of the hall and Duhśāsana has after all given up his attempt to strip her. Bhīma meanwhile has cursed the villain and sworn that he will drink blood from his chest in the battle. There is some uproar in the hall, with some of the people blaming the Pāṇḍavas for having sat still, while others blame the Kurus and Dhṛtarāstra for not having answered Draupadī’s question At this moment Vidura raises his arms to silence the crowd. In a second intervention (the first was at the beginning of the game) he tries to change the mind of the assembled Kuru elders towards Draupadī He draws attention to the fact that Draupadī’s question has not yet been answered. This passivity of the assembly is in itself a sin: “If a man comes with a grievance and raises a question of Law with the men in the hall, they must resolve the question and shed all partiality.” He proceeds to point out that so far only Vikarna has spoken. The silence of the others is a sin in itself.

If a person sits in the hall and fails to answer a question, although he sees the Law, he incurs half the guilt that accrues if the answer is false. And he who has gone to the hall, knows the Law, yet resolves it falsely, certainly incurs the full guilt of the falsehood

To illustrate the point Vidura tells the story of Prahlāda and his son Virochana who was competing for a girl with Sudhanvan Āṅgīrasa. The two boys both claimed to be the better man and made Prahlāda their judge The loser would lose his life Sudhanvan Āṅgīrasa threatened Prahlāda that Indra would split his head into a hundred pieces if he failed to answer the question. Thereupon Prahlāda was frightened and took council from Kaśyapa. The latter clarifies his question and gives basically four cases as a guide-line: 1) if one knows the answer, but does not resolve the question, one “lets loose on himself a thousand of Varuna’s nooses.” 2) If Dharma is mixed with Adharma, the leader

of the assembly takes half the guilt, the culprit a quarter and the other people who do not condemn the culprit the other quarter. 3) If the culprit is duly condemned, all the guilt goes to the culprit alone. 4) Those who explain the Law falsely to the one who raises the question, “kill their own offerings and oblations for seven generations upward and downward.”<sup>35</sup> After this discourse Prahlāda decided to speak to the question and declared that Sudhanvan was better than his own son Virochana. Sudhanvan praised Prahlāda (“You relinquish your love for your son to stand firm on the Law”) and gave Virochana his life.

If Prahlāda was impressed by Kaśyapa’s discourse, this was not the case with the assembly of the Kauravas. As always, little importance was given to what Vidura said, however true it might have been. Instead of that, Karṇa asked Duḥśāsana to take Draupadī away to the house. At this moment Draupadī had a genial idea: she proposed to bow before the assembly, an act which might have captured some sympathy even in those unmoved hearts of the Kuru elders. However, Duḥśāsana dragged her on until she fell on the floor. Draupadī is once more deeply humiliated and accuses the assembly of its lawlessness. A woman is not even supposed to enter the men’s hall. But “this ancient eternal Law is lost among the Kauravas.” Draupadī now asks again her question, but this time she dares to formulate it openly: “Is the wife of King Dharma, whose birth matches his, a slave or free? Speak, Kauravas. I shall abide by your answer.” Again it is Bhīṣma who alone goes into the legal aspect, but again he refuses to resolve it, “because the matter is subtle and mysterious as well as grave”. However, he admits now that the Kurus are deluded by greed and folly. Draupadī on the other hand is praised highly since she does not stray from the path of *dharma* even though she is in severe trouble. “Such is the conduct that you yourself practise, princess of the Pāṅchālas, for though you have come to grief, you still look to the Law”. Draupadī seems to fare better this time in Bhīṣma’s statement and yet he cannot do anything for her. We have already pointed out that coming to her rescue would necessarily mean to doubt Yudhiṣṭhira’s authority, a step Bhīṣma is not prepared to take. Instead, he refers the question directly to Yudhiṣṭhira;

But Yudhiṣṭhira, I think, is the authority on this question. Let him himself speak out and say whether you have been won or not.

The discussion has taken a logical course now. Actually, everything was hingeing on Yudhiṣṭhira all the while, but he kept silent. Only Vikarna dared to question his authority on Draupadī’s behalf, while Vidura encouraged the assembly to speak, but did not commit himself to Draupadī’s position. The *dharmarāja* alone would be able to resolve the question satisfactorily, since he could speak disregarding considerations of politeness and respect, in his own matter. The text does not mention anything about Yudhiṣṭhira in what follows. It is quite obvious that he is too much struck down to say a word. Duryodhana

exploits this situation by urging the other four brothers to make a statement as to Draupadī's status. This is a subtle attempt to break up the brothers whose unity is already precarious. In either case his triumph is sure: if they declare Draupadī to be free, Yudhiṣṭhira is isolated and his authority broken. If Draupadī is not free, she belongs to Duryodhana! Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son is mercilessly torturing the Pāṇḍavas by creating a conflict of *dharma*, or rather by making it more pungent, forcing them to commit themselves to a decision, making a choice which in either case will be unacceptable. These are Duryodhana's words:

“In the midst of these nobles they (the four  
Pāṇḍavas) must declare  
For thy sake that Yudhiṣṭhira's not the master,  
And thus they must make King Dharma a liar,  
Pāñcālī, so you escape servitude!

King Dharma, great-spirited, firm in the Law,  
The peer of Indra, himself must declare  
Whether he owns you or does not own you;  
At his word you must choose, the one or the other.

For all the Kauravas in the assembly  
Are caught inside your misery:  
They cannot resolve it, the noble-hearted,  
And they look to your unfortunate masters.

What makes this scene so realistic and touching is the common life-experience that righteous law-abiding people are often driven into a corner by cunning rogues. In spite of all that has happened before everybody's eyes, the rogues suddenly look as if they are honest and interested in the truth. Accordingly, the people in the assembly hall “all loudly approved the word that the king of the Kurus had spoken”. The one Pāṇḍava who reacts towards Duryodhana's suggestion is Bhīma. He is undergoing a terrible inner conflict between his natural impulse to knock down Duṣṣāsana and his obligation to obey his elder brother. No inner torment could be more unbearable than this forced obedience to a law that seems unnatural and against all common sense in this particular situation. In any case, Bhīma keeps his loyalty to Yudhiṣṭhira intact. “If he holds himself defeated, so are we defeated.” With helpless impotence Bhīma exclaims:

But now, like this, *tied by the noose of the Law*, constrained by his gravity  
and held back by Arjuna, I wreak no havoc!

After Bhīma's impetuous but ineffective talk Karna again reasserts the position of Duryodhana's party: "There are three who own no property, a student, a slave, a dependent woman: the wife of a slave, you are his now, my dear; a masterless slave wench, you are now slave wealth." Karna ridicules the Pāṇḍavas by telling Draupadī she may choose a new husband *who would certainly not gamble her freedom away in a game of dice!* This again increases Bhīma's inner torment, for what Karna says here about Yudhiṣṭhira is basically Bhīma's own opinion. Such a provocation could drive a man mad ..

Hearing this, Bhīma bore it no longer;  
 A man tormented, he panted hard,  
 But vowed to the king and trapped by the Law,  
 Burning him down with wrath-shot eye,  
 Bhīma said: I do not anger at a *suta's* son,  
 For the Law of serfdom is surely upon us:  
 But could our enemies now have held me,  
 If you had not thrown for her, my liege?

Again the poet uses the same phrase *dharmapāsānubaddhah* (trapped by the law) to describe Bhīma's terrible dilemma. What is really at question here is whether *dharma* is something like a dead law, laid down in the books, to be followed under all circumstances, or whether it allows a spontaneous interpretation according to the truth of the respective situation. This is a philosophical problem whose central importance has impressed on us the need to write a detailed analysis of the events relating to the game of dice. Yudhiṣṭhira follows very rigidly the written law, whereas Bhīma is like a dog that jumps to its master's defense without inquiring first whether it is legal or not. But someone or something is holding him back on a chain: he is *dharmapāsānubaddhah*.

Duryodhana's further provocation by exposing his left thigh to Draupadī is well known as is Bhīma's reaction. We need not further discuss them. More interesting is Vidura's third attempt at an intervention. Once more he urges the Kaurava elders to make a decision on Draupadī's question. He is now giving his own opinion on the matter:

Like a stake that is won in a dream is the stake,  
 If the stake is put up by one who does not own it!

The implication of this statement is clearly that Yudhiṣṭhira was not any more Draupadī's master after he had lost himself, or it might even mean that a wife is not owned at all in an absolute sense by her husband and cannot be put as a stake for this reason. Vidura speaks as indirectly as possible, in an abstract manner, in order to protect Yudhiṣṭhira's authority. Thereupon Duryodhana

asks the four Pāṇḍavas to state that Yudhiṣṭhira was not their master; in that case Draupadī would be free. Arjuna affirms that Yudhiṣṭhira was their master when he put them (the four brothers) as a stake. Then he raises the question: “But whose master is he who has lost himself?” This question he refers to the Kurus. Even though Arjuna restrained Bhīma at an earlier stage, he is himself breaking out of the family unit now by questioning the propriety of Yudhiṣṭhira’s action. He is thus giving Draupadī a chance to get a decision in her favour from the Kuru elders. After Arjuna had spoken, a number of inauspicious signs suddenly manifested which frightened the Kuru family. Dhṛtarāṣṭra blames Duryodhana for having mistreated Draupadī and gives her a boon. She chooses freedom for Yudhiṣṭhira. When offered a second boon, she chooses freedom for the other four Pāṇḍavas. A third boon she rejects.

After this surprising turn of events Karna was the first to grasp what had happened: Draupadī had through her persistence liberated her five husbands and saved them from slavery. He is stating this less to praise Draupadī than to humiliate the Pāṇḍavas who should rather have saved Draupadī. His speech is full of irony:

Of all the women of mankind, famous for their beauty, of whom we have heard, no one have we heard to have accomplished such a deed! While the Pārthas and the Dhārtarāṣṭras are raging beyond measure, Kṛsnā Draupadī has become the salvation of the Pāṇḍavas! When they were sinking, boatless and drowning, in the plumbless ocean, the Pāñchālī became the Pāṇḍavas’ boat, to set them ashore!<sup>36</sup>

Bhīma gets much enraged on hearing this. Suddenly the thought strikes his mind that Draupadī has been defiled and that therefore they cannot have any offspring from her, an idea which Arjuna rejects. But Bhīma builds up more and more fury, threatening to kill all the enemies there and then. He reaches the peak of his inner crisis. Endlessly he had to suppress all his natural instincts for the sake of a mere theoretical consideration, now he cannot stand it any more. The poet gives a vivid description of the steaming Bhīma:

“When Bhīmasena had spoken, surrounded by his younger brothers like a lion amidst deer, he kept glancing at his club. While the Pārtha of unsullied deed sought to appease and cool him off, the powerful strong-armed Bhīma began to sweat with his inner heat. From the ears and the



other orifices of the raging man fire issued forth, smoking and sparkling. His face became fierce to behold, with its folds of knitted brows, as the face of Yama himself when the end of the Eon has come. Yudhishthira restrained the strong-armed Bhīma with his arm, O Bhārata “Don’t!” he said. “Stay quiet!” And when he had restrained the strong-armed man, whose eyes were bloodshot with rage, Yudhishthira went up to his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra and folded his hands.”

Yudhishthira then asks the king for advice as to what they should do, and the king gives him leave asking him to rule his kingdom in peace. The whole cycle is completed now. It was Dhṛtarāṣṭra who had invited *dharmarāja*, and now he allowed him to go home as a free man, not however without giving him a short lecture on the virtue of forgiveness. The unfortunate Yudhishthira who is the very incarnation of this virtue receives now his last little bit of torture and provocation when the less morally perfected king tells him wisely:

The best among men do not remember hostilities;  
they see virtues, not the faults, and they do not  
stoop to enmity. It is the lowliest that hurl  
insults in a quarrel, Yudhishthira; the middling  
ones return the insults, but the best and the  
steady ones never babble about hostile insults,  
spoken or unspoken.

After this unnecessary lecture Dhṛtarāṣṭra also gives a reason for the game of dice which is no more convincing than helpful in consoling Yudhishthira;

It was from affection that I allowed this dicing  
game, as I wished to see my friends and find  
out the strengths and weaknesses of my sons.

We have presented a detailed analysis of one of the most dramatic chapters of the Mahābhārata. The main purpose was all the while to draw attention to the legal, psychological and philosophical problems that arise as the action takes its course. We have as the three main actors Yudhishthira who sticks to his Law without caring for any consequences. Draupadī, a woman who revolts against this very attitude; and Bhīma who is getting a strong pull from either side, without knowing quite to which pressure to yield. to surrender to the family law or spontaneously come to Draupadī’s defense. The side roles are played by

Vidura who tries to intervene on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas without hurting Yudhiṣṭhira too much; Vikarṇa who speaks out clearly in favour of Draupadī and Arjuna who is restraining Bhīma even while at the end also doubting Yudhiṣṭhira. On the other side there is Karṇa who is prompting Duḥśāsana to proceed with his evil acts, while Bhīṣma does not commit himself, even though he praises Draupadī's attitude at the end. Duryodhana hardly appears any more in this scene. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is at the end sufficiently moved by Draupadī's suffering to put an end to the whole nightmare, but this is not of any consequence since he yields to the pressure of Duryodhana to have another game played which Yudhiṣṭhira loses of course whereupon the Pāṇḍavas go into exile.

In the following section we will probe more closely the philosophical aspects of the event.

*(To be continued)*

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

#### *Notes*

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# A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

## 41. A LOVE STORY

KING Kulothungan Chozhan had banished poet Kamban from the realm because of a misunderstanding. Often he chided himself for having done so. He felt lonely, for no man was there in his kingdom whom he could treat as his equal, hence he craved for Kamban's company. He sent his men to the Pandya kingdom, where Kamban had taken refuge.

Kamban jumped at the offer.

Back in the Chozha Empire, he found the king more friendly than before. Is it not true that absence makes hearts grow fonder?

Kamban gleefully thought that peace and joy had returned to his life. But neither peace, war, joy nor sorrow lasts forever. This time sorrow came to Kamban in the guise of his son Ambigapathy.

Ambigapathy was in love—in love with Amaravathy, the king's daughter.

Kamban was certain that King Kulothungan in spite of his love and affection for the poet would never consent to marry off his daughter to the poet's son.

The day Kamban came to know of the affair, he pulled his son by his shirt and slapped him across the face, "Who do you think you are?" he yelled at his son, "Do not forget that you are after all a poet laureate's son. And the king's daughter will be beyond your reach. You are inviting trouble. You will bring doom on yourself and our family. Forget the princess as though she had appeared only in your dream."

Ambigapathy listened to his father with rapt attention. He felt that something was weighing heavily upon his tongue, and he couldn't speak to his father. Call it respect or shame or what you will.

"Speak, scoundrel, speak," roared Kamban.

Passion untied Ambigapathy's tongue. In a stern voice he said: "Amaravathy loves me. I'll never jilt her. Without her I would experience only a death in life."

"If you continue to meet Amaravathy your life will be at the mercy of the king. He would go mad and mercilessly butcher you once his ego is insulted," warned Kamban.

Suspicion rose in the heart of Kamban when King Kulothungan invited him and his son to dinner. "This must be a trap, my son. Be on the alert. Do not give the king the least opportunity to trap you," Kamban warned his son on his way to the banquet hall.

The king welcomed the father and the son, sat with them at the dinner table and motioned his daughter to serve food for all the three.

Amaravathy obeyed. They began to eat. While Ambigapathy's tongue feasted on the sumptuous dishes, his eyes were feasting on the voluptuous

physique of the princess. The king who was all eyes and all ears didn't fail to notice his daughter ogling at the poet's son. He waited for the right opportunity to trap the lovers. And when Amaravathy stood close by Ambigapathy to serve him more food, the lad, unable to keep his hand to himself, mischievously tugged at the hem of her sari.

King Kulothungan stood up, hurled abusive words at the young man and said: "At last I have caught you. You are in love with my daughter, eh? I'll punish your impertinence with death."

Calling in his guards, the king ordered them to keep Ambigapathy in custody.

The guards obeyed.

Kamban pleaded for his son's life but to no avail. The king left the banquet hall caring a straw for Kamban's presence.

By dawn Kamban rushed to the palace and waited outside the royal bed-chamber. And when the king came out, he saw the sorrow-laden face of Kamban, pitied him and said: "I've changed my mind. I shall give your son the last chance. Let us as usual meet in the court today."

Kamban became more impatient than ever.

In the court the king ordered his guards to bring in Ambigapathy. He then sent word for his daughter.

The lovers entered the court from different directions. The king ordered a couple of chairs to be pulled to the centre of the court. He motioned the lovers to sit in them facing each other.

While the courtiers and the lords were trying to make guesses, the king said, "I'll set free Ambigapathy on condition that he sings one hundred songs all the time looking at my daughter, but making no reference to sensual pleasures. If he fails to do so his head will be severed from his neck."

Shocked stood the onlookers. Kamban was quite confident of his son's talents as a poet. But no poet could resist the temptation of singing the physical charms of a woman, especially when an enthralling beauty is seated in front. Hence he prayed to Saraswathi, Goddess of Knowledge, to guide him properly.

Ambigapathy began to sing. Amaravathy counted the songs by pulling out a jasmine flower from her braid and throwing it on the ground.

Like everybody else in the court the king too enjoyed the songs, as they rushed forth like a torrent from the mouth of Ambigapathy.

"Ninety-nine," Amaravathy said, as she pulled out a flower from her braid and threw it on the ground. "Just one more," she said and smiled enticingly.

Ambigapathy simply melted when Amaravathy smiled that smile at him. He forgot all about the competition and his life at stake. He smiled back at her and sang the last song describing his lady love as the most nearly perfect work of art.

Kamban became nervous. The courtiers and the lords looked helplessly at one another. Amaravathy was in tears. And the king said: "You have failed in

my test. You have proved that you can never take your mind away from my daughter. You shall die.”

Amaravathy swooned.

Kamban and others helplessly watched Ambigapathy go with the guards to the place of execution.

Before news reached the palace that Ambigapathy was dead, Amaravathy had already breathed her last

#### 42. WHERE IS MY ANKLET?

Bereaved of his son Ambigapathy, Kamban decided to leave the Chozha Empire once for all. Accompanied by his wife he moved to Cheranadu (now Kerala). Without revealing his identity he joined as a minion to King Cheran.

King Cheran took no notice of the newly appointed minion till one day he found him a highly talented man.

It was King Cheran's custom to listen to discourses delivered by his court poets and scholars. On one moonlit night the king flanked by his courtiers and lords sat on the terrace of his palace and listened to a scholarly lecture on Kamban's epic *Ramayanam*. The king's minions stood in several parts of the terrace

The scholar lecturing on Prince Rama winning Sita for his wife was quoting stanza after stanza from *Ramayanam* to substantiate his points of view. And once while quoting a stanza he fumbled for the right word, Kamban came to his rescue.

Kamban, the minion, attracted the attention of the gathering. But the scholar felt a bit ashamed of himself for getting help from a minion. A few minutes later when the scholar misinterpreted a line from a stanza, Kamban flared up and said. “No, sir, Kamban didn't mean it that way. Your interpretation would bring discredit to Kamban's genius.”

The scholar stood flabbergasted. An expression of awe animated the faces of the courtiers and the lords. King Cheran beckoned the minion and asked: “You seem to be well-versed in *Ramayanam*. Would you like to deliver a lecture on the subject chosen by this scholar?”

“If you permit me, your Majesty! I'll be glad to do it,” replied the minion.

“Go ahead,” the king said to Kamban and motioned the pseudo-scholar with a wave of his hand to vacate his place for the minion.

Kamban began his lecture. Engrossed in the presentation the gathering forgot all about food and sleep. By the time the lecture was over, a cock crew and indicated that it was dawn

“Great! . . . Really great!” commented the king “How come you are well-versed in this great epic?”

Kamban smiled in all humility.

“Answer me. What were you before you joined my service?”

“I was a minion to Kamban, the poet,” said Kamban. “I was by his side when he wrote his epic. He wrote 700 verses every night. I’ve seen Goddess Saraswathi herself holding the light for the poet.”

“A minion to Kamban need not necessarily be a minion to a king. You are a blessed soul. I appoint you scholar-in-chief. And your duty is to deliver lectures on *Ramayanam* and enlighten me and my people.”

Kamban’s discourses attracted huge gatherings. The love and the respect the king and his subjects showered upon Kamban made the other scholars and poets in the court turn green-eyed monsters.

The monsters joined hands. “First of all, we must make the king look down on the upstart. And that will pave way for our next step—to drive him out of the kingdom if not out of the world.” They hit on a plan.

According to the plan they bribed the king’s barber with a huge amount which he could not have dreamt of in his life, and told him what to do.

The barber allowed a couple of days to pass by. On the third day he entered the king’s court, rushed towards Kamban in all glee, hugged him tight and with crocodile tears rolling down his cheeks asked: “Where were you so long, my dear brother? It is ages since we met. You left our home when we were children... Why do you blink? Don’t you remember me?”

Kamban, suspecting the barber’s motives, embraced him in turn and pretended to weep.

King Cheran watched the scene in blank dismay.

“Your Majesty!” said the barber. “This courtier and I are uterine brothers. He ran away from home several years ago. And today I got back my brother.”

“Huh!... A barber as our chief, eh?” sniffed the scholars and the poets in unison.

Dumbstruck sat the king.

Back home, Kamban ruminated on the problem. “A thorn must be removed by another thorn,” he said and prayed to Goddess Saraswathi for help. She came to his rescue.

One evening when the king was relaxing with his queen in the garden, Kamban entered, offered a casket made of sandalwood to the king and said: “Your Majesty! This is one share of my family property. The other share is with my brother, your barber. Only yesterday my brother gave me my share. I don’t think that any woman on this earth except your queen deserves to wear what is in it. And so I’ve brought it here.”

The king opened the casket. The queen too peered over her husband’s shoulder. Her eyes began to twinkle at the sight of an exquisitely carved anklet in the casket. “Heavenly!” she said taking the anklet into her hands.

“Thank you for the present. But my wife has two legs. Don’t you see?” joked the king.

“Well! The other anklet is with my brother. I am sure he will not hesitate to give it to you, if you ask.”

On the morning of the next day, the queen despatched one of the ministers with a few guards to get the other anklet by hook or by crook from the barber.

When the barber pleaded ignorance, the guards under the command of the minister whipped him to bring the truth out of him.

The excruciating pain drove the barber to the court and to the dismay of every plotter he confessed: “Your Majesty! I am not in any way related to your one-time minion and now your scholar-in-chief. I acted on the advice of your jealous scholars and poets who have bribed me heavily. And I know nothing about anklets.”

Kamban giggled as the plotters bent down their heads in shame and shivered in their sandals.

“But where did you get this lone anklet? Where is the other one?” asked the king.

Kamban moved his lips. But before he could utter a word, the sound of footsteps accompanied by the music of rolling pearls inside the ‘other’ anklet stunned everyone.

“Here comes Goddess Saraswathy,” said Kamban with all reverence.

Though none but Kamban was able to see Her, everyone heard the heavenly voice of the Goddess of Knowledge: “Where is my anklet, my dear son Kamban?”

“Kamban... Kamban... Here is Kamban... Kamban is with us,” several voices were heard uttering the name of the poet with great respect.

“Here it is, Mother, in the hands of the king,” said Kamban pointing at the king.

The anklet disappeared from the king’s hand. Everyone could hear the symphony the twin anklets made as the Goddess moved out of the court.

*(More legends on the way)*

P. RAJA

## TO PĀṆINI'S TIME FROM PĀṆINI'S PLACE

### HIS GEOGRAPHICAL POINTER AT HIS HISTORICAL PERIOD

*(Continued from the issue of September 1994)*

3

THE one serious obstacle that might be set in the way of all claim for Cyrus as master of Gandhāra, Pāṇini's province, is, as R. C. Majumdar<sup>1</sup> says, "the Buddhist account of the kingdom of Gandhāra, which comprised both Peshawar valley and the Western Punjab". Majumdar's argument<sup>2</sup> is: "Special importance attaches... to the information that Pukkusati, King of Gandhāra, sent an embassy and a letter to King Bimbisāra of Magadha and also defeated Pradyota, King of Avanti. As Pradyota was the contemporary of both Bimbisāra and his son Ajātaśatru he did not probably come to the throne before 540 or 530 B.C., and Pukkusati may also be regarded as ruling in Gandhāra about that time. He would thus be a contemporary of Cyrus who established his power and authority in 549 B.C. and died twenty years later in 529 B.C. On general grounds, therefore, we can hardly credit Cyrus with the conquest of the trans-Indus borderlands in the region round Peshawar, until some positive evidence is forthcoming."

Contrary to Majumdar's idea, there definitely is—as we have shown—evidence of this kind. Apart from it, too, we can neutralise if not nullify Majumdar's contention. What is the basis of his chronology? All modern historians date Buddha's death to the 8th year of Ajātaśatru's reign, and most of them identify this year as 483 B.C. So Ajātaśatru ascended the throne in 491 B.C. and Pradyota who was the contemporary of both Ajātaśatru and his father Bimbisāra would be ruling Avanti around this date and his reign would commence fairly earlier. Pukkusati of Gandhāra would, therefore, be able to deal with both Bimbisāra and Pradyota in the quarter century before 491 B.C. We get the epoch of Darius I, when Gandhāra was indisputably in Persian possession. Even in the quarter century after 491 B.C., leading us to the end of the reign of Xerxes in 465 B.C., Pukkusati could never have ruled in a Persia-free Gandhāra. We must surely discount the Buddhist story.

The alternative date of Buddha's death, still entertained by some historians, is 543 B.C. Then Ajātaśatru becomes king in 551 B.C. and Pradyota still earlier. So Pukkusati would be sovereign of Gandhāra before and after this year. As Cyrus's conquest of Gandhāra falls in the period 546-540 B.C. we can have Pukkusati sending an embassy and a letter to King Bimbisāra of Magadha and defeating Pradyota, king of Avanti, all before Cyrus's achievement.

Even if Majumdar's chronology—540 or 530 B.C.—is accepted, it is



possible to accommodate both Pukkusati and Cyrus. Pukkusati could lose the trans-Indus borderlands in the region round Peshawar to Cyrus and yet remain a powerful king of Gandhāra by possessing the Western Punjāb, with the capital at Taxila. And, in Majumdar's chronology, he who is already associated with embassy-and-letter-sending eastward to Bimbisāra would be just cut out to play the role of Xenophon's Indian king who sent an embassy westward to Cyrus with a sum of money.

So, on all counts, we should be justified to push Pāṇini upwards of 546-540 B.C. Here is the irreducible lower limit we can pose by making his "Gāndhāri" and "Gandhāra" as an independent kingdom our *point de départ*.

What, then, about that famous term of Pāṇini's, which has compelled so many scholars to date him after the Behistun Inscription: "Yavanāni"? Is it possible to suppose that it might not have connoted "Greek script"?

A most serious ground for doubt of this connotation is forthcoming from Pāṇini himself. Let us listen to what Barua<sup>3</sup> conveys:

"The Gaṇapātha on Pāṇini's rule, II.1.72—*Mayūravayamsakādi*, speaks of persons who were shaven-headed like the Kāmbojas and Yavanas (*Kāmboja-muṇḍaḥ*, *Yavana-muṇḍaḥ*). This was evidently based upon a legend like the one in the *Harivaṃsa* (XIII.763-64, 775-83) purporting to say that King Sagara who was bent upon annihilating the Śakas, Yavanas, Kāmbojas, Pāradas and Pahlavas relented and so he released the first after having half of their head shaved, the second and third after having the whole of their head shaved, the fourth after compelling them to keep their hair dishevelled, and the fifth after compelling them to keep their beards.<sup>4</sup> The tradition gained ground in later Indian literature that these were the distinctive habits of these five peoples."<sup>5</sup>

The greatest commentators, like Vāmanajayāditya of the *Kāśikā* and Bhattojjidīkṣita of the *Siddhānta-kaumudī*, have accepted the *Gaṇapātha*'s phrase as authentic Pāṇinian material. But can we ever conceive complete shaven-headedness as characterising the Greeks in Pāṇini's eyes? "Yavana" must have meant to him something else than "Greek". Side by side with the *Gaṇapātha*'s phrase, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*'s *Yavanāni* cannot signify anything Greek.

Neither is it odd that Pāṇini should yield a non-Greek view of "Yavana" (and "Yona"). The Pali *Majjhima Nikāya* (II.149), which is admittedly pre-Mauryan, presents to us Buddha telling Assalāyana of "the Yona, Kamboja and other border countries". Buddha, at the earliest, is dated to 563-483 B.C. Can any historian point to an organised Greek state on the borders of India in that period? Individual Greeks might be about in the second half of it, perhaps small groups of them might also be there, scattered in various places; but a whole country, a *janapada*, of them, organised—as the *Majjhima Nikāya* goes on to say—on a twofold basis of "masters" and "servants" instead of on a system of four castes as in India, such an established, developed and regulated state is out of the question. The Pali *Chullanidessa*,<sup>6</sup> one of the oldest Buddhist commen-

taries, numbers Yona no less than Kamboja as having been a country of the Indian sub-continent shortly before Buddha's birth. So, at the latest, we are driven upwards of 563 B.C., a time when Cyrus had not even brought his Persians into their first contact with the Lydians and no Greeks could have been known in his country: the "Greek script" would be non-existent for the Persians and still more for a Gandhāran like Pāṇini.

Non-Buddhist Hindu literature—the *Manusamhitā* (X.43-44) and the *Mahābhārata* (XIII.33.21)—go even further in depicting the Yavanas as non-Greek. They show them as degraded Kshatriyas, an Indian tribe which—like the Kambojas and others—lost its Aryan status by not consulting Brāhmaṇas. The *Mahābhārata* (I.79.42) gives them even a specific Indian ancestry: it designates them as descendants of the very ancient Turvasu, the son of Yayāti Nahuṣa.

A mention of "Yavana" still older than Pāṇini's is in the *Gautama-Dharma-Sūtra* (IV.17), perhaps the oldest writing of the Sūtra type. Neither of the two authorities—G. Bühler and P. V Kane—regards the mention as an interpolation.<sup>7</sup> Gautama states that the offspring of a Kshatriya father and a Śūdra mother is called Yavana. Here a social rather than a tribal significance is stressed. It is analogous to the same authors's definition (I.917.2) of the offspring of a Brāhmaṇa father and a Śūdra mother as a Nishāda. Nobody has questioned the existence of the Nishādas as a tribe merely because a new shade of meaning is brought out by Gautama. The tribe of Nishādas has been listed as early as the later Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas.<sup>8</sup> Evidently Gautama is supplying us with an extension of the concept of Yavana for a special purpose: it complements rather than contradicts the tribal existence of the Yavanas. But in this social no less than in the tribal context the term, just as much as "Nishāda", is far from the least Greek colour.

We know that in times succeeding those when "Yavana" or "Yona" did mean "Greek" this term had a general implication of "foreigner".<sup>9</sup> Similarly in times preceding them it indicated a non-Greek tribe of the Indian frontier or a mixed class in Indian society.

Pāṇini's "shaven-headed Yavanas" is in the typical Indian tradition, reflecting one aspect out of several pointing away from Greece. It is no freak to be goggled at. In the most natural fashion it supports our chronology and helps us to reduce to absurdity the common reading of "Greek" in his *Yavanānī*.

We cannot determine what script, out of the several identified ones of antiquity, Pāṇini intended: we should first need to know the upper limit of his date and the cultural character of the Yavanas. But it is quite on the cards that he had no script in mind. We may attend to Barua's words:<sup>10</sup> "In Pāṇini's time Yavanānī was the only feminine form of Yavana, while Kātyāyana, Patañjali and other later grammarians found it necessary to recognise Yavanī as another form, and to restrict the use of Pāṇini's form to the writing of the Greeks." Barua is, of course, accepting the modern interpretation of "Yavana" and so he brings in the

Greeks. What he means is: "the writing of the Yavanas." And the point he makes suggests that Pāṇini might not have intended "writing" at all.

Pāṇini's rule merely shows the formation of certain feminine endings. As Kane<sup>11</sup> observes, he mentions twelve words, to most of which the affix *ānī* is added in the sense of "wife". Agrawala<sup>12</sup> himself has cited several of these words. Discussing "Religion", he writes: "Of the female deities the older goddesses mentioned are *Indrānī*, *Varunānī* (IV.1.49)..." Among the post-Vedic deities, "the most important... is goddess *Pārvatī* four of whose names are mentioned, viz. (1) *Bhavānī*, (2) *Śarvānī* (3) *Rudrānī* and (4) *Mṛṣḍānī* (IV.1.49). This worship was a feature of the Sūtra period. The Vedas refer to their male counterparts such as *Bhava*, *Sarva*, *Rudra* and *Mṛṣḍa*."

The female deity-names Agrawala has listed are, in that very order, the first six of Pāṇini's twelve words. The next six in their Pāṇinian sequence are: *Himānī*, *Aranyānī*, *Yavānī*, *Yavanānī*, *Mātulānī*, *Āchāryānī*. Leaving aside *Yavanānī* for the moment, we may quote Agrawala on the rest. "Pāṇini... refers to... glaciers as *himānī* (IV.1.49)..."<sup>13</sup> Pāṇini shows knowledge of the mountainous regions called *Himālaya*, with its perpetual snow (*himānī*, IV.1.49)..."<sup>14</sup> Pāṇini calls a large forest *aranya* (IV.1.49) and *Kātyāyana aranyānī* (*Bhāshya*, II,220)..."<sup>15</sup> Pāṇini refers to *yavānī* (IV.49), a kind of crude and coarse barley according to *Kātyāyana*..."<sup>16</sup> *Yavānī* (a kind of inferior barley, IV.1.49)..."<sup>17</sup> *Mātulānī* (maternal uncle's wife, IV.1.49)..."<sup>18</sup> Women also occupied the exalted position of teachers and were called *āchāryā* IV.1.49, a counter-example of *āchāryānī*..."<sup>19</sup> Pāṇini also speaks of *āchāryānī* as the wife of an *āchārya* (IV.1.49)<sup>20</sup>."

*Himānī*, *Aranyānī*, *Yavānī* pertain to objects. *Yavanānī*, *Mātulānī*, *Āchāryānī* stem from persons; but their bearing is not on personal names as with those six female counterparts of particular gods, that open the list. The last two are common and not proper nouns. The first is from a proper noun, the name of a people or a country or the general designation of an individual belonging to either, but here too no unique individual standing out from all others by a special name is concerned: the individual belongs to a class and, if we keep that in view, the word *Yavana* can be grouped with *Mātula* (maternal uncle) and *Āchārya* (teacher). Since, like the other six words pertaining to persons, *Mātulānī* and *Āchāryānī* imply "wife" by the *ānī*-affix, why should not *Yavanānī* which is groupable with these two carry the same implication? Kane takes Pāṇini's *Yavanānī* to mean the wife of a *Yavana*, unlike *Kātyāyana's* term which means the *Yavana* alphabet, as Kane puts it. From Kane's remarks it would seem highly debatable whether in Pāṇini's time we can speak of a script of the *Yavanas*.

Agrawala<sup>21</sup> argues: "*Kātyāyana's vārttika* mentioning the *lipī* of the *Yavanas* (*Yavanāl-lipyām*) is only an explanation of Pāṇini's use of the term *Yavanānī*. It is unwarranted to assume that he is supplying some new information not known to Pāṇini. Such an assumption goes against the very style of *Kātyāyana's* other

*vārttikas* on this *sūtra*, designed to explain and not supplement the words of Pāṇini's rule, as *himānī*, *aranyānī*, *yavānī* ”

But has not Agrawala himself written: “Pāṇini calls a large forest *aranya*... and Kātyāyana *aranyānī*”? And does not Agrawala say of Pāṇini's *yavānī*: “a kind of crude and coarse barley according to Kātyāyana”? What certitude do we have that Kātyāyana is not giving the meaning which a word has come to possess in his day? Further, there are a number of new words and forms offered by him. He mentions *Āchāryā* as an alternative to *Āchāryānī*. He adds the examples: *Upādhyānī*, *Upādhyāyī—Aryānī*, *Aryā—kshatriyānī*, *kshatriyā—mudgalānī*. Apropos of Pāṇini's rule, Kātyāyana brings sufficient infusion of his own for us to suspend judgment in the case of *Yavanānī*. In general, too, he is known to be no simple follower or expositor. Agrawala<sup>22</sup> has himself summed up: “He subjected Pāṇini's work to a searching examination, modifying and supplementing the *sūtras* where there was need for it in the process of time, initiating discussions on contentious grammatical theories, at times developed in as many as fifty-nine *vārttikas* (cf. *sūtra* I.2.64), and in other cases justifying and defending Pāṇini against his critics.” On the whole, Kātyāyana cannot be regarded as prohibiting Kane's position.

Perhaps we shall be told: “*Yavanānī* has been proved to have done duty in literature for a script. Agrawala<sup>23</sup> points out its occurrence under the form *Javanānīyā* in the list of scripts in the *Samavāyānga sūtra* (*Samavāya* XVIII) as well as in the *Paṇṇavanā sūtra*. B. G. Puri<sup>24</sup> cites the *Lalitavistāra* (p. 125) for a reference to it as one of the 64 scripts in which the Śākya prince Gautama was proficient. How can we doubt the script-sense in the *Astādhyāyī*?”

The answer is: “Puri<sup>25</sup> also says: ‘The *Mahāvastu* [Vol. I, p. 135] has... mentioned *Yāvanī* besides other scripts...’ If the form *Yavanī* could lead to a term meaning a script, so might *Yavanānī* without ceasing to have meant the wife of a Yavana in the first place. Kātyāyana's usage—and, after him, Patañjali's—cannot definitively determine Pāṇini's sense.”

All in all, the problem of finding an identifiable alternative to “Greek” is not obsessive. If necessary, it can be ignored.

In any case, Pāṇini's category for his native place—an independent kingdom—can in no manner restrain us from fixing for him the lower time-limit: 546-540 or, say, the mean year 543 B.C.

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA

## Notes

- 1 Majumdar, *op cit* , p 153
- 2 *Ibid*
- 3 Barua, *op cit* , p 99
- 4 The same legend is met with also in the *Vāyu Purāna*
- 5 Max Muller, *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p 28
- 6 B C Law in *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p 1
- 7 Ram Gopal, *India of the Kalpasūtras* (Delhi, 1959), p 54
- 8 *The Vedic Age*, edited by R C Majumdar and A D Pusalker (London, 1952), p 261
- 9 *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p 101
- 10 Barua, *op cit* , p 97
- 11 *History of the Dharmaśāstra* (Poona), Vol V, p 516, fn 743
- 12 Agrawala, *op cit* , p 357
- 13 *Ibid* , p 204
- 14 *Ibid* , p 39
- 15 *Ibid* , p 210
- 16 *Ibid* , p 206
- 17 *Ibid* , p 104
- 18 *Ibid* , p 95
- 19 *Ibid* , p 89
- 20 *Ibid* , p 86
- 21 *Ibid* , p 312
- 22 *Ibid* , pp 4-5
- 23 Agrawala, *op cit* p 312
- 24 *India in the time of Patañjali* (Bombay, 1957), p 182
- 25 *Ibid*

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Sri Aurobindo Circle: Special Fiftieth Number, Golden Jubilee, Sri Aurobindo Society Annual 1994.** Pub. by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry; pp. viii + 171. Price Rs. 35.00.

THIS is indeed a special number. Its contents are a veritable feast of superb delicacies and wines of rare vintages, after a few sips of which one remembers these lines from a poem of Sri Aurobindo's in this volume:

“Thought is the wine of the soul and the word is the beaker;  
Life is a banquet-table—the soul of the sage is the drinker.

What of the wine, O mortal?  
I am drunk with the wine as I sit at Wisdom's portal.”

A detailed review of this issue would involve extensive quotations from the well-selected works, a temptation I am trying to avoid.

The main and the first big part of this annual consists of 50 pages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and 17 pages from the Mother. They are arranged in a non-linear way, there is neither an ascending nor a descending order but a more or less global or spherical approach and this portion, in brief, is Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's philosophy, their way, and description of the path they have opened for all of us in its essential. I dare suggest that apart from these pages a Sadhak need not read anything else for quite some time. Rather it would be more correct to say that for someone who has read a 'lot' from the writings of our Masters and is practising Sadhana, he need not have any other reading material except these 67 pages together with some of the beautiful photographs from this issue if he were to get stranded on a desert island.

For those who enjoy poetry the next 19 pages provide a selection of a high quality from nine poets apart from Sri Aurobindo. For sheer beauty Arjava's poem “Unveering Light” has no parallel, it is just “Exceedingly beautiful” in Sri Aurobindo's words. Then we have a detailed correspondence on *Savitri* between Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) and Sri Aurobindo.

Finally, there is the usual section of articles from stalwarts on various aspects of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their writings in 93 pages, all of them interesting. Kishor Gandhi writes on the always topical subject of limitations of the Guru-Shishya relationship in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar gives us a glimpse into the life-work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother via a biographical sketch. Prema Nandakumar continues her series on Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of Indian Culture by taking the topic of religion, the true religion and why it should be there at all. Then we have Huta attempting to

condense 'The Infinite Wisdom' in four pages, followed by Jugal K. Mukherjee who tells us what a Sadhak should do—the why and how of it. Dr. Dalal continues to relate Sri Aurobindo with the evolving views of Transpersonal Psychology and finally we have an interesting article by S. Mohanty on 'Spirituality and the Agenda of the Nineties'.

For myself, the 'Kohinoor' in this collection is the small piece on page ii, "The Mother, Her children and the New Creation" which is a very powerful and an invaluable revelation that contains within it the description of all wants and aspirations and achievements of humanity from eternity to eternity. It tells us what this yoga is and that too in Sri Aurobindo's own beautiful handwriting.

If I have persuaded you, the reader, to own this volume I would say to you, paraphrasing Arjava (p.65), 'let me be the Gratefulness that lifts this spring to thee, O reader, one with the grey dawn's laugh that staves the dark from thee.'

DINKAR PALANDE

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-fifth Seminar

23 November 1993

THE IMPERATIVE CHOICE

Speech by Jhumur Bhattacharya

In this fiftieth year of the founding of our Centre of Education, more and more a certain passage from *Savitri*, the book I love above all others, rings in my mind. A marvellous passage from a most marvellous poem, it can shake even the most somnolent person awake:

“O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,  
O petty adventurers in an infinite world  
And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,  
How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind  
Around your little self and petty things?”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, how long will we continue to be so terribly interested in ourselves? How long will we walk in the same ruts, repeat the same journeys? We mouth great words but achieve little; we embark on ventures that lead us to no new discoveries. We are often so satisfied with the mediocre, and happy if we find that we have made some slight improvements on the past.

And yet Mother expected so much more from us. She was completely certain that some day we who have been brought up here, educated in this Centre of Education would fulfil Sri Aurobindo's ideals and Hers. She said that even if it took fifty or a hundred years the work would be done; about this She had no doubts. Well, fifty years have indeed elapsed since the day She founded our Centre of Education. Are we going to wait for a hundred to pass by before a real leap in the right direction is taken?

Every passing day makes it more evident that the choice is growing imperative and the time to make it is Now.

And the beautiful thing is that She who is the Goal is also the Guide. We are not being asked to grope forward on our way all by ourselves. We are not alone, we are never alone. A Hand is always stretched out towards us, to help and save. All we need to do is to hold on to it and never let it go. For She who is our

<sup>1</sup> *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), p 370



Mother has told us that we are only required to remember that we are simply Her little children and love Her unquestioningly with all our hearts. Just as flowers offer themselves unhesitatingly to the sun and therefore blossom in the light, so can we. For here, we are drenched in Her light, even when we refuse to see it.

When we realise this, when we give up the terrible obsession with our petty separate selves, then we shall know that there is no freedom greater than that of a complete self-forgetting surrender.

We are Her children. This surrender, this freedom and this joy could be ours if we chose. The choice is ours.