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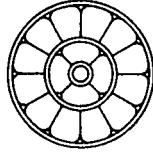
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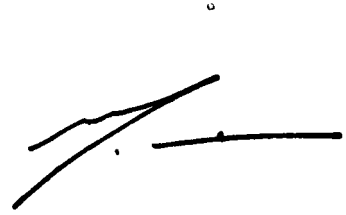
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to

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Editor K D SETHNA

Associate Editor R Y Deshpande

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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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A PERFECT SHRINE FOR THE GOD OF LOVE

NEAR to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflowed the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised un stumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.
As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple door to things beyond.
Immortal rhythms swayed in her time-born steps;
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives,
A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came
And gave a sense as of a greatened world:
Her kindly care was a sweet temperate sun,
Her high passion a blue heaven's equipoise.
As might a soul fly like a hunted bird,
Escaping with tired wings from a world of storms,
And a quiet reach like a remembered breast,
In a haven of safety and splendid soft repose
One could drink life back in streams of honey-fire,
Recover the lost habit of happiness,
Feel her bright nature's glorious ambiance,
And preen joy in her warmth and colour's rule.
A deep of compassion, a hushed sanctuary,
Her inward help unbarred a gate in heaven;
Love in her was wider than the universe,
The whole world could take refuge in her single heart.
The great unsatisfied godhead here could dwell:
Vacant of the dwarf self's imprisoned air

Her mood could harbour his sublimer breath
 Spiritual that can make all things divine.
 For even her gulfs were secrecies of light.
 At once she was the stillness and the word,
 A continent of self-diffusing peace,
 An ocean of untrembling virgin fire:
 The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.
 In her he found a vastness like his own,
 His high warm subtle ether he refound
 And moved in her as in his natural home.
 In her he met his own eternity

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL Vol 28, pp 14-16)

THE MANTRA

Sri Aurobindo's Letter to Amal Kiran

The *mantra* as I have tried to describe it in *The Future Poetry* is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. Its characteristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater.

(*The Future Poetry*, SABCL Vol. 9, pp. 369-370)

A HYMN TO SAVITRI

RIG VEDA V. 81

[THE Rishi hymns the Sun-God as the source of divine knowledge and the creator of the inner worlds. To him, the Seer, the seekers of light yoke their mind and thoughts; he, the one knower of all forms of knowledge, is the one supreme ordainer of the sacrifice. He assumes all forms as the robes of his being and his creative sight and creates the supreme good and happiness for the two forms of life in the worlds. He manifests the heavenly world, shining in the path of the dawn of divine knowledge; in that path the other godheads follow him and it is his greatness of light that they make the goal of all their energies. He has measured out for us our earthly worlds by his power and greatness: but it is in the three worlds of light that he attains to his real greatness of manifestation in the rays of the divine sun; then he encompasses the night of our darkness with his being and his light and becomes Mitra who by his laws produces the luminous harmony of our higher and lower worlds. Of all our creation he is the one author, and by his forward marches he is its increaser until the whole world of our becoming grows full of his illumination.]

युञ्जते मन उत युञ्जते धियो विप्रा विप्रस्य बृहतो विपश्चितः ।
वि होत्रा दधे वयुनाविदेक इन्मही देवस्य सवितुः परिष्ठितिः ॥१॥

1. The illumined yoke their mind and they yoke their thoughts to the illumined godhead, to the vast, to the luminous in consciousness; the one knower of all manifestation of knowledge, he alone orders the things of the sacrifice. Great is the praise of Savitri, the creating godhead.

विश्वा रूपाणि प्रति मुञ्चते कविः प्रासावीद् भद्रं द्विपदे चतुष्पदे ।
वि नाकमच्छत् सविता वरेण्योऽनु प्रयाणमुषसो वि राजति ॥२॥

2. All forms are robes the Seer puts on that he may create the good and bliss for the double and the quadruple¹ creature. Savitri describes by his light our heavenly world; supreme is he and desirable, wide is the light of his shining in the march of the Dawn.

यस्य प्रयाणमन्वन्य इद् ययुर्देवा देवस्य महिमानमोजसा ।
यः पार्थिवानि विममे स एतशो रजांसि देवः सविता महित्वना ॥३॥

¹ Literally, two-footed and four-footed, but *pād* also means the step, the principle on which the soul founds itself. The esoteric meaning is four-principled, those who dwell in the fourfold principle of the lower world, and two-principled, those who dwell in the double principle of the divine and the human

3. And in that march all the other gods in their might follow after the greatness of this godhead. This is that bright god Savitri who by his power and greatness has measured out our earthly worlds of light.

उत यासि सवितस्त्रीणि रोचनोत सूर्यस्य रश्मिभिः समुच्यसि ।
उत रात्रीमुभयतः परीयस उत मित्रो भवसि देव धर्मभिः ॥४॥

4. But also thou goest, O Savitri, to the three shining worlds of heaven and thou art made manifest by the rays of the Sun, and thou encirclest on both sides the Night, and thou becomest Mitra, O god, with his settled laws of Truth.

उतेशिषे प्रसवस्य त्वमेक इदुत पूषा भवसि देव यामभिः ।
उतेदं विश्वं भुवनं वि राजसि श्यावाश्वस्ते सवितः स्तोममानशे ॥५॥

5. And thou alone hast power for the creation and thou becomest the Increaser. O god, by thy marchings in thy path, and thou illuminest all this world of the becoming. Shyawashwa, O Savitri, has found the affirmation of thy godhead.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL Vol. 10, pp. 529-530.)

THE TRIPLE DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS AS THE CENTRE OF THE WORLDS

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER FOR THE BOON

May 27, 1914¹

IN each one of the domains of the being, the consciousness must be awakened to the perfect existence, knowledge and bliss. These three worlds or modes of the Divine are found in the physical reality as well as in the states of force and light and those of impersonality and infinitude, of eternity. When one enters with full consciousness into the higher states, to live this existence, light and bliss is easy, almost inevitable. But what is very important, as well as very difficult, is to awaken the being to this triple divine consciousness in the most material worlds. This is the first point. Then one must succeed in finding the centre of all the divine worlds (probably in the intermediate world), whence one can unite the consciousness of these worlds, synthetise them, and act simultaneously and with full awareness in all domains.

I know that it is a very long way from these incomplete and imperfect explanations to the sublime reality which manifests Thee, O Lord. Thy splendour, Thy power and Thy magnificence, Thy incommensurable love are above all explanation and comment. But my intellect needs to represent things to itself at least a little schematically, in order to allow the most material states of the being to enter as completely as possible into harmony with Thy Will.

Yet it is in the deep silence of my mute and total adoration that I best understand Thee. For then who can say what loves, what is loved, and what is the power of loving in itself? All three are but one in an infinite bliss.

O give to everyone, Lord, the boon of that incomparable bliss.

SOME LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO A PROPOS OF PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

There are some Prayers of the Mother of 1914 in which she speaks of transformation and manifestation. Since at that time she was not here, does this not mean that she had these ideas long before she came here?

The Mother had been spiritually conscious from her youth, even from her childhood upward and she had done Sadhana and had developed this knowledge very long before she came to India.

23.12.1932

There are many who hold the view that she was human but now embodies the Divine Mother and her "Prayers", they say, explain this view. But, to my mental conception, to my psychic being, she is the Divine Mother who has consented to put on her the cloak of obscurity and suffering and ignorance so that she can effectively lead us—human beings—to Knowledge and Bliss and Ananda and to the Supreme Lord.

The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the Divine. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing divine consciousness, not human turning into divine. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood, so the view held by "many" is erroneous.

I also conceive that the Mother's "Prayers" are meant to show us—the aspiring psychic—how to pray to the Divine.

Yes.²

17.8.1938

Nirodbaran: The Mother says in her Prayers and Meditations that experience is willed by the Divine. Am I then to suppose that dearth or abundance of experiences is, in any given case, willed by the Divine?

Sri Aurobindo: To say so has no value unless you realise all things as coming from the Divine. One who has realised as the Mother had realised in the midst of terrible sufferings & difficulties that even these came from the Divine and were preparing her for her work can make a spiritual use of such an attitude. For others it may lead to wrong conclusions.³

14.5.1934

Nirodbaran: In her Prayers and Meditations, under 8th October, 1914 the Mother says: "The joy that is contained in activity is compensated and balanced by the perhaps still greater joy contained in withdrawal from all activity..." This state of greater joy, Mother explains, is that state of Sachchidananda and the withdrawal is not an inner detachment during work. Does it not suggest then that there is a joy in non-activity superceding that of activity? If such be the case, one would naturally aspire for this far greater joy, which is the aim and purpose of our sadhana, isn't it so?

Sri Aurobindo: Do you think the Mother has a rigid mind like you people and

was laying down a hard and fast rule for all time and all people and all conditions? It refers to a certain stage when the consciousness is sometimes in activity and when not in activity is withdrawn in itself. Afterwards comes a stage when the Sachchidananda condition is there in work also. There is a still farther stage when both are as it were one, but that is the supramental. The two states are the silent Brahman and the active Brahman and they can alternate (1st stage), coexist (2nd stage), fuse (3rd stage). If you reach even the first stage then you can think of applying Mother's dictum, but why misapply it now?⁴

22.12 1934

References

- 1 *Prayers and Meditations, Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol 1, p 157
- 2 *Ibid* , p 380.
- 3 *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, p 49
- 4 *Ibid* , pp 83-84

POINTS OF POETIC COMPARISON

WALTER DE LA MARE, ARJAVA, AND AMAL KIRAN

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS

DE LA MARE's poem¹ has a delicate beauty throughout and a sort of daintily fanciful suggestion of the occult world. I do not know if there is anything more. The weakness of it is that it reads like a thing imagined—the images and details are those that might be written of a haunted house on earth which has got possessed by some occult presences. Arjava² must no doubt have taken his starting-point from a reminiscence of this poem, but there is nothing else in common with De la Mare—his poem is an extraordinarily energetic and powerful vision of an occult world and every phrase is intimately evocative of the beyond as a thing vividly seen and strongly lived—it is not on earth, this courtyard and this crescent moon, we are at once in an unearthly world and in a place somewhere in the soul of man and all the details, sparing, with a powerful economy of phrase and image and brevity of movement but revelatory in each touch as opposed to the dim moonlight suggestions supported by a profusion of detail and long elaborating development in De la Mare—of course that has its value also—make us entirely feel ourselves there. I therefore maintain my description “original” not only for the latter part of the poem but for the opening also. It is not an echo, it is an independent creation. Indeed the difference of the two poems comes out most strongly in these very (first eight) lines.

... the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,

... the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky

are a description of things on earth made occult only by the presence of the phantom listeners. But

... the empty eerie courtyard
With no name

or

... a crescent moon swung wanly,
White as curd

are not earthly, they belong to a terrible elsewhere while the latter part of the

¹ *The Listeners*

² *Totalitarian*

poem carries the elsewhere into a province of the soul. This is the distinction and makes the perfect successfulness of Arjava's poem.

15.10.1936

The Listeners

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
'Is there anybody there?' he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

WALTER DE LA MARE

Totalitarian*

Night was closing on the traveller
 When he came
 To the empty eerie courtyard
 With no name.
 Loud he called; no echo answered;
 Nothing stirred:
 But a crescent moon swung wanly,
 White as curd.
 When he flashed his single sword-blade
 Through the gloom,
 None resisted—till he frantic,
 Filled with doom,
 Hurling his weapon through the gloaming,
 Took no aim;
 Saw his likenesses around him
 Do the same:
 Viewed a thousand swordless figures
 Like his own—
 Then first knew in that cold starlight
 Hell, alone.

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's Comment:

Exceedingly original and vivid—the description with its economy and felicity of phrase is very telling.

*

It is indeed charming¹—De la Mare seems to have an unfailing beauty of language and rhythm and an inspired loveliness of fancy² that is captivating. But still it is fancy, the mind playing with its delicate imaginations. A hint of something deeper tries to get through sometimes, but it does not go beyond a hint. That is the difference between his poem and the one it inspired from you.³ There is some kinship though no sameness in the rhythm and the tone of delicate

* Arjava (J. A. Chadwick), *Poems*, John Watkins, London, 1941, p. 215

¹ *Arabia*

² It is strange that in spite of "an unfailing beauty of language and rhythm and an inspired loveliness of fancy" W. H. Auden, while presenting Walter De la Mare, did not include this poem in his selection — Ed

³ *Pharphar*

remoteness it brings with it. But in your poem that something deeper is not hinted, it is caught—throughout—in all the expressions, but especially in such lines as

When the magic ethers of evening
Wash one the various day

or

The beautiful body of Pharphar
Or its soul of secret sound

or

This river of infinite distance,
Pharphar.

These expressions give a sort of body to the occult without taking from it its strangeness and do not leave it in mist or in shadowy image or luminous silhouette. That is what a fully successful spiritual or occult poetry has to do, to make the occult and the spiritual real to the vision of the consciousness, the feeling. The occult is most often materialised as by Scott and Shakespeare or else pictured in mists, the spiritual mentalised, as in many attempts at spiritual poetry—a reflection in the mind is not enough. For success in the former, Arjava's *Totalitarian* with the stark occult reality of its vision is a good example; for the latter there are lines both in his poems and yours that I could instance, but I cannot recall them accurately just now—but have you not somewhere a line

The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind?

That would be an instance of the concrete convincing reality of which I am speaking—a spiritual state not hinted at or abstractly put as the metaphysical poets most often do it but presented with a tangible accuracy which one who has lived in the silent wideness of his spiritualised mind can at once recognise as the embodiment in word of his experience.

I do not mean for a moment to deny the value of the exquisite texture of dream in De la Mare's representation, but still this completer embodiment achieves more.

16.10.1936

Arabia

Far are the shades of Arabia
Where the Princes ride at noon,
'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,
Under the ghost of a moon;

And so dark is that vaulted purple
 Flowers in the forest rise
 And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom stars
 Pale in the noonday skies.
 Sweet is the music of Arabia
 In my heart when out of dreams
 I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn
 Descry her gliding streams;
 Hear her strange lutes on the green banks
 Ring loud with the grief and delight
 Of the dim-silked, dark-haired musicians
 In the brooding silence of night...

They haunt me—her lutes and her forests;
 No beauty on earth I see
 But shadowed with that dream recalls
 Her loveliness to me:
 Still eyes look coldly upon me,
 Cold voices whisper and say—
 “He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,
 They have stolen his wits away.”

WALTER DE LA MARE

Pharphar¹

(“... *Abana and Pharphar, lucid streams*”—Milton)

Where is the glassy gold of Pharphar
 Or its echoing silver-grey
 When the magic ethers of evening
 Wash one the various day?

I have travelled the whole earth over
 Yet never found
 The beautiful body of Pharphar
 Or its soul of secret sound.

But all my dreams are an answer
 To Pharphar's blind career;

¹ *The Secret Splendour (Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna—Amal Kiran)*, 1993, p. 177

And the songs that I sing are an image
Of quiets I long to hear.

For, only this unreached beauty
No time shall mar—
This river of infinite distance,
Pharphar.

AMAL KIRAN

*

Sphere-Music¹

Bring not your stars the very same
Magic as mine? I give that name
Unto a touch of cool far flame
Upon my heart

When evening yearns beyond the brief
Monotonies of joy and grief
For some strange rhythmical relief
Shining apart—

And dim migrations, mindward sent
From reveries omnipotent
Through shadows of a firmament
Crowned by deep lull,

Scatter their white and winging powers
Of song across the barren hours
Till darkness lit to flying flowers
Breathes beautiful.

AMAL KIRAN

Sri Aurobindo's Comment

“It is a very good lyric, the rhythm and the thought very subtle and satisfying.”

(I have the same impression about it as about Pharphar which, according to you, has come from the Intuition plane. Am I right?)

“I believe it is the same source.”

¹ *The Secret Splendour (Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna—Amal Kiran)*, 1993, p. 180

CALL AT MIDNIGHT

THEY walked under the trees
along the wet streets
and one from inside,
who had lain awake,
smelt the midnight cold
and dreamt them walking
like heroes of great epics.
“Bublaai, we wait beyond the three ponds!”
The cry came floating through the fog
The windows were strange,
big trees filled in the rectangles
and the smell of the fog
came through them slowly, softly.
The boy lay stiff in the bed
and the call came again.
“Bublaai, we wait beyond the three ponds!”
The walkers passed by,
crossed the canal,
into the trees and
beyond the three ponds
From inside the room
the boy heard them
walk away.
The voice rang in the room still.
“Bublaai, we wait beyond the three ponds!”

GOUTAM GHOSAL

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

AT present there is a strong pressure to integrate the outermost being into the Sadhana. The dominant note of the spiritual process at the moment is in that line of Sri Aurobindo's—

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight....

A tension is felt in the body as if it were straining to join the infinite I have known the thrust of the inner being through the body: it was that thrust which threw me at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Now it is as if the body feels on its own to take to their feet, and through their feet it pushes towards becoming one with the essence of their physical divinity. This essence resides in the ultimate *Sat* as moulded into the *kāraṇa śarīra* whose creative power is a fathomless delight and whose constructive art is the supramental consciousness. One of the characteristics of the new movement is a complete detachment from all ties—not an insensitive aloofness but a holding of all ties sweetly and considerately in one's hands instead of their holding one tight in the way of ordinary life. One moves towards a total freedom yet without any cold farness. On the contrary the freedom has a warm aura and spontaneously tries to draw others into its own happy concentration in the Eternal One within the changing Many.

All this seems to happen not inside—in the mind or heart—but in the blood and bone and tissues if not in the skin itself. It is all rather strange and cannot be easily explained. The process is best experienced and communicated in that Mantra of the body's yoga, the line which I have quoted and which keeps haunting me at all hours. It is the first time in my stay here that this great line has sprung into living reality, in however vague a manner. The three other Mantras which follow it—

Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwall'd mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest—

have had some faint reflex-echo in my being, but I never knew before, except in a poetically sympathetic way, the mighty truth that throbs in the opening line.

Enough now of myself. What you say about *The Secret of the Veda* sums up my own attitude. This book has always been a favourite with me, the most thrilling detective story I have ever come across. Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles* is nothing in mystery, excitement and discovery, compared to the

Rigveda's "Hound of Heaven", Sarama, the illumined intuition, finding out the dark home of the Dasa-Dasyus, the hostile groopers within, in order to release and reveal Martanda, the lost Sun.

Your account of the stroll in the early morning and the slow appearance of the light reminded me of a passage in Sri Aurobindo's *Love and Death* about Ruru before his last reunion with Priyumvada:

Far he strayed
 Tempting for flower and fruit branches in heaven,
 And plucked and flung away, and brighter chose
 Seeking comparisons for her bloom; and followed
 New streams and touched new trees, and felt slow beauty
 And leafy secret change, for the damp leaves,
 Gray-green at first, grew pallid with the light
 And warmed with consciousness of sunshine near;
 Then the whole daylight wandered in, and made
 Hard tracts of splendour and enriched all hues.

Your question about the Ashwins being two set me thinking. In the Avesta there is only one Nasatya. How has the Rigveda managed to duplicate him? As you must have seen from Sri Aurobindo's book, Greek legend also has two figures corresponding to the Rigveda's Ashwins, they are Castor and Pollux, the brothers of Helen. The Ashwins are horsemen like Castor and Pollux. They are also sailors. Physicians riding the horse, plying a boat—always in a pair—do they answer to the needs of our psycho-somatic being in its twofold movement over the wide earth of life's swift career and over the far-stretching "strange seas of thought"?

You have mentioned your one "vital" problem. You wonder whether exercise will help. Well, the best exercise I know of for slimming is to push one's chair away from the dining table at the right moment! (6 3 1983)

*

Time is a little queer with me these days. You speak of my 'quantum leap'. There has not been any marked thrust forward, a passage from an outer to an inner orbit more close to the divine nucleus. But in regard to time though not to space a quantum weirdness has come in. The electrons change their orbits without seeming to cross space or time. They just are in one orbit and suddenly they are in another. It is as if they vanished from the spatio-temporal world at one point and reappeared in it at a different place. That is how I feel occasionally. And in that gap between the two spots several things get lost. It is not merely a falling, *à la* Shakespeare,

In the dark backward and abysm of time.

It is a falling out of time, a touch *à la* Sri Aurobindo of

The abysm of the unbodied infinite

Philosophically and less spectacularly, one might say that a little withdrawal occurs into the immobile Self—not perhaps right “into” but a wee bit “towards” and something of the eternal silent Presence is intuited. This intuiting brings a great deal of comfort, which is very much needed these days, for the new orientation of which I have written to you in several letters has created quite a sense of uncertainty as if everything has to be sought and found anew. Only the wideness of being which is always there prevents the whole system from feeling upset and the new state is not a pandemonium but, as the last line of Sri Aurobindo’s *Sea at Night* puts it,

The quiet welter of a shifting world.

You seem to be undergoing something of a welter too. Just surround it with a trustful calm. The adjective “trustful” is as important as the noun “calm”. For although the inner serene milieu is ever a fine thing, it may not go further than freeing you from the outer fret. The outer fret may not become productive of a transformation, a divine cosmos emerging from the human chaos. The disturbance has not simply to be borne in the sense of endurance: it has to be borne forward, rendered progressive, through that inner calm. For this the calm has to be trustful—that is, permeated with the awareness of the Supreme Mother into whose hands it is to be put so as to realise the Savitri-state:

A heart of silence in the hands of joy. .

Then the calm realises the happiness of which a line of Dante’s—one of the greatest in world-poetry—is a pointer:

E’n la sua voluntade è nostra pace

which is perhaps best Englished thus:

His Will alone is our tranquillity

The tranquillity is based on and lit up by a consciousness of the dynamic Wisdom secret behind all things and can transmit the impetus of a *vita nuova* to whatever turmoil goes on in the surface being. In addition to freeing one from the turmoil

and, rather than settling it at the end, it serves as the medium of a recreative Power. (12 5 1983)

*

As you profess either complete ignorance or else a great scepticism in the matter of either Sri Aurobindo or the Mother bestowing new names on their disciples, I may venture to offer a few ideas of mine. I believe they have some point since I myself have been blessed with a new name: Amal-Kiran—The Clear Ray

When a new name is given, a certain basic turn of nature is visioned. This turn is not operative in full, but neither is it entirely covered over. The open recognition of it by the Master or the Mother evokes it more and more. At any rate a dynamic call is made to it and the expectation is that it would serve as a shining ideal to be lived up to and to check constantly the deviations natural to the human condition. Especially the very opposite is to be feared, for always in us we have the strongest overt or covert contrary of what we are meant to be by the Divine. Each of us has to represent the conquest of our outstanding defect or difficulty. The new name points, on the one hand, to this flaw and, on the other, to our glorious destiny of victory over it. Usually it is conferred on us at a stage when the hint or glint of an inner conversion is perceived by the Gurus. And just because in one or two or several cases the person fails to live up to the ideal, the visionary sea-mark, it scarcely follows that every instance is bound to be a fiasco. Nor does a faulty side-step, now and again, nullify the new name. Such side-steps are unavoidable, but Sri Aurobindo and the Mother never gave them more importance than they deserved. Always their attitude was positive and forward-looking and always they wanted us to take the new name as a Mantra, a source of power in which their very presence was concentrated, a luminous reminder of the truth that there is no hole so abysmal that the Divine Grace cannot lift us from it sky-high. Of course, one can be inwardly guided and progress without receiving a new name, but I have observed in my own case the deep utility of it and come to know how exactly we have to look at its implications.

(17 5 1983)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE MOTHER'S PLAYGROUND

A TALK BY NOLINI KANTA GUPTA TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN

You may remember, we once saw a play in our Theatre staged by our students. It was about the adventure of a few young people leaving their home and going out wandering. In the end they came to a house and one of them casually opened a side-door in the building and all entered and found themselves in a fairyland. They were surprised, astonished: they found they had left the old world and come to a new unfamiliar enchanting fairyland.

The same experience one has when one opens the gate of the playground and enters it. At least we used to experience in that way in the early days. As soon as we stepped into the playground, a new atmosphere enveloped us, a new life full of joy, happiness and delight and freedom. When we used to put on our group uniform, we felt quite different from what we were normally. Old people with their blue shorts in our group, really old people—they felt very young, youthful and trotting about as if they had left their age behind with all their cares. And the younger people, the youngest ones, they were so eager to join the group, to put on the green uniform. So many among them after putting on their green shorts rushed to me and said enthusiastically: “Today I have got my uniform and I will join the group”: so happy, so free, so full of delight and delightful they were.

Now a word about the organisation or grouping in the playground. Naturally some attention had to be paid in view of the difference of age and sex and capacity; but the principle, the general principle that lay behind the organisation and on which the Mother insisted was: no difference of age, specially no difference of sex; all human beings are fundamentally of the same nature. Particularly in the competitions of physical education that were arranged from time to time, the groups were more or less all mixed up, the green and the red and the blue and all the other colours made a blend as it were. Now-a-days it is somewhat different, but in those early days it was otherwise; only capacity was the chief consideration for distinction and difference, and that too in a general and very superficial way. I also, an aged person, I do not say *old*, I ran and did the exercises with young people, very young people and girls also—not for any fun and joke but very seriously. It was to show by example that in your mind, in your consciousness there should be no feeling of difference, no sense of inferiority or superiority from the point of view of age and sex—and even capacity, to an extent.

In the very early days when we were rather very few in number, somewhere about fifty, we used to address each other by our names, mere names, there was no *dādā* or *didi* tagged on: Nolini, Pavitra, Sahana, Lalita, that was all, pure and simple. So when people from outside came they found it a little queer: “they

have no respect here for age, no respect for elderly people, no consideration for the women, they call each other merely by the name." But in reality, whatever it seemed like from outside, the consciousness, the attitude behind was different. And yet there were some people who felt it and appreciated it. Thus when some one in the Ashram called me by name or an elderly woman by hers, evidently the feeling behind was full of respect and consideration, even love. Only the form of address was like that, bare and without qualification. Even someone from outside saw the thing and judged it correctly. He wrote an article on the Ashram: it is very strange that youngsters called old people by their mere names but it sounds so nice and appropriate when the thing comes from their lips

Thus the principles that guided the organisation of physical education are as you know now there is to be, first, no difference between boys and girls, all should undergo the same exercises and the same programme. This was and is even now, I think, compulsory for the younger groups—the green and the red and even a little beyond. But it has been often asked, the bodies are different specially with regard to sex, is it not natural to provide different programmes? But in reality the bodies have become different because of the consciousness that insisted on the difference during millenniums of growth and evolution. It is only now, in this age, that things have begun to change a little. Some of you may remember, the elderly ones, how difficult it was for the Mother to make the girls put on shorts and shirts for the playground exercises. She had to begin gently and gradually. In the beginning the girls *learnt* to put on trousers, with trousers they used to do marching and exercises. Even today in the outside world, in many places in India specially, we see women, girls marching and doing the parade in saree. Our women-police even today are on duty with saree. The tradition was very strong and in this respect, we here claim to be the pioneers of this new development of physical freedom of women to be equal to that of men. This was the lesson taught by the Mother.

Long ago, some twenty-five years ago, a well-known leader of India, a great educationist came and saw our Playground activities and made the remark: "I have travelled all over India, visited various educational institutions, seen women doing gymnastics but it is the first time that I see here in the Ashram girls doing vaulting, especially on parallel bars, I have never seen it anywhere else." Of course, it goes without saying, circus-girls are different. In other words, people used to consider vaulting as a specially masculine virtue and along with it many other physical games and exercises. Today it is being gradually found that this is a superstition and the judgement is wrong. The Wimbledon women champions will bear witness. The most important thing is that you have to change the attitude, you have to change consciousness. Of course, there are difficulties on the way, the force of habit, the force of atavism, all that means an extra dose of your consciousness or a new consciousness. What is done here and what is done elsewhere in this respect of freedom being given to women and

freedom being given to younger generation, there is a difference. I will come to it. Mother was repeating so often. the freedom, the liberty you enjoy here is extraordinary, exceptional, there is almost no limit to your freedom. That is to say, it is dangerous, because the unlimited use of freedom means also misuse of freedom. But the Mother took the risk, for that is the only way towards a radical solution, not merely a half-way compromise. Only when you are free, when you are completely, absolutely free, you choose between the good and the bad and you choose the good of your own will, then the good has a real importance for you, for your consciousness and for your development. Otherwise when you accept and follow the good through compulsion through fear or social decency or for your own sake, through vanity—that is to say, in order to be good you observe certain rules, and you feel you are virtuous, you are dutiful, then it is not the true way, not the true attitude and consciousness. The true consciousness is that you do the right thing not because it is your duty to do it, not because it is worthy to do it and it is expected of you to do it, but because your nature impels you towards it. The flower blooms spontaneously without any sense of duty. It possesses no sense of duty because its nature is to do so, to be beautiful. Human being also could be like that, spontaneous and natural in its action and behaviour. When you do a great thing, you do not feel that you are doing something marvellous or that you are exercising or stretching your power. You do not do a thing because it is your duty to do it but because it is your nature to do so, you cannot but do it. I give an example here. You are students of English and English grammar. Now, tell me, what is the difference between these two statements? “I have to do the thing” and “I am to do the thing”... “I have to do the thing” means ‘I am obliged to, I am compelled to, I cannot do otherwise,’ “I am to do” means ‘I am doing it, it is for me to do it, I will do it, that is to say it is my nature to do it.’ Something of that kind is taught in the Gita—the ideal of *kartavyam karma* and *niskāma karma* or one’s Swadharma. *Kartavya* is usually translated as duty but it is not correct *Kartavya* is one’s Dharma or the spontaneous expression of one’s nature,—what one is to do, not what one has to do. Mother gave this infinite freedom to her children because that was the only way of creating a new nature and she showed also the difference between the right use of freedom and its wrong use. The wrong use is found in all the movements of freedom outside in the normal life, either in the student movement or the women’s emancipation movement. Now when women are fighting for freedom for themselves they consider themselves as women fighting for freedom against men. “We are women, you are men, you enjoy privileges, rights, we are denied them, we want them, we claim them.” In the youth movement also the young people say all the powers the old people enjoy, positions and emoluments, that will not do, we want to share these also along with the old. Mother said, “No, it is not the right attitude.” You must change your position, your point of view. Going out for a quarrel, for a fight means that

you consider yourselves different beings, with different powers, capacities, constitutions etc , etc First of all you must consider yourselves, all, both the parties, as human beings, not two different species. This is being acknowledged to some extent now-a-days but it is not sufficient, Mother says. If you are content to be human beings, just human beings, differences will arise again and again and not only differences but serious differences. Human nature is composed of these differences, and culture and civilisation meant nothing more than a reconciliation, a compromise among these differences. And the result has been that we have not gone very far for the solution. A deeper truth is to be found, a higher truth and a more powerful truth We must rise to a new state, Mother spoke always of the truth—the truth of your soul To the truth of your soul, in the truth of your soul you are neither man nor woman, neither young nor old—*tvaṁ kumāra uta vā kumārī, tvam jīrno* . . you are all that in the appearance, for you are something more or something else.

You are to take your stand on your soul, that was the lesson that the Mother was trying to impart in the playground education. So long as you are in the normal consciousness imbedded in your body-consciousness and view things from there, your life also will be built in the pattern created by the body-consciousness. Life in that pattern can proceed only through difference and distinction, contrast and contradiction, conflict and battle. So long as you stick to your habitual position it will be so, the remedy is a radical remedy, it is to reverse your position. You have to stand not on your legs but on your head, then you will find the way to march through not confrontation but co-operation, not through separation but union, not through difference but identity. So long as you are mere human beings this supreme soul-identity cannot come. You have to forget the differences.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF THE FUTURE OF POETRY

O human image of the deathless word,
How hast thou seen beyond the topaz walls
The gleaming sisters of the divine gate,
Summoned the geni of their wakeful sleep,
And under revelation's arches forced
The carved thought-shrouded doors to swing apart,
Unlocked the avenues of spiritual sight
And taught the entries of a heavenlier state
To thy rapt soul that bore the golden key?
In thee the secret sight man's blindness missed
Has opened its view past Time, my chariot course,
And death, my tunnel which I drive through life
To reach my unseen distances of bliss.¹

THIS human image is Sri Aurobindo himself with whom the wheel of evolution appears to have completed its full circle, for he manifests the Supramental Consciousness in the earth-nature. He is the "conqueror of the kingdom of the soul"² who has entered "the forbidden realms"³ of the Divine Creation. He has brought down a new light upon the earth "to stay the wheel of doom" leaving no room for darkness to prevail. The light he has brought down makes us see what we could not. Since the Supramental Consciousness is the integral consciousness, its light puts an end to the eclipse of the mental vision as a result of its subjection to the divisive principle of Consciousness in Mind. Therefore in his works he unveils the planes of truth even of this 'aparardha', the lower hemisphere of Existence, which the Vedic Rishis, too, failed to do, for they could not finally cross the border of Mind. They could succeed in hoisting the flag on its border and see beyond it what they called 'parardha', the higher hemisphere.

Sri Aurobindo's Supramental Consciousness sees poetry as "the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery".⁴ In the discovery of the Self lies the future of poetry as also of all literary activities. This discovery of Self is the movement of the Soul on the ascending planes of Consciousness. Since body, life and mind are the instruments of the Soul, it brings the vision of the Divine through them corresponding with their universal counterparts while ascending the higher planes of Consciousness in this world of 'aparardha', the lower half of the Existence. The poetic excellence depends upon the soul's ascent on the higher planes. The highest poetic excellence is found in the Mantra which is the poetry of the Intuitive Mind Consciousness and the Overmind Consciousness which are the two uppermost planes of the mental range. He says:

"The Mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only

possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. All great poetry comes about by a unison of these three elements; it is the insufficiency of one or another which makes the inequalities in the work of even the greatest poets; and it is the failure of some one element which is the cause of their lapses, of the scoriae in their work, the spots in the sun. But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible."⁵

Here arises the need to evaluate the works of the poets in the light of the soul's ascent on the successive higher planes of Consciousness consequent upon the discovery of Self. This 'Self', Sri Aurobindo visualises, is neither the physical self, nor the vital self, nor even the mental self. It is the self of the Soul, which is a portion of the Divine, or a spark of the Divine in us. This 'Self' which he terms the 'psychic self' gives "no heed to the paeans of victory."⁶ It remains "indifferent to its own defeats."⁷ It hears the cry of grief and makes no sign. It is impartial to evil and good. Sri Aurobindo says:

It saw destruction come and did not move.
An equal Cause of things, a lonely Seer
And Master of its multitude of forms,
It acted not but bore all thoughts and deeds,
The witness Lord of Nature's myriad acts
Consenting to the movements of her Force.⁸

Such a Self will be instrumental in taking us to the higher planes of the spiritual consciousness. And the poetry coming down from those higher planes is the future poetry culminating in the poetry of the Supramental Consciousness which we have in the form of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* for the vision of the Divine.

At the present stage of evolution man's mind is under the command of the vital self, or, at the highest, the mental self. A majority of men of the literary world manifest either of these selves, and they miserably fail to go beyond the visible, to see the truth behind the terrestrial. Even if a work of art, in its rarity, comes down to us from a very high plane of spiritual consciousness, say the Intuitive Mind Consciousness or the Overmind Consciousness, which are the authors of the Mantra, the vital self or the mental self having the control of our mind fail to see the truth in it. When a work of art like *Savitri*, a poetry of the Overmind plane of Consciousness, comes to one the vital and the mental selves do not bear its dazzling light, as if a high-power current were not bearable to a low-power electric device. We shall have to discover the psychic self and bring our mind under its command for a true vision of the Divine, though this vision

will continue to be an eclipsed one till we cross the frontiers of Mind, for Mind is the divisive principle of Consciousness. This discovery, Sri Aurobindo says, is the psychicisation of our mind which we can achieve by establishing peace in our mind. Opening to the Divine Consciousness is the psychicisation, says Sri Aurobindo. We shall have to refuse reactions in order to disengage our mind from the clutches of the vital and the mental selves so that the divine peace may descend into us. Having discovered the psychic self and consequently brought our mind under its command, the instrumental selves of body, life, mind start losing their potentiality to alloy the vision of the Divine. On the successive higher planes of the spiritual mind consciousness, we find the stamps of the instrumental selves diminishing, the vision of the Divine we then have is in the less eclipsed state. We shall then be able to go beyond the visible and see the truths and powers behind the terrestrial appearances. A divine Ananda, a supreme Beauty will be the order of the future poetry. Such a culmination is destined, for evolution has to unfold the Divine on the Earth. Even a matter-oriented mind cannot deny it ever since Eddington in the realm of Science found the 'mind-stuff principle' present in it. Such a discovery will lead to the realization of the Divine. For, as Sri Aurobindo says,

“Ananda, in the language of Indian spiritual experience, is the essential delight which the Infinite feels in itself and in its creation. By the infinite Self's Ananda all exists, for the Self's Ananda all was made.”⁹

NIKHIL KUMAR

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SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of September 1996)

SRI AUROBINDO started the *Arya* with his *magnum opus* *The Life Divine*, along with *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Secret of the Veda*. All these embodied the philosophical, the mystical, the psychological and spiritual expressions of his Yogic experiences. Sri Aurobindo said that from 1910, and particularly from 1914 to 1921, “A vast Power came pressing down upon him and rushed into his being. There was a ceaseless stream of universal consciousness, tremendous force and light from the Supramental plane.”¹

The Life Divine occupied the premier place in the pages of the *Arya* and it ran into fifty-four chapters (August 1914 to January 1919). It was nearly twenty years later that Sri Aurobindo took it up for revision. On November 14, 1938 when he had a fracture in his right thigh, he was compelled to suspend his usual activities and, at the Mother’s suggestion, he started revising his earlier writings for publication in book-form for which there was an insistent demand.

The first volume bore comparatively few revisions, but he enlarged the chapter on the Psychic Being and added a new chapter on the Supermind, Mind and the Overmind Maya at the end. He gave a sub-title to the volume. *Omnipresent Reality and the Universe*. The volume appeared in November 1939. The second volume, however, was subjected to thorough revision, many of the chapters were recast and enlarged and twelve new chapters were written. It is one of his most thoroughly revised works. It appeared in July 1940 with the sub-title *The Knowledge and the Ignorance—the Spiritual Evolution*. Being the main metaphysical exposition of his yogic system, *The Life Divine* has been widely read and it has been prescribed for study in many of the universities in India. It is being used in some universities in other countries also. It has undergone many printings and has been translated into several languages, Indian and foreign.

What Sri Aurobindo realised through his yogic experience has been expressed philosophically mainly through his writings in *The Life Divine*. Can it be said that Sri Aurobindo is a philosopher from the standpoint of his contributions in *The Life Divine*?

In our search for the answer to this question, we have to see first that the word “philosophy” may be used in different senses. There is, first of all, an ancient way of using this word. Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives*, I 8, says “he who embraces wisdom is called a philosopher.” Plato, in his *Republic*, declares that knowledge sought in philosophy is the knowledge of the whole or the vision of truth. Thus he says, “The philosopher is one who loves not a part of knowledge, but the whole. His passion is for Truth.”² In another place, in his *Republic*, he writes, “The philosophic nature loves eternal and changeless Being in its entirety. It follows that the philosopher naturally loves Truth...”³ Aristotle,

in his *Metaphysics*, has expressed the same point, but differently. For him, "Philosophizing is made for the purpose of rending the veil of ignorance and entering into the realm of truth and knowledge."

According to Sri Aurobindo, a true philosopher is he who does not philosophize in the void, but philosophizes for man. For Sri Aurobindo, to philosophize for man means: "... to give him light on the nature of his being, the principles of his psychology, his relations with the world and with God, the fixed lines or the great possibilities of his destiny."⁴

We then come to see that Sri Aurobindo is not a philosopher in the contemporaneous sense of the word. "Although," as he once wrote to Dilip Roy, "I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician, and not a philosopher."⁵

When Sri Aurobindo disclaims being a philosopher and at the same time admits that he has written philosophy, we face a riddle which can be put in the form of a question: How does a person who is not a philosopher write philosophy? Sri Aurobindo himself has answered it. He writes: "First, because X proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse, .. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher."⁶

What Sri Aurobindo has written in the *Arya* is often interpreted as showing the art of reasoning and arguing, merely with intellect and logic, but this is not a correct interpretation. We can see what he himself says here: "There is very little argument in my philosophy—the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the Knowledge."⁷

The real value of philosophy lies in its practical effect on life and aspiration. Sri Aurobindo opens *The Life Divine* with a chapter on "The Human Aspiration." This chapter bears great philosophic significance. We shall see shortly how it does. Meanwhile, we can pay attention to what Sri Aurobindo means by the phrase "The Human Aspiration".

In *The Life Divine* he gives stress on "Life" and the possibility of the transformation of the life-human into the life-divine. He explains that life as manifested in man has a constant aspiration, an aspiration for perfection, for "God, Light, Freedom, Immortality."⁸

Sri Aurobindo says that although in the human aspiration we find "the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences,"⁹ such affirmation gets contra-

dicted by the normal experience of man. Man aspires for perfection, but in actual life he is far from attaining perfection. This contradiction is really superficial and may appear to us as an argument against the validity of unrealised ideals. Sri Aurobindo says that what seems to be contradictory is not really so, for if we see the working of Nature, we come to realise "that direct opposition appears rather as part of Nature's profoundest method"¹⁰ which consists in seeking a harmony between the oppositions

Nature, in her terrestrial evolution, always strives to go beyond by solving the problems of opposites. Sri Aurobindo says. "The accordance of active Life with a material form in which the condition of activity itself seems to be inertia, is one problem of opposites that Nature has solved and seeks always to solve better with greater complexities. . . The accordance of conscious mind and conscious will with a form and a life in themselves not overtly self-conscious and capable at best of a mechanical or subconscious will is another problem of opposites in which she has produced astonishing results and aims always at higher marvels. . ." ¹¹ The goal of Nature is, thus, to work out an ultimate harmony which can be said to be "the manifestation of God in Matter."¹²

The human being to-day is in the throes of a new birth from the mind into the Supermind. The mental being is to be replaced by the Supramental consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo discusses all stages of terrestrial evolution, the stages that have marked an ascent of the emerging consciousness, the parts played by Religion, Mysticism, Asceticism, Reason, Science, Institutions, the various theories of Knowledge, and the direction in which Nature is being precipitated by the pressure of the manifesting spirit. He concludes: "If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key-terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. The Self, the Spirit, the Reality that is disclosing itself out of the first inconscience of life and matter, would evolve its complete truth of being and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself,—or, if its end as an individual is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also,—not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life. Our evolution in the ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery, and world-discovery, its half-fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state, it must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature."¹³

(To be continued)

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KRISHNA

O DEAR Krishna!
 O sweet Krishna!
 How you hold cascades of laughter
 Under a calm clear gaze—
 Hide in silent withdrawal,
 Cloaked in mystic denial,
 Waiting eagerly for a seeking soul.

 This eternal hide-and-peek
 Steers the ship of sadhana
 To the Haven of your Love.
 Safely home
 Your weary baby clings to you
 and
 Sleeps.
 The soul awakens gently
 petal by petal.

 You smile then,
 You give yourself away
 O dear Krishna!
 O sweet Krishna! How long shall I wait for
 That moment of Beatitude?

PRIVATISING ACADEMIA

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATION

PROPOSED remedies for the ills of the Indian academia are often characterized by a thinking that treats all collegiate education as basically wasteful, diversionary and infructuous. The more charitable view regards it as a necessary evil: Colleges must exist, or else what will happen to the burgeoning student population? It is sure to create a civic nuisance. For the army of aspirants in their annual run-up to the civil services, banking and insurance examinations, college degrees are a lollypop. For politicians, colleges provide a fertile ground. While the elite university system has its own influential advocates in the government and the media, schooling is perceived as increasingly important by the upwardly mobile Indian parents. Colleges, however, are viewed as an unavoidable nuisance. Their presence, like our illiterate electorate, needs to be finally tolerated.

The tendency to downplay collegiate education.—based on the argument that colleges are “degree factories” and therefore ought to be supplanted by a system of national level tests sponsored by potential employers.—betrays insufficient awareness of the growth and role of collegiate education in parts of the world that follow the Anglo-American model. The history of university education in the world reveals that a change took place in the late 19th century from the old-style college for prospective clergymen to a new German type of University research and discovery of knowledge organised into fields of specialisation and administration within specialised departments. The older English and American universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton laid greater emphasis on character-building and undergraduate-education, whereas many new ones such as John Hopkins, Cornell and Chicago preferred the graduate and professional over undergraduate education. In Britain, the mainstay of undergraduate training came to be known as liberal education. The John Morley-Augustus Freeman debate over the definition of Literature, or the F. R. Leavis-C. P. Snow debate over “two cultures” are symptomatic of the importance always accorded to liberal education in the West.

Does liberal education have a mandate and role to play in our system? An organised self-image of the academia, broad exposure to many disciplines—sciences, arts and the humanities—within the ambit of a college campus, close interaction with the professoriate, the promotion of a balanced mind and a critical temper that looks at issues and problems with detachment and yet sympathy, a knowledge of the nation’s rich, chequered past and finally the preparation of the pupils for undertaking positions of leadership later in life—these constitute the hallmarks of 19th century collegiate education in Britain. Admittedly there was much in it that was exclusive, parochial and colonial. The writings of even some of the most enlightened ideologues like J. S. Mill and

Cardinal Newman often concealed a subtext hegemonic in content and orientation. Yet for all its limitation, collegiate education served a vital national need in the West.

Do the principles of liberal education have any relevance to the vastly unmanageable system of India's collegiate education? The strength of India's academia, it must be said, has always rested not on the post-graduate departments of elite universities (though the latter have been the most visibly influential) but on the residential colleges at Madras, Delhi, Pune, Cuttack, or Madurai.

However, liberal education—howsoever flawed—is a far cry in the bulk of the collegiate sector in India. Poorly staffed and burdened with an excess of student population, such colleges have become dungeons rather than greenhouses of creativity or liberal temper. Unlike the university faculties that can pursue their scholarship undisturbed in the relative isolation of campus life, college teachers are increasingly subjected to the pressures of housing, transport and a civic system disconcertingly crass and mercenary.

Collegiate system is important because socialising the young through liberal education is important. It must be remembered that the battle against communalism, casteism and other forms of bigotry is to be fought not so much in the university campus as in the more impressionable minds at the college level. The best of India's colleges—e.g. "M.C.C.", "Loyola" in Madras, "Hindu", "Stephens" or "I.P." in Delhi or "Presidency" in Calcutta—have always played such a role. We need to learn from the reasons for their success just as we must constantly safeguard against their occasional elitism and snobbery.

The remedy to bad scientific or technological research in the universities is not the creation of parallel C.S.I.R. labs as we have belatedly discovered. Similarly, the answer to bad colleges is to revitalize the entire collegiate system. Privatization is not a magic wand that can cure India's ailing educational system, least of all its collegiate sector. Liberal Education has always rested on humanities and the liberal arts—pure disciplines that are not likely to attract private funding. While all unconditional funding could be welcomed, tuition fees that are ridiculously low in the colleges need to be proportionately enhanced along with a number of matching scholarships to those in the lower socio-economic strata. Ultimately, however, collegiate education in the country will remain the burden of the State. The community must realize the importance of colleges just as the professoriate must visibly demonstrate the role of liberal culture to the acts of nation building among the youth. Along with this realization must be built a national consensus against the mushrooming of colleges, recruitment of mediocre faculty and politicking within the campus.

Liberal education remains the strongest argument in favour of collegiate education. We need to redefine the goals of such education to match India's growing socio-cultural needs. We must restore to colleges the primacy that they

once had. It is in the majority of our colleges that India's most promising young men and women spend the most formative and impressionable years of their lives and we need to give them a better deal.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

IMMORTAL WINGS

FLY on, ye finches of the sky,
 To your gentle nest, your waiting brood,
 Sing, sweet delights, your hearts' contents,
 The evensong of solitude
 The day is done, the night is nigh,
 A song from the throbbing heart yet springs,
 And here I lie, a lonely bird—
 Alone, with a pair of broken wings.

Born to fly beneath the azure sky,
 Over mountain tops and valleys green;
 Born to glide through the fragrant air
 And sing the songs of rivers serene.
 Songs of mirth, of joy and of love
 For Nature and all ethereal things,
 But here I lie, a lonely bird—
 Alone, with a pair of broken wings.

O lift me up from this sordid earth,
 O lift me up from this cold dark clod
 Lift me up to sail the heavens,
 Enamoured of the abode of God.
 The Golden Dawn of morrow would bring
 A greater radiance over the world—
 And up I would soar in boundless space
 With my golden pair of wings unfurled.

ARYAN ROOTS OF HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

UNTIL quite recently, the famous Harappan civilization of the Indus valley has been an enigma. Many questions still remain about the identity of the people who created this great ancient civilization. Stretching over a million and a half square kilometers, from the borders of Iran to east UP and with some sites as far south as the Godavari valley, it was larger than ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia combined. What is perhaps most puzzling about it is the fact that all major sites spread over this immense belt went into sudden decline and disappeared more or less simultaneously. The renowned archaeologist, S. R. Rao, probably the foremost authority on Harappan archaeology, recently wrote

“In circa 1900 BC, most of the mature Harappan sites were wiped out forcing the inhabitants to seek new lands for settlement. They seem to have left in a great hurry and in small groups, seeking shelter initially on the eastern flank of the Ghaggar and gradually moving towards the Yamuna. The refugees from Mohen-jo-daro and southern sites in Sind fled to Saurashtra and later occupied the interior of the peninsula.”

From this it is apparent that the Harappans, though inhabiting a vast area, fell victim to a sudden calamity which forced them to seek shelter in other parts of ancient India. The usual explanation found in history books is that the inhabitants of the Harappan cities were driven out by the invading Aryans. However, it is now recognised by scholars that the Aryan invasion theory of India is a myth that owes more to European politics than anything in Indian records or archaeology. (The Politics of History, *The Hindustan Times*, Nov. 28, 1993.) The evidence against any such invasion is now far too strong to be ignored. To begin with, sites spread over such a vast stretch, measuring well over a thousand miles across, would not have been all abandoned simultaneously due to the incursion of nomadic bands at one extremity. Further, there is profuse archaeological evidence including the presence of sacrificial altars that go to show that the Harappans were part of the Vedic Aryan fold. As a result, it can safely be said that the Vedic age also ended with the Harappan civilisation.

From all this it is clear that the loss of these sites must have been associated with some natural catastrophe. A few scholars have pointed to evidence of frequent floods to account for the abandonment. But floods are invariably local in nature and do not cause the collapse of a civilisation over a vast belt. People adapt. Floods bring death but they also sustain life. Some of the most flood-prone areas of the world—like the Nile valley, the Bengal valley and the Yangtze valley in China—are also among the most densely populated. It is the loss of water or desiccation that causes massive disruptions on the scale witnessed at the end of the Harappan civilization. Thanks to the latest data from two major archaeological and satellite-based studies, we now know that this is exactly what happened. It was ecological change that ended the great civilizations not only in

India but over a vast belt that included Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Aegean.

On the basis of extensive explorations carried out in Northern Mesopotamia, a joint French-American team led by H. Weiss of Yale University has determined that most of the old world civilizations were severely affected by a prolonged drought that began about 2200 BC and persisted for about 300 years. The most drastically hit region seems to have been the Akkadian civilization neighbouring India. The drought may have been triggered by massive volcanic eruptions. According to the findings of this historic study concluded only recently.

“At approximately 2200 BC, occupations of Tell Leilan and Tell Brak (in Northern Mesopotamia) were suddenly abandoned—a marked increase in aridity and wind circulation, subsequent to a volcanic eruption, induced considerable degradation in land use conditions. This abrupt climatic change caused abandonment of Tell Leilan, regional desertion, and collapse of the Akkadian empire based in southern Mesopotamia. Synchronous collapse in adjacent regions suggests the impact of abrupt climatic change was excessive.”

An end uncannily like that of the Harappans. The authors of this momentous study note that the collapse of the Akkadians more or less coincided with similar climate change, land degradation and collapse noted in the Aegean, Palestine, Egypt, and India. The date of 1900 BC given by S. R. Rao for the collapse of the Harappans should be seen as approximate. More accurate methods are now available that show this date to have been sometime before 2000 BC, and they are well within the calibration error of radiocarbon and other scientific dating techniques. The basic point is—as a result of several independent explorations conducted over a vast belt from southern Europe to India, it is now clear that civilizations over a large part of the ancient world were brought to a calamitous end by an abrupt climate change on a global scale. To attribute a global calamity of such colossal magnitude to nomadic ‘Aryan’ tribes is simplistic in the extreme.

These discoveries should help put an end to all speculation regarding the Aryan invasion as the cause of break-up of the Harappan civilization. On the other hand we now know that the Vedic civilization, far from coming into existence after the Harappan, in fact ended with it; the mature Harappan civilization was the last glow of the Vedic age. This recognition has brought about a fundamental change in perspective in the history and chronology of not only ancient India, but also nearly all ancient civilizations. It helps answer several fundamental questions about the source of the Harappans—they should now be called the Vedic Harappans—and the age of the Rig Veda. Thanks to recent discoveries about the mathematics and geography of Vedic India, we are now in a position to answer these questions.

This shift in perspective, that the Harappan civilization came at the end of the Vedic age, also helps explain a major puzzle—the technological basis for this

great civilization. Even a superficial study of Harappan sites suggests that its builders were extremely capable town-planners and engineers. And this requires sophisticated knowledge of mathematics, especially geometry. Elaborate structures like the Great Bath of Mohen-jo-daro, the Lothal harbour or the citadel at Harappa are inconceivable without a detailed knowledge of geometry. The world had to wait 2000 years more, till the rise of the Roman civilization for sanitation and town-planning to reach a comparable level. The question is, where did the Harappans get the necessary mathematical and engineering knowledge? History books tell us that Indians borrowed their geometry from the Greeks. This is absurd. The Harappans must have had the necessary technical knowledge at least 2000 years before the Greeks. Without it the civilization would never have seen the light of day. It is as simple as that.

Once we recognise that Harappan archaeology belongs to the closing centuries of the Vedic age, the mystery vanishes. The late Vedic literature includes mathematical texts known as the Shulwa-sutras which contain detailed instructions for the building of sacrificial altars. After a monumental study spanning more than 20 years, the distinguished American mathematician and historian of science A. Seidenberg showed that the Shulwa-sutras are the source of both Egyptian and old Babylonian mathematics. The Egyptian texts based on the Shulwa-sutras go back to before 2000 BC. This provides independent confirmation that Indian mathematical knowledge existed long before that date, i. e., during the height of the Harappan era.

The Shulwa-sutras are part of the Vedic religious literature known as the Kalpasutras. They were created originally to serve as technical manuals for the design and construction of Vedic altars. As previously noted, Harappan sites contain many such altars, a fact that supplies a link between Vedic literature and Harappan archaeology. It serves also to show that the Vedic literature could not have been brought in by any invaders—they were needed for building the altars that are very much part of the Harappan archaeology! The Shulwa-sutras are the oldest mathematical texts known. A careful comparison of the Shulwa-sutras with the mathematics of Egypt and old Babylonia led Seidenberg to conclude:

“ the elements of ancient geometry found in Egypt and old Babylonia stem from a ritual system of the kind found in the Shulwa-sutras ”

What is interesting is that the origins of ancient mathematics are to be found in religion and ritual. So the great engineering feats of the Harappans can be seen as secular off-shoots of the religious mathematics found in Vedic literature. This can in a way be compared to the history of books and publishing. The first books printed were Bibles, like the Gutenberg Bible, but the technique of printing soon transcended its original niche and led to an explosion of knowledge that made possible the European renaissance. Similarly, the ‘ritual mathematics’ in the Shulwa-sutras led eventually to the purely secular achievements of the Harappans like city planning and the design of harbours.

So the Vedic civilization ended well before 2000 BC, with the ending of the Harappans following the Great Drought. The next question is, when did it actually begin? Here we cannot be certain although some experts on Vedic astronomy claim to be able to find statements in the Rig Veda that point to dates like 6500 BC and beyond. I feel it safer at this time to be conservative and stick to reliable archaeological evidence. Although some sites dating to almost 7000 BC have been found, I believe that a lot more supporting data must be found before such dates can be accepted. But thanks to new data made available by the French SPOT satellite and the Indo-French field study, we can definitely conclude that the Rig Veda describes the geography of North India as it was long before 3000 BC. The clinching evidence is provided by the fate of the Saraswati river

It is well-known that in the Rig Veda the greatest and the holiest of rivers was not the Ganga, but the now dry Saraswati. The Ganga is mentioned only once while the Saraswati is mentioned some 50 times. There is a whole hymn devoted to her. Extensive research by the late Dr. Wakankar has shown that the Saraswati changed her course several times, going completely dry around 1900 BC. This date may now have to be moved back by a few centuries in light of what we now know about the disappearance of the neighbouring Akkadians. In any event we know now what Dr. Wakankar did not, that the Saraswati described in the Rig Veda belongs to a date long before 3000 BC. The Rig Veda calls the Saraswati the greatest of rivers (Naditame) that flowed from "the mountain to the sea". The latest satellite data combined with field archaeological studies have shown that the Rig Vedic Saraswati had stopped being a perennial river long before 3000 BC.

As Paul-Henri Francfort of CNRS, Paris, recently observed, "... we now know, thanks to the field-work of the Indo-French expedition that when the protohistoric people settled in this area, no large river had flowed there for a long time."

The protohistoric people he refers to are the early Harappans of 3000 BC. But satellite photos show that a great prehistoric river that was over 7 kilometres wide did indeed flow through the area at one time. This was the Saraswati described in the Rig Veda. Numerous archaeological sites have also been located along the course of this great prehistoric river thereby confirming Vedic accounts. The great Saraswati that flowed "from the mountain to the sea" is now seen to belong to a date long anterior to 3000 BC. This means that the Rig Veda describes the geography of North India long before 3000 BC. This is further supported by the fact that the Drishadvati river, also described in the Rig Veda, had itself gone dry long before 3000 BC. All this shows that the Rig Veda must have been in existence no later than 3500 BC. There is other evidence from metallurgy and astronomy that lend further support for this date.

What does this all mean? In our book, *Vedic Aryans and the Origins of*

Civilisation, David Frawley and I have shown that the Rīg Veda belongs to an earlier layer of civilizations before the rise of the civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley (Harappa). This calls for a fundamental change in our idea of Mesopotamia as the cradle of civilization. In the same book, on the basis of ecology and ancient literature, it is also suggested that the Rīg Vedic Aryans were the beneficiary of an age of abundance in north India, brought about by the melting of the ice caps at the end of the last Ice Age. The last Ice Age ended in about 8000 BC. For the next several thousand years, many areas that are now arid—like Rajasthan, Sind, Baluchistan—were fertile and supported agriculture. This of course was due to the discharge of waters in the form of numerous streams from melting ice-caps. This is apparent from the French satellite study. In the course of time the ice-caps, accumulated during the long Ice Age, came to be depleted and aridity began to spread across the sub-continent. This of course culminated in the great drought of 2200 BC that wrought havoc with the civilizations of the ancient world.

In summary, all this new evidence, when examined in the light of science, gives a totally different picture of the ancient world. The rise and fall of the Vedic civilization of which the Harappan was a part can be seen to have resulted from the vagaries of nature, inseparably bound to the boom-and-bust ecological cycle that followed the last Ice Age. The Vedic age and more specifically the Rīg Veda were the beneficiaries of nature's bounties—a unique age in water abundance in the wake of the last Ice Age. Its end was also brought about by nature in the form of a killing drought. The Harappan civilization was its twilight. And this is the verdict of science—what nature giveth, nature also taketh away.

N. S. RAJARAM

(Courtesy, *The Hindustan Times*)

TWO POEMS*

TOWARDS TRANSCENDENCE

WE enlarge our arms to seize the cosmic space,
We extend our hearts into the vistas of God
Where stands revealed the bounty of the unknown
In sheer resplendence the skies are nude above,
The firmament at our feet is colossal, bare,
The air like a robe of light around is dumb.
Then a pure loneliness assails the soul,
An august need and hunger for the One.
An arrow climbs the summit's permanent rest
Where vastness meets the glory of the sun
And body meets the spirit's exquisite flame
1 9 1961

TRANCE

INVIOABLE is the flame of thy trance
That burns up all in its supernal shaft
And smites the vacant core of human sleep.
Sovereign is its awakening, kindling power and ray
Surprising the heart of drunk and fruitless earth
With its kinetic splendour and its wave
Breaking all bounds, the horizons of the past
A white dangerous noon is on its brow,
A tremendous loneliness of light and force
Engulfing all in its quintessential clasp
A passion-wideness is in its embrace;
A fiery hold of burning puissance like a sea
Merging all in its golden exquisite expanse
Emerged from thy all-seeing solitude,
It has come puissant with its unnamable desire
To break all bonds and strangling knots of fate
Till the globe is free from the huge and massive doom
To wake into thy diamond marvel unborn—
The marvel of thy eternity's holocaust
21 5 1959

ROMEN

* From the late poet's unpublished diaries

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

91. DON'T TOUCH US

THIRUNEELAKANTAR, a potter by birth and profession, had just finished shaping a few pots when someone tapped his back and sought audience. He looked over his shoulder and saw an aged devotee of Lord Shiva standing behind him. He quickly rose to his feet, turned and welcomed the devotee.

“Now hurry up and get me back the begging bowl I gave you a few days ago. I have to rush,” said the devotee, combing his long grey beard with his fingers.

“Wait a minute. I’ll get it,” said Thiruneelakantar and ran into his house.

The devotee smiled and mumbled. “He is very active even at this ripe old age.”

Several minutes passed. And there was no sign of Thiruneelakantar yet.

Losing his patience, the devotee yelled, “Hey! Have you forgotten all about me? I am still waiting here near your potter’s wheel. Be quick. Give me back my begging bowl.”

“Please wait. Your begging bowl is playing hide and seek with me. Hope to find it soon,” came the voice of Thiruneelakantar from his house.

Finding no begging bowl in his hand when he finally appeared, the devotee darted a suspicious look at him.

“Can’t find it. Don’t know where it has gone.”

“By all means you should find it. I can’t afford to lose it.”

“I’ve ransacked the whole house. But no use. It has disappeared. But I’ll make one for you, and you can have a new begging bowl by tomorrow morning.”

“I want only mine. Didn’t I tell you that it is worth more than a golden or silver bowl? Come on. Get me back my earthen bowl.”

Thiruneelakantar helplessly watched the devotee raving at him. He kept mum this time.

“I say you are hiding my bowl. I say you are a robber and you have robbed me of my precious bowl,” sneered the devotee.

“Please calm down, Sir! To steal your bowl was nowhere in my mind. Believe me. I am innocent. I think it’s all the play of the Lord.”

The devotee was about to burst into a peal of laughter. But controlling himself he said, “You want me to believe it.”

“I would do anything to prove my innocence.”

“Then take a holy dip in the sacred tank holding the hands of your son and swear that you are not hiding my begging bowl.”

“I would readily do that. But alas! I have no son.”

“Well, then take the hands of your wife in yours and swear.”

Thiruneelakantar blinked and said, “I can’t do that. I have taken a vow not to touch my wife.”

The devotee let out a delighted guffaw. "What? What did you say? You have vowed not to touch your wife, eh? You want me to believe it? You are a liar. You've lied for a second time. I am afraid I've been taken for a ride."

"Please believe me, Sir. In the name of Lord Shiva, I assure you that I am innocent."

"No! If you don't hold your wife's hand and swear, then I've no way but to take you to the council of Brahmins at Thillai **"

Thiruneelakantar lapsed into an unhappy silence.

The devotee held the old man by his grey hair and dragged him before the council and laid his complaint.

The council heard both the versions and then said, "O potter, do as the old devotee says."

Thiruneelakantar refrained from telling the council of Brahmins the reason for his not touching his wife. Hence he thought of an expedient to satisfy the devotee.

He brought his wife to the sacred tank. Taking in his hand one end of a stick lying there, he asked his wife to hold the other end.

"Look what he is doing," protested the devotee. "This old potter is a cunning fellow. Let him take his wife's hands in his."

Thiruneelakantar felt that he could hold the secret no longer. He became very voluble and told the council everything.

In his youth Thiruneelakantar loved his wife dearly and she too reciprocated. Life and time went on smoothly for them till one day the wife, a model of chastity, discovered to her dismay that her affectionate husband was having illicit relations with a woman of easy virtue.

The wife tortured Thiruneelakantar with her silence. He begged for her pardon. He coaxed her. He cajoled her. But to no avail.

One day when she was fast asleep he tried to hug her. Startled she woke up and pushing him aside said once and for all, "Don't touch us by the holy word Thiruneelakantam.***"

The words of his beloved wife poured like poison into his ears. Since she told him not to "touch us" in the plural, which meant womankind, he resolved not to touch any woman and not even to think of the other sex.

The couple drew an invisible curtain between themselves. They continued their life as before and neither their dear ones nor the near ones knew that they had given up all carnal desires. They decided to spend their leisure hours in the

* Chidambaram

** Thiruneelakantam meaning "blue-throated" is one among the many names of Lord Shiva. During the churning of the sea of milk for ambrosia, Siva gulped down the poison spat out by Vasuki, the serpent, before the poison could pollute the ambrosia. But Siva's wife, Parvati, held her husband by His throat and arrested the movement of the poison in His throat itself, on account of which the Lord's throat turned blue.

Interested readers may refer to *Shivapurānam* that tells in detail this enchanting legend.

service of the Lord. They grew old in ministering to His devotees

As the council sat spellbound by this story, Thiruneelakantar and his wife still holding the ends of the stick plunged into the tank. When they rose, they had resumed their youth in all its freshness and the Heavens showered flowers on them.

The council and the gathering wondered at the miracle. Seconds later, they were bewildered at the sudden disappearance of the old devotee who had brought in the case.

They knew for certain that the old devotee was Lord Shiva Himself and that He willed that the great merit of the potter couple should be revealed to the world.

92. AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Age began to tell on Nagan and his wife Thatthai, a hunter couple. The beautiful village of Udipi in Pothhappi Nadu, near the temple city of Thrukalatthi (near Thirupathi, now in Andhra State) was under their command. The nearby jungle infested with animals was theirs. Fruits, roots and meat of birds and animals they had enough. Worry they knew not, except that they had no child to call their own.

Their prayer to Lord Shiva in all these years to bless them with a son yielded fruit at last. To the surprise of their subjects, Thatthai bore her husband a son in her old age.

The child was hale and hearty. His parents named him Thinnan for he was bonny. The chubby-cheeked child became the attraction of the village. Bathed in affection and love it grew to be a youth.

Like his father, Thinnan was a good shot. His hunting skills were the talk of the village. He knew no fear and had strength enough to club an angered tigress to death with no weapon but his fist.

When Nagan's health began to deteriorate, he relinquished his duty as chief. The mantle fell on his son Thinnan. People rejoiced, for they were sure that their life would be more safe than ever.

Thinnan listened to the elders, for they spoke from experience. Traditional knowledge, mingled with his individual talent, made him a great hero. He had no enemies. The rival chieftains of the nearby villages too, scared of his valour and strength, decided to be friends with him.

On one of his hunting expeditions with his men, Thinnan ran after a wild boar. In the chase, many men lost their way. A few became tired and gave up the chase. A few lost track of the boar. But Thinnan, still hopeful, chased the boar all alone.

Tired and exhausted, the boar took shelter in the shade of a tree. From a distance, Thinnan saw the animal out of breath from the run. He was about to let

his arrow go at it, but on second thought he put the arrow back into his quiver. He then dashed towards the animal and with just one blow of his fist killed it. Such was his untiring energy.

Thinnan climbed a tall tree to know the whereabouts of his men who had accompanied him in the wild-boar chase. There was no sign of them, except for his two bosom friends, Nanan and Kadan, who were looking for Thinnan. Thinnan attracted their attention by imitating the cry of an animal and soon the three were together beside the dead boar.

“We are terribly hungry. This boar will be a real feast to us. We can roast its gammon and satisfy our hunger,” said Nanan and Kadan.

“But we don’t have water with us,” said Thinnan.

“But River Ponnugali is just a stone’s throw away.”

“Good! You two carry the carcass and guide me to the river,” commanded Thinnan.

As they neared the foothills of the Thirukalattai range Thinnan, who was all along feasting his eyes upon the beauty of the hills, began to feel a sense of peace pervading his heart.

“I feel like climbing the hills,” said Thinnan.

“It’s a beautiful hill. If we reach the top, we shall have a darshan of Kudumai Thevar* seated there,” said Nanan.

“Let’s start climbing now. We shall leave Kadan here to make a fire and roast the gammon. We shall be back in time to partake of the food.”

As Thinnan and Nanan climbed the hill, Thinnan began to feel that his heart was becoming lighter and lighter with every forward step and the shackles of earthly life frittering and breaking away. And to the awe of Nanan, Thinnan’s face began to glow with love.

On the hilltop, Thinnan saw a Shivalingam, ran towards it, embraced it warmly as if it were a friend and wept: “What made you choose this lonely spot, O Lord! Wild animals endanger your life. I can’t withstand your being alone here. Who will care for you here? Who will provide you with food and shelter you from rain and heat?”

Nanan was taken aback. He had never before seen Thinnan behaving in such a fashion with a stone image. He wondered what had gone wrong with his chief.

Attracted by the cleanliness of the surrounding, and by the flowers and leaves strewn over and around the image, Thinnan asked, “Oh! Who is it that has swept clean this place, bathed my Lord, decked Him with flowers and leaves, and worshipped Him with loving kindness?”

“A sage named Shivakochariyar,” replied Nanan. “I have come here on several occasions with your father during his hunting expeditions and have seen the sage perform pooja here.”

* Lord Shiva

“Have you seen him offer food to the Lord?”

“I doubt it ”

“What? You mean the sage had kept my Lord hungry all these years? Huh! I can’t bear to see Him go hungry He needs food I’ll fetch Him food. But who will look after Him in my absence?” Thus saying Thinnan reluctantly moved down the hill, followed by Nanan

At the foothills, anxious Kadan rejoiced at the arrival of his friends and said: “Why is this delay? The roasted boar is getting cold Come quick. Let’s eat ”

“Something unexpected happened,” Nanan began to brief his friend. “Thinnan became a different man altogether on the hilltop He has fallen in love with Kudumi Thevar He wants to remain there giving company to the Lord and offer Him food every day Had it not been for the food, he would not have stirred out,” informed Nanan.

Meanwhile Thinnan sat conveniently beside the roasted boar, tossed a piece of it into his mouth, tasted it and spat. He tossed another piece into his mouth, tasted it and turned it in the mouth to know how soft and tasty it was. He then pulled it out and kept it safely on a teak leaf. As he repeated the process of rejecting and choosing, Nanan and Kadan blinked at each other

“What are you doing, Thinnan?”

“Choosing the best to be offered to the hungry Lord awaiting my return,” said Thinnan

Nanan whispered into the ears of Kadan, “His craze for the Lord had made him a loony He has forgotten that he is our chief He loves to spend all the time with that stone image At this stage, we can do nothing but report the matter to our old chief.” The hungry friends headed towards their village, leaving their new chief to his fate

On the morning of the next day, Sage Shrivakochariyar was shocked to see roasted meat on a teak leaf kept in front of the Lord. The stench assailed his nostrils Cursing the mischief-maker, he brushed the teak leaf away with a stick, cleaned the surrounding, bathed the Lord, decked Him with flowers and leaves, and performed his pooja.

When he returned to the spot on the next day at the same hour, he saw roasted meat and bones lying in front of the Lord The flowers and leaves with which he had decked the Lord were gone and their place was occupied by different flowers

“This means that somebody else comes every day to offer food and flowers to the Lord Oh! It’s a sin to offer Him the flesh of birds and animals. Who is this madcap? If only I could find him...,” mumbled the sage He then cooled down and did the religious rites to perform the pooja

“O Lord!” prayed the sage. “This must be the deed of a forest-dweller. He has to be punished for his sacrilege Do not accept any more offerings from him,

for he doesn't deserve your blessing. If only I could find him .”

“Do not mistake him ” It was the Lord who interrupted the sage. “He is love incarnate. His ways of performing the pooja may be crude. but he does it with lots of love for me. He is as innocent as a child. His words, his deeds are joy to me. He comes to me everyday by sunset, gives me his offerings and stands sentinel throughout the night and gives me company in this wilderness. By sunrise he leaves me to myself and goes to hunt animals and birds for me. There is nothing comparable to his love . Wait here in hiding and watch him. You will know what a great man he is ”

It was a long wait and the sage had a lot of patience.

Meanwhile Nanan and Kadan returned to the hills with Thinnan's father Nagan. Nagan tried his best to take his son back to the village. But when he realized that Thinnan's mind was preoccupied with the service to the Lord, he helplessly retreated to his village. Nanan and Kadan cursed themselves for having brought Thinnan to the Thirukalattai hills and went back home with tear-filled eyes.

By sunset, Thinnan came carrying the choicest meat on a teak leaf. He wore a bunch of flowers in his shaggy hair. His puffed-up mouth was tightly shut.

The sage thought that he was in for some fun.

Thinnan went near the Lord, removed one of his leather slippers, took it in his hand and using it as a duster swept clean the place, brushed aside the dried leaves and flowers. When the cleaning was done, he bent low and blew a jet of the water he had stored in his mouth at the stone image and bathed the Lord. He then pulled out the bunch of flowers from his hair and kept it piously on the head of the Lord. Placing the roasted meat in front of the Lord, he said “It's venison, the tastiest meat available on earth. It's all for you. Eat.”

The sage was unable to believe his eyes. Every action of Thinnan would easily amount to sacrilege. He continued to watch his further deeds.

“I'll stand sentinel to your Lordship throughout the night, so that you can have an undisturbed sleep without the fear of wild animals and thieves,” said Thinnan.

When he was about to take up his stand as a guard, he was shocked to see blood oozing out of the Lord's left eye. He ran and brought herbs, crushed them in his palms and dropped the juice into the bleeding eye. He waited. But blood continued to stream down the Lord's face.

He moved to have a closer look at the Lord's eye. It seemed as if somebody had walked away with the eye, for there remained only a deep wound.

For a minute he stood rooted to the ground, unable to decide what to do next. His father's words “Blood for blood, an eye for an eye,” said in some other context flashed through his mind.

He pulled out an arrow from his quiver and with its pointed end gouged out his own left eye and fixed it to the Lord's eye-socket. The eye fixed very well and

the bleeding stopped

Thinnan jumped for joy, while the sage hiding behind the broad trunk of a tree stood dumbfounded.

“My father’s words have come true Old men are really wise men,” rejoiced Thinnan But his joy and relief were short-lived.

He saw blood trickling out of the Lord’s right eye Within seconds it began to bleed profusely.

“There is nothing to fear, my Lord! Your need is greater than mine,” thus saying, he prepared to gouge out his only eye.

“Oh! This boor is really great. No wonder the Lord shows mercy to all his irreverent deeds,” murmured the sage watching the entire show.

But before Thinnan could push the arrow beneath his eye, a hand thrust out of the stone image and arrested his hand. And the Lord said: “Stop, Kannappa! Stop, Kannappa! Blessed Kannappa, stop!”

Delighted beyond words at the sight of the Lord’s affectionate hand and with His pleasing words, Thinnan (known hereafter to the world as Kannappa, meaning the eye-giver) kissed the Lord’s hand.

The Lord blessed him with a new eye and gave him a place of honour in His hilly abode

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Women of Power and Grace: Nine Astonishing, Inspiring Luminaries of Our Time, by *Timothy Conway* The Wake Up Press, Santa Barbara, California, pp 351. \$ 22 95

“RESPONDING to our society’s dire need for truly heroic spiritual role-models, this landmark book reveals the deeply moving tales of NINE FEMALE SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS from modern-day Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, telling of their awesome virtues and miracles.” So informs the front-cover flap of this unique biographical compilation. The women profiled in this work, its author claims, “genuinely *live* a dazzling goodness and godliness. Through their shining deeds, joyous outlook, and penetrating words, they show us a simple way to complete God-Realization, beyond all misery and mediocrity.”

This book is indeed a rare treasure, an achievement similar to Dr. Johnson’s *Lives of Poets*, Vasari’s *Lives of Painters* and Butler’s *Lives of Saints*. Spiritual leadership is by and large a male domain and it speaks of the author’s sense of dedication (even devotion) that he has crossed not only religious but the still stronger gender boundaries—in bringing his subjects of study to the readers. Readers need not be put off by Conway’s polemical style in the introductory pages. While emphasizing spiritual values he attacks secular, material attitudes to life. These attacks sound clichéd but all suspicion of clichédness turns to admiration for the author as we take up reading his enormously researched and thoroughly assimilated presentation. Are we so steeped in material and secular pursuits that we have become immune to any such verbal attacks? Have we become immune to the power of language itself in expressing one’s anguish in the post-industrial, post-modern, acquired-immuno-deficiency-syndrome’s decade at the end of the century?

Perhaps, like many writers, Conway cannot cope in language with the triviality of our daily lives and the human ability to reach spiritual heights. Perhaps, chronicling the lives of the nine “Olympians of the Spirit” is his way of expressing human possibilities for spiritual grandeur. “So let us read,” he urges in his introduction, “not merely for getting *information*, but for undergoing complete *transformation*.”

Conway’s manner of presentation is hagiographical rather than biographical/journalistic, but it must be said in all fairness that his hagiography is no mere eulogy. Enormous research, study and time have gone into the making of this work which contains the lives (and teachings) of two Roman Catholic, two Russian Orthodox Christian, one Muslim Sufi and four Hindu women. A point that comes to mind is that even in a proverbially male-dominated society as in India, social suppression need not be a stumbling block when it comes to spiritual achievement by women. A notable omission from this selection is

Mother Theresa who is excluded at her own request, informs the author. The following figures fill the chapters of this volume and a chapterwise synopsis is provided in this review, elaborating on the non-Hindu subjects. Rather than take up a literary analysis, this reviewer feels that a critical condensation would induce readers to go to the original. Hindu subjects are very briefly reviewed for reasons of 1) space constraint and 2) familiarity and easy access of this information to Indian readers.

The first portrait is that of Mother Francis Cabrini, the first U.S. citizen to be canonized (in 1946) by the R. C. Church. A simple immigrant woman from Italy, the likes of her were accorded little respect in the male bastions of power. "She fared well because she laboured, not for herself, but for Love," Conway observes. By the time of her passing away in 1917 she had built 67 charitable institutions. Conway's first footnote on Cabrini cites dozens of works on her by several writers. These entries reveal the extent of Conway's research besides authenticating what may appear to the reader as pure idolatry by an ardent devotee. The life and achievement of this woman is unbelievably great. Her struggle in 19th-century America to be recognized as a missionary was an uphill task doubled—spiritual struggle as well as a social struggle against gender bias. With a team of sisters she began in the slums of New York by serving the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of poverty-stricken Italian immigrants engaged in "difficult, dangerous and degrading" forms of labour. In the end, in addition to Italy and the U.S. she established foundations in Nicaragua, Panama, Argentina, France, Spain, England and Brazil.

In the course of her career, she performed many miracles. It may be mentioned here that everyone of Conway's subjects has performed miracles. We will return later to the phenomenon of miracles but now suffice it to say that these acts are *not* sleight of hand, hypnotism or sorcery.

Conway has avoided the pitfalls of hagiography by pointing out some of the "flaws" as when he underlines a "certain lack of ecumenical spirit" in this great woman. He has done service to readers by thoughtfully providing a subsection with excerpts from Mother Cabrini's "Teachings". Such a subsection accompanies some other chapters as well, providing the reader with instant access to the central ideas of these great women.

Chapter Two is the tale of Therese Newmann, "an extraordinarily courageous individual, atoning for the plight of humanity in her own body through a miraculous process of 'redemptive suffering.'" She would take on much intense pain while all the time radiating joy and vitality. Conway's awe-inspiring words of introduction are somewhat marred as the author launches into a polemic to say that Therese's story "will have little appeal for superficial folks caught up in pursuing the hedonistic life. But for real people with real problems, yearning to enrich their lives with a deep meaningfulness, the following tale has power." This polemical blow against "superficial folks" could have been avoided and yet

the chapter would have lost nothing of its inspiring and interesting quality.

Born in West Germany a century ago, Therese was afflicted with diseases. At one stage she had severe bedsores that left her bones exposed. She became blind at 21, followed by convulsions, rheumatic pain, ulcers and cough. She would later report that this period was the happiest in her life! While psychiatrists would call her a case of hysteria, Conway reminds us that she was “one of those rare souls destined to play a leading role in an extraordinary Divine Drama.” She enjoyed the miracle of her eyesight restored, besides being completely healed of her paralysis, bedsores and other ailments. Conway reports that she was incarnate in human form to help clear up the *karmic* burden of those suffering on earth. Throughout her life she continually underwent *stigmata*—the wounds of Jesus—mysteriously reproduced in her body. She would vicariously suffer great pain for the physical and spiritual ailments of others.

Conway takes on Therese’s detractors, those “unfortunately influential” authors who attribute Therese’s joyful suffering to hysteria. In this context, like many 20th century thinkers, Conway accuses the blind “European Enlightenment” motto that if something “cannot be seen, perceived or measured, it does not exist.” An amazing phenomenon of her life was her 40-year-long perpetual fasting. A miraculous anomaly, her condition has been authenticated through careful observation by respectable medical and clerical personnel, all of which is documented by the author. Even more amazing to scientists, reports Conway, is her abstinence from liquids. From 1926, for the rest of her life she stopped drinking water or other fluids. Yet she would spend the whole day doing farmwork, housework and garden-work, and the nights doing chores at the local church. She would take a brief nap for about 30 minutes every other day, totalling 2 to 3 hours of sleep per week. Her only other time of rest was her occasional 45-minute “moments of quietude” when all normal signs of life, heartbeat, pulse and breathing left her. The author mentions that in the East this state is known as *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

She was clairvoyant and had occult powers of speaking unknown or even dead languages, like Aramaic. Language professors were called in to investigate her speech. Yet all these powers did not make her a recluse or biophobic. She greatly loved nature, and was deeply interested in the welfare of her human visitors. She had no words of spiritual instruction and spoke only through her works.

The next chapter is on Pelagia Serebrinı Rova, a Russian Orthodox Christian—a very different type of a spiritual heroine. Conway begins this chapter by surveying the tradition of the “Holy Fool” in all the major religions of the world. These enlightened “fools,” of whom Pelagia is one, are regarded by people at large as being utterly crazy. But they are known to those with a discerning eye to be spiritual giants. Conway presents with convincing logic the probable reasons for their odd behaviour. His words remind us of Shakespeare

who saw “the lunatic, the lover and the poet” to be akin. Ardent “lovers” of God like Pelagia would certainly seem eccentric to the world

The author quotes Pelagia’s mother who said that “from being an exceptionally intelligent child, she turned into some kind of fool.” But to Conway this shift was the gift of her true-life vocation: to be a “fool-for-God.” An instance of her “madness” is that on the day of her betrothal, Pelagia was using her cup of tea to water the artificial flowers on her dress. She received severe beatings regularly from her relatives and the novices of the convent. She never once complained but in fact “rejoiced at such a life.” This is not to be taken as masochism or insanity, says Conway, who attributes her behaviour to “Divine foolishness”.

The turning-point of her life came one night at a tavern near her house which she frequented. People thought that she was a drunk. But one night, hiding there, she burst upon the proprietor who was going off to his room intending to kill his wife, an act he had been planning for some time. Pelagia shouted at him and chided him and thus stopped the murder. In the wake of this event, people began to regard her as clairvoyant. “They stopped judging her and began to honour her.” But she was beyond the twin pulls of pleasure/pain, praise/blame, loss/gain. For 22 years she lived without a window to her cell in the severe Russian winter, sleeping on the floor near the doorway. She never bathed or pared her fingernails. She allowed cockroaches to crawl over her and used metal chains for a pillow. For all her eccentricities, her gifts of prophecy and healing earned the veneration of her numerous visitors.

From this colourful personality, the next chapter passes on to Mother Maria Skobtsova, also of Russian Orthodoxy. Level-headed and down-to-earth, she was not a monastic and devoted herself to the world in concrete service. She tirelessly worked for the physical, emotional and spiritual life of lay persons. After having saved hundreds of Jews from the Nazi horror, she courageously sacrificed herself to the Nazis for the sake of her imprisoned friends in the death camp.

Twice-divorced and the mother of a daughter by a man with whom she had a brief relationship, she settled down in Paris in 1923 as a missionary. Living in poverty, she was familiar with the underworld of Paris. She held late-night discussions with Paris intellectuals in her room, smoked in public—acts unbecoming of a nun.

Her major work began in 1940 when Paris fell to Hitler. She wrote openly against Hitler’s insanity. She formed a committee that organized despatch of food parcels to the families of some thousand Russian emigrés imprisoned by the Nazis. When the Nazis began their extermination of Jews, Mother Maria issued them certificates of membership in her convent, risking perjury, showing Jews to be Christians. Besides, she and other nuns deliberately wore the Star of David on their sleeves to perplex Nazi authorities. Her convent became a major link in

the complex system of refugees and escape routes throughout France

Along with 200 women prisoners, Maria was taken to the Ravensbruck concentration camp. She spent the last 2 years of her life there undaunted by Nazi terror, a source of strength to the inmates. There, as a result of a new policy, all women ill and unable to walk were to be killed. She voluntarily offered herself in martyrdom so as to help her companions to die. It is a cruel irony that the very next day after her death, at the intervention of the Red Cross, all French women in Ravensbruck were set free. "Had Maria not given her life for her companions, she might have lived for another decade or so," the author movingly reports. "Mother Maria," he comments, is a "far more heroic figure than Oskar Schindler, since she felt a specific vocation to help the destitute, the ill, and the forsaken, for whom no one would care." Her teachings, excerpted in a subsection of the chapter, reveal her poetic sensibility combined with a down-to-earth realism.

From Christian heroines, Chapter 5 passes on to the Sufi mystic, Hazrat Bābājān, the delightfully mysterious "holy fool". A beautiful princess from Afghanistan, she fled her royal family and an arranged marriage to undertake a perilous journey, eventually becoming a deeply God-realized Sufi mystic who lived for 140 years. Crossing the Khyber Pass, meandering through the Indus River valley, she trekked further to Rawalpindi. There she lived her life in a state of *bāga* (remaining in God) identical to the Hindu *sahaja samādhi* (the natural state of absorption).

When Bābājān later settled down in the state of Maharashtra "people were drawn to her like moths to a flame." She slept very little and ate almost nothing, subsisting on the tea offered by vendors and devotees. She gave no discourses but everyone came to receive her blessings and words of counsel. Miracles, clairvoyance and healings of every kind of affliction sprang around her. To readers skeptical about her extra-longevity, Conway cites in a footnote dozens of people from Hindu, Muslim, Sufi, Taoist, Western and even British cultures—proven cases of longevity of life.

Chapters 6 to 9 chronicle the life and teachings of four extraordinary Hindu women, who ought to be familiar figures to Indian readers. Conway begins with Śrī Ānandamayī Mā of Bangladesh, devoting a long subsection (35 pages) to her teachings. Readers familiar with Śrī Rāmana Maharshī will find close parallels to him in her teachings. Any researcher in philosophy/spirituality is certain to be rewarded by a comparative study of the two saints—one male and the other female.

From the upper reaches of Bengal, Conway takes us on a spiritual journey to interior South India in his study of Anasūyā Devī in Chapter 7. "One of the grandest spiritual presences ever to be embodied on this planet, her counsels constitute a profoundly healing and enlightening teaching of original innocence that will strongly appeal to people who feel burdened by guilt and shame." The

author reports that like Ānandamayī, Anasūyā was a realized soul from the moment of her birth. Conway's incisive understanding of Western and Asian theology is in evidence when he makes a distinction between pantheism and *panentheism*. "Panentheism," he explains, "is a supremely balanced theology, the perfect theological blending of the Divine One as both transcendental formlessness and immanent formfulness."

In the context of Anasūyā's teachings, Conway points out a grand paradox at the highest level:—People come to the spiritual master with a great sense of dilemma, that something is "wrong," that they are not enlightened, not pure enough, not fulfilled and so on. Yet the real Master knows that everyone's identity is pure spirit, absolute Being-Awareness-Bliss, not affected by the play of the personality, the body, the world-events. Thus, a true Master is not interested in "changing" or "improving" anyone—such was the case with Anasūyā. Though she had no formal education, Conway's excerpts reveal the depths of Amma's teachings which are however marked by their simplicity.

— When love becomes primary in your life, it isn't possible for there to be a single person who isn't loved. You will love death, you will love life—love alone will be important.

— Real goodness is seeing the goodness that's in all.

— The darkness that is the basis of light is real light.

Someone raised to Anasūyā a question that nags everyone

Q: Have we no responsibility for our good and bad deeds?

A: No.

Q. Then may we not kill someone and claim that we are not responsible?

A. If you could do that, you could do good deeds also.

Whoever is doing bad deeds is doing them in full awareness of the social conventions. In spite of being aware that good deeds should be done, you are not able to do them, are you?"

Anasūyā's reasoning here is as profound as it is simple, as irrefutable as it is true.

If Anasūyā's teachings advocate *jñāna mārga* (the path of wisdom), Chapter 8 is a sketch of Shyāma Mātāḥī whose ceaseless devotion to Lord Krishna is akin to Śrī Ramakrishna Paramahansa's *bhakti mārga* approach to Goddess Kali. Mātāḥī's counsel was: Chant the name of God. He will provide everything you want. Conway sees her to be a reincarnation of the "bridal mystic," the medieval saint Mirabai.

The last chapter is devoted to Ammā Mātā Amritānandamayī. Known as "Amma", "she may be the greatest phenomenon in the history of religion," the author observes. "If anyone has wondered what a female Christ might be like, he or she can encounter Amma and feel the exquisite compassion emanating from this unique saviouress." "Awesome and wonderful," he concludes, "yet completely natural and intimate."

Last but certainly not least the chief virtues of this book can be discovered in this chapter on “Amma”. One remarkable feature is the author’s finely accurate translations provided in brackets to explain Hindu spiritual terminology. Only someone with a sharp and intuitive understanding of the terms could provide such equivalents in jargon. So much so, that Indian readers familiar with these Sanskrit terms without understanding their full import would discover their connotative and denotative meanings through Conway’s translation

Examples: tyāga—renunciation
 guru—remover of ignorance
 siddhīs—paranormal powers
 jñānī—knower

More significantly, instead of sticking to one-to-one equivalents, Conway translates the same terms differently in different places so as to highlight indirect meanings and nuances in specific contexts. For instance, the term *vāsanās* is translated as:

1. egocentric tendencies of binding, like and dislike;
2. selfish tendencies;
3. reactive, selfish tendencies;
4. tendencies of attachment and aversion

It is unlikely that many of us could have provided such precise English equivalents for concepts of our own religion. Compare, for instance, Lakshmi Jalan’s inept translation (excerpted in the previous chapter of this book) Speaking of her ardent desire for Lord Krishna, Shyāma Mātāji sings (in Lakshmi’s translation):

“I become shameless in his (Krishna’s) love.”

whereas the line could have been rendered thus:

“I shed all my shyness (or maidenly coyness) in my overwhelming desire for him.”

The “Appendix” section deals with miracles and other related subjects, a feature common to all these holy women is their performance of miracles: clairvoyance, healing and bilocation (simultaneous presence in two different spots). The appendix is footnoted with a remarkably comprehensive list of literature on the subject of miracles. These footnotes alone would serve as an exhaustive bibliography on the subject.

Not merely satisfied with quoting, in his own simple yet irrefutable manner, the author argues for the authenticity of these miracles. In addition, he cites from peer-reviewed scientific literature that has validated paranormal abilities like healing prayer

Very useful to the Western readers, there is a Pronunciation Guide for Hindu names and terms used throughout the book. In every such usage, the author’s pronunciation marks are remarkably accurate and true to Indian pronunciation, a rare feat for a Westerner in understanding our sound patterns.

The author answers the reader's charges of imbalance and deficiency by informing us that he has profiled hundreds of such women from all over the world in an ongoing, much longer project *Women of Spirit* (in print). If the present volume is any indication, his forthcoming work should be an encyclopedia of female spiritual figures of the world. Conway silences sceptics of spirituality with G. K. Chesterton's words: "Mysticism is simply a transcendental form of commonsense."

P RAMASAMY

K. D. SETHNA'S COMMENT

While closing the book, one may wonder why the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has been omitted. It is really just as well, for here is a category apart. The impression created by the Mother is not that of a saint but someone who falls out of all such categories. One has the inexplicable impression of an avatar—history's first full-fledged feminine figure of the Supreme Divine, a perfect peer to the figure of Sri Aurobindo who appointed her the head of his Ashram of Integral Yoga.

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Krishna of the Gita, by Lt. Col. G. K. Bhattacharya. Published by Writers Workshop Calcutta, Pages 233. Price Rs. 300/-

A small wisp of time was creating itself in a solitary confinement cell in the Dacca Central Jail, on a February day in 1961. Lt. Col. G. L. Bhattacharya: 43 years old: Signals Corps: ambushed and captured by the E. Pakistan Army patrol: sentenced to solitary imprisonment for 8 years: awaited patiently, painstakingly the remission of his sentence. A sliver of the afternoon sun, suffused through the sheet covering the bars of two full-length windows of his cell, snuggled under the grey blanket spread out into a rough seat over the stone floor of the cell, and faded into an umbra around Sri Aurobindo's picture, illumined with a table lamp. The dull amber of the bulb fell on the Gita opened by the Colonel. Sri Aurobindo's warm eyes coaxed the spirit of the words to spread out from the larger consciousness to the Colonel's focused mind. From the other side of this screened window three pairs of eyes guarding over him, consciously averted themselves over the Colonel's *namaaz*. Within the cell it became pure 'Satyug'.

Weird shrieks from the mental ward behind the cell sinewed his grip on his own sanity for which he turned to the Gita for help with the desperation of a man of action, wrongly confined to solitude—*sādhu mām tvām prapannam*—"I seek

your vision; instruct me", These were the inchoate beginnings of *Krishna of the Gita*

Krishna of the Gita is an intensely personal account. This Krishna is not at all the four-armed plenipotentiary power, stuck within the framework of his own divinity. Bhattacharya's Krishna is part of the OG fraternity of the uniform, a brother officer. He is a wise and mature leader of men, dealing with the problem of reviving the spirit of his demoralized High Command. Not for Bhattacharya the complicated web of metaphysical and spiritual symbolism that certain commentators weave around the Gita. His is the penultimate repose in Krishna of flesh and blood, in *sākār bhāva*. Here is a profound conviction that the Mahabharata war was actually fought. Arjuna the mortal *jīva* actually had all those doubts and Krishna the redoubtable counsellor deftly resolved them, leading his *priya sakhā* as one would indulgently lead a toddler by the finger.

The purpose of any symbolism is to get a message across, albeit indirectly, sometimes gently, in the manner of *shākhā-chandra nyāya* or with extreme delicacy as in *arundhati nyāya*. These are systems of logic, highly sophisticated in their approach and well-chiselled by the finest minds on earth. But they need a certain amount of receptiveness and quietude of mind to be appreciated. Bhattacharya rightly judges for himself, that, for a consciousness sunk in confusion, a direct approach would be more appropriate to get the message home. In any system of logic there always exists the possibility of going straight to the message, without following the route of symbolism. The latter has a subtle appeal, a tantalizing allure, yet it does entail a risk of over-cerebration and sophistry. With deftness, Bhattacharya skirts all these in one neat operation and goes straight for the message. One can almost feel him resonating in extended sympathy with Krishna, facing an irresolute Arjuna. Krishna's first response itself, to Arjuna, sets a brisk note, if not a brusque one. There is not a shred of sympathy for the nervous Arjuna, no mollicoddling. In response to his elaborate analysis, all Arjuna draws out from Krishna is a barely tolerant, somewhat good-humoured jibe at his pretentious arguments. And in the very next shloka Krishna talks of Moksha—nothing less! Bhattacharya likes the pace indeed. He knows this sort of stuff—for him Krishna is certainly not so much the one with the *kamalapatrākshanetra*, the blue sky itself draping his luminous form. His Krishna is a rough and tough guy talking to his men (only one man in this case). In fact, he is just short of being a Krishna with multiple stars on his epaulet talking to his man beside a trench over a tumbler of steaming tea! A quick march till the goal is in sight—take aim with full concentration and then straight on to target. The directness is reminiscent of what Islam refers to as *Sirat-ul-Mustaqueen* (the Straight Path). Bhattacharya's fondness for Mohammed is logical and it certainly is no accident that his *Krishna of the Gita* has a full appendix on the Prophet of Islam. Here indeed one is witness to the rising of the Human Spirit over constricting and confining religious boundaries to truly catholic heights.

With a sense of mounting excitement Lt Col Bhattacharya discerns Krishna's technique of casting aside all that is not quite effective. Step by step he contours the straight and simple track of Samarpan Yoga, side-stepping the rugged terrain of Sannyas Yoga and the tough and arduous path of Bhakti Yoga. "Ultimately, Krishna discards, . . . in XVIII.57-66, all yogas. Arjuna is left with faith in Krishna, turning within for strength, to act as expected in one's vocation." It is this directness of approach which appeals to the soldier in Bhattacharya. In fact in his essay he catches this thread as early as in Chapter III of the Gita. "In III-8 Krishna recommends work in one's vocation. Here is anticipated Chapter XVIII 45-46." (The book abounds in such cross references.)

Bhattacharya's journey through the Gita in the company of Krishna to discern the path of Samarpan is an exercise with contrasts built into its structure. It begins with delicate precision and ends in a wanton faquir! One is reminded of another faquir, the Sufi poet Kamil Aurangabadi—

*Tark-e-duniyan, tark-ukba, tark-e-maula, tark-e-tark,
Is tarah be-arzu jine ki aadat kar ke dekh*

(Relinquish this world, the other world, Divine Bounty, relinquish relinquishment itself, and thus try and live without any compulsion.)

One suspects that Bhattacharya, after reading Chapter XI, backtracked to read the Gita *ab initio*. For, it seems that it is only at this stage that he enters into the phase of intensive study and internalization of the scripture in the spirit of an individual, a personalized *yajna*. This special affinity with Chapter VI is the impulse behind the Appendix F in his book—"I was thus very sorrowful. Hence the Gita's Chapter VI, verse 17 excited me. Could there be a method to get rid of sorrow? I read repeatedly verses 11-17 and verse 23." Here is the essence then, both the possibility and the mechanism for eliminating sorrow. Bhattacharya and his Krishna chart the entire course over again. This is a 'progressive revelation' of Krishna himself, notes the author with a sensitive perspicacity. As the Colonel's gross form sat in disciplined formation on his rough blanket seat, Krishna takes his *sukshma* or subtle self through a wondrous adventure, past the initial quandary of Arjuna, past the philosophical distinctions between Prakriti and Purusha, or the nuances of Adhidaiva, Adhibhuta and Adhiyajna, past even the Grand Vision—the Vishwarupa—wherein Krishna appears before his disciple in all his might and munificence, to the triad of the 'three counsels' described as the secrets, *guhya*, in Chapter XVIII. "What exactly he teaches is a mystery and in a way the Gita is, like a thriller, with clues scattered in it though they do not seem to be so."

The first 'secret counsel' (XVIII.45-46) is to offer one's work—done according to one's Swabhava—to him. The second counsel (XVIII: 57-63)

emphasizes that trust and adoration for Him accompany such offering of work. And finally the greatest secret of them all—Sarvaguhyatamam—(XVIII:64). A complete Surrender to Him alone—*sarva dharmān parityajya māmekam śaranam vraja* And then an interpretation characteristically his own “The Greatest secret of ALL is all work. . . This is NOT *niskāma karma*, a phrase not found in the text of the Gita It is ‘all’ karma It is against rejection of life ” Bhattacharya observes almost sardonically. “Can we say with any certainty what guidance Krishna gives to us? To Arjuna it had seemed clear after XVIII 65-66, the shloka quoted above Not even a sight of the Ishwara or Kāla forms had goaded him to fight. The decisive element is in the words ‘forsake all religious rules of conduct enjoined by any religion’. At one stroke is abolished the problem of sin, liberation, duty, right, wrong, worries of the future, for own and others ”

The drama of the Gita that flashed in a few intuitive moments in Sanjay’s mind comes a full circle as Arjuna says simply: “The delusion is gone; I am freed of all doubts; I am restored, I will act as you direct ”

Bhattacharya’s main text tapers off with an equally noble simplicity. “The conversation ends. The battle is to commence. We go back to the beginning.... The blind King does not stop the War ”

But there is more to the book—the appendices, a whole host of them spread over 120 odd pages. They form a fascinating collage which sits on an engagingly candid epilogue: “A pleasant task of explaining to myself the passages of the Gita” is what the epilogue calls the book. The text does indeed flow like an internal dialogue, a personal missive. Every once in a while Bhattacharya asks himself a question and then sorties forward to search for an answer. To wit, his search for the ultimate message, leading to the ‘three secret counsels’. The reader is part of the subtle mental meandering of the author, as the search courses its path at various levels of the consciousness from the subliminal to the intuitive till, at one point, both the author and the reader come to the solution in a flash! A superb piece of delicate artistry! The appendix gives it a final touch.

The appendices resonate much in the manner of an accordion. Tucked within their folds are a miscellany of notes—the gentle notes of the Divine Presence in the collection of Christian prayers, the dulcet ones of the poem, the astronauts left on microfilm on the surface of the moon, all hold one in the exploration of the concept of the Yogashreshtha in the personality of Mohammed the Prophet, or the suggested regrouping of the shlokas in the Gita into a new formation of chapters. Tucked within its folds is a brief glimpse of Lt. Col. Bhattacharya’s quiet over-modesty. In his copy of the Gita, in Chapter XVI where demoniacal qualities are described, he had scribbled in the margin ‘my prakṛti’!

Finally a word about the get-up It is refreshingly original, right from the cover in handloom sari cloth to the calligraphed titles by P. Lal

The book is touchingly dedicated to his son Pradeep. “There is very little

vanity, but feeling of much certainty in what I have typed I shall not touch or shall I again?"

SHASHI MISRA

Across the Seven Seas: Essays in Comparative Literature, by P. Marudanayagam. Published by B R Publishing Corporation, Delhi 110 052 (New World Literature Series: 80). Price Rs. 190/-

Dr. Marudanayagam is not a stranger to the readers of *Mother India*. An erudite scholar in English as well as Tamil, he has taken to Comparative Literature as a fish to water. In the volume under review he has collected essays published in different magazines and journals including *Mother India*.

His love of the Tamil language and literature is writ large on every page. But he loves English literature equally well. His casting of net "across the seven seas" is an indication of his wide culture and it makes any narrow parochialism impossible.

As a comparatist, Marudanayagam reveals his perfect mastery over all the types of comparative studies—*influence studies*, *analogical studies*, *influence of philosophical or other idea on literary work*, etc. In his well-written introduction he elaborates on the different types as well as the relationship between English and Tamil literatures.

One of the best essays in the volume is *Sri Aurobindo and Tamil*. Marudanayagam not only traces the "Bengali's" influence on the Tamil poets—the great Subrahmanya Bharati and Suddhananda Bharati "who could not reach great heights"—but comments with discernment on Sri Aurobindo's renderings of *Kural* as well as the lyrics of Nammalvar and Andal. He also shows Sri Aurobindo's influence on Tamil criticism.

His first essay in the volume *Inscape and Ullurai* is remarkable for the writer's originality in trying to seek out parallels to Hopkins's idea of *inscape* in Tamil Literature. Careful scholar that Marudanayagam is, he brings out the differences between the English Poet and the *Sangam* Poet.

The essay *Ananda Ranga Pillay and Pepys as Diarists* first appeared in *Mother India* and treads on safer ground; it is very fine. He challenges the claim of the Western scholars: "There are many diarists but only one Pepys"—and proves there is yet another from South India.

Another bold and no less brilliant essay is on A. K. Ramanujan as translator. Hats off to Marudanayagam for his courage in saying: "Ramanujan fails to impart the natural vigour of the original and seems to be satisfied with platitudes."

His other essays reveal the same taste, understanding and discrimination. When Marudanayagam writes on Bharatidasan, for example, he differs from the other scholars. "When he writes about the Aryan-Dravidian differences, attacks God and religion. expresses his love for Tamil, when he advocates widow remarriage and castigates child marriages, we do come across many passages in which the palpable designs upon the reader are evident."

But it is a pity that Marudanayagam accepts the so-called concept of Aryans and Dravidians which Sri Aurobindo and, in recent work, Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) have proved to be wrong. And he is not unfamiliar with their works.

Speaking of Bharatidasan's drama, *Iranian alladu Inayatra Veeran* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Marudanayagam says. "Though Bharatidasan's drama may not win such recognition it is as successful as Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* in its use of an ancient myth investing with contemporary significance inasmuch as it became the progenitor of a host of novels, poems and dramas in Tamil, dramatizing the confrontation between the Aryans and the Dravidians through similar characters and situations."

That of course in no way lessens the value of Marudanayagam's excellent work.

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

KISHOR GANDHI: A COMMEMORATIVE VOLUME

Editors: Amal Kiran & Nirodbaran

Assisted by Sachidananda Mohanty

KISHOR GANDHI, a senior Sadhak of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, passed away on 13 August 1996. During his life of more than four decades at the Ashram, Kishor Gandhi distinguished himself as one of the most dedicated and outstanding students of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Editor, teacher and critic, he showed a remarkable thoroughness in the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings. He is best remembered for the editing of the annual journal *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, the compilation of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* in four volumes, *Lights on Life Problems* as well as original works like *The Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* and *The Fallacy of Karl Marx*. Kishor Gandhi is also remembered for founding and continuing *The New Age Association* from 12 July 1964 onwards.

As a homage to an outstanding life of dedication and scholarship, it is proposed to bring out a commemorative volume of essays to be released at an appropriate time in the near future. Divided into four sections, the volume will comprise extracts from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, extracts from the best of Kishor Gandhi, reminiscences by friends, and finally literary and critical pieces by admirers of Kishor Gandhi.

We invite contributions (maximum 2,500 words, double spacing on A-4 size paper) in the area of critical essays and shorter reminiscence pieces. While the focus could be ideally on the socio-cultural aspects of Sri Aurobindo's writings that Kishor Gandhi excelled in, essays related to other aspects such as Poetry, Literature and Philosophy are also welcome.

Those interested are requested to get in touch *immediately* with:

The Editors

Kishor Gandhi Commemorative Volume

c/o *Mother India*

Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Pondicherry 605 002

It will be appreciated if the articles arrive by mid-January 1997

— Editor, *Mother India*

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Eighty-first Seminar

21 April 1996

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S TEACHINGS

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR SYSTEM OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Speech by Yogendrakumar Dwivedi

My topic for this seminar is: Why is our system of physical education unique? Let us see why the Mother gave so much importance to it. The Mother says in a competition message:

“It might be better to remind you that we are here for a special work, a work which is done nowhere else.

“We want to come in contact with the supreme consciousness, the universal consciousness, we want to bring it down in ourselves and to manifest it. But for that we must have a very solid base; our base is our physical being, our body. Therefore we have to build up a body solid, healthy, enduring, skilful, agile and strong, ready for everything. There is no better way to prepare the body than physical exercise: sports, athletics, gymnastics, and all games are the best means to develop and strengthen the body”¹

The great thing about our system of physical education, here in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is that our system does not aim at the perfection of a specific part of the body, but at an integral perfection of the whole body. For example, it does not aim at a muscular body alone, but for a strong, supple and healthy body. To fulfil this purpose, our system includes a variety of physical activities such as gymnastics, athletics, swimming and games. These physical activities, besides building a robust health, develop in us a discipline and a sound and strong character, which is so indispensable in any collective life and endeavour

Gymnastics brings to the body a certain degree of co-ordination, agility and elasticity, along with some positive qualities such as concentration, a strong will, perseverance and patience. To illustrate this I shall cite an example. When I was in the red group I was lazy and I was not very interested in gymnastics. The gymnastics competition was approaching and I had not practised seriously till then. I had in my gymnastics figure a round off to back somersault. Seeing my

friends practise seriously for the back somersault, I too decided to give it a try. I was determined to do it, so I concentrated hard on my turn. I tried to visualize the figure while seeing my friends do it. Within a week I was able to do round off to back somersault all alone. This figure not only required a strong will, concentration, perseverance and patience but also a great degree of self-confidence.

Swimming and athletics bring to the body vigour, strength, stamina and some positive qualities like will power, perseverance and patience. To make this point clear, I will give an example. In January this year, we had a mini road-race. We had to run a distance of about twelve kilometres. The maximum distance that I had run previously was seven kilometres. Feeling that I would have to struggle hard to finish this race, I set out slowly with my captain, Habul. There were about sixty competitors and my position was thirtieth after the first four kilometres. Habul then suggested that I should go ahead. I sped up and at the half-way mark my position was fifteenth. About four kilometres from the end, my position improved to fourth. While Sundarlal was out of sight, Debashish and Amal were about a hundred metres ahead. I was tiring out by then, but I decided not to give in. I consciously called for the Divine Mother's help and grace to carry me through the race. At once I felt quite concretely a power taking hold of me and carrying me ahead. I went on to finish second in the race. This race brought my stamina, will power and perseverance to the forefront and gave me greater self-confidence and faith in the Divine Mother's Grace.

Games have given me an opportunity to purify my vital being and ego. Through games I have achieved a considerable control over my temper. I have realised that if I lose my temper during any game, I not only play badly but the team plays badly. Now I no longer discourage the weaker players but try to give them a word or two of good encouragement. Knowing that all individuals are not made of the same substance, there is no point in losing one's temper and discouraging the weaker players. I no longer play a game for my personal benefit but for the team. In this way my ego gets subdued and quiet.

Another important aspect of our physical education here is that the system organises for us competitions. You may ask what is so great about the competitions? But the Mother says that competitions are required because all human beings, especially in their young age, still require some excitement in order to make an effort. Competitions, therefore, are an occasion to put in a greater effort.

Our aim in the competitions is not to come first and win praises from our coaches, captains and friends, but to do everything to the best of our ability. Here again I shall quote the Mother. She says

“Replace the ambition to be first by the will to do the best possible
Replace the desire for success by the yearning for progress
Replace the eagerness for fame by the aspiration for perfection

Physical Education is meant to bring into the body, consciousness and control, discipline and mastery, all things necessary for a higher and better life.

Keep all that in mind, practise sincerely and you will become a good athlete...”²

Here we are all very fortunate and privileged to have the Mother’s presence during the competition season. It is due to Her presence that there are very few accidents during the competitions. If we do our items to the best of our ability and offer them to the Divine Mother, we are bound to make a lot of progress.

I end my talk quoting a message of the Divine Mother which she gave for the athletics competitions of 1959: “Behind the appearances that the physical eyes can see, there is a reality much more concrete and lasting. It is in this reality that I am with you today and will be during all the athletic season. The force, the power, the light and the consciousness will be in your midst constantly to give to each one, according to his receptivity, the success in his endeavour and the progress which is the crowning result of all sincere effort.”³

References

- 1 *On Education, Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 12), p 278
- 2 *Ibid* , pp 275-76
- 3 *Ibid* , p 275