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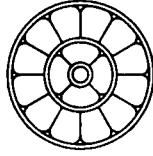
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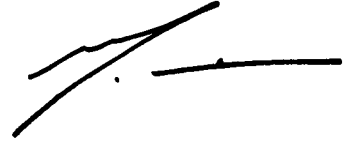
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLIX

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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# THE MOTHER'S TALKS TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN

## NOLINI KANTA GUPTA'S REPORT

### This Mystery of Existence

HAVE you ever asked yourself why there is this universe at all, at least this earth with which we are so much concerned and which seems to us so real, so authentic? It would perhaps be very wise on your part if you did not! I have often spoken to you of Theon. He was truly a sage in his own way. People used to come to him and ask questions. Many asked why there was an universe. He would answer, "But what is that to you?" Some would ask, "Why is the universe like this?" To that he would say, "It is what it is, how does it matter?" Others again would remark, "I do not consider the world a satisfactory affair." There, we begin to come more to the point. To those who find the world unsatisfactory I would say, "Get to work, try to change it. Find a way that it may be otherwise, that it may be made better. Things are what they are, it is no use speculating over that and getting worried. Seek for the means of remedy, so that things may be made what they should be. Why are things what they are? Not that one cannot know the reason, although one may not always be sure of it. The best thing to do is to take whatever is as it is and try to change it towards that which it should be. Now the wonder of it is that if you are sincere, if you want to know sincerely and work sincerely, you will come to know why things are what they are—the cause, the origin and the process, for they are all one. There is one truth at the base of things; if that were not there, nothing would be. If you seize that truth, you seize at the same time the origin of the creation and the means of changing it as well. In other words, if you are in contact with the Divine—for the Divine is that base—you are in possession of the key to all things, you know the why, the how and the process for change. One thing to do then is to start doing the thing. But you might say, it is too much, too difficult, too big for you—to work in the world or for the world. Well then, start with yourself. You are a little mass of substance, a symbol or representative of the universe. Let your work then be to form and fashion that particle. Concentrate upon it, go within—even within that little person of yourself you will find the long-looked-for key."

### Record of World-History

All that has happened upon earth, everything from the beginning of creation till now, everything without exception has been recorded somewhere in some particular world or region of consciousness. All that man has thought, his researches and discoveries, his findings and conclusions are kept intact, carefully stored. If you want to know anything of the past history of the earth, a happening

at a particular time and place, you have simply to transplant yourself into that world and look into the records.

It is a very curious place, something like a vast library. It consists of an infinite number of cells, as it were, each containing all information on a particular subject. They seem to be squares in shape and they remain closed normally. If you have to consult a particular square, you press a button and it opens and out of it comes a roll of written matter. You unroll it and find out what you want. There are millions and millions and millions of these cells and rolls, around, above, everywhere. Fortunately in the mental world you can move anywhere you like, you do not require lifts and ladders to get up.

The point, however, is how to go there at all. Well, the first thing is that you must completely silence your mind. Mental cogitations, agitations you must leave behind, no thoughts must enter your consciousness; it must be tranquil and still, like a transparent sheet of water or smooth and polished like a mirror. The description I have given of a library is only an image, the real thing is something different. However, you have in this way some idea to go upon. In the silent mind you form a point of consciousness and send it out as an emissary to gather the required information. This point of consciousness must be absolutely detached and free to go as it likes; for if it were in any way kept tied to the normal movements of your own mind, then you would not go further than what is in your head. You must be able to make your brain a blank, you must have no preconceived notion, no idea that the solution of your problem might lie in this way or that. As I say, your mind has to be a thoroughly blank page, a clean slate, with nothing written on it, no mark even. There should be instead a sincere aspiration to know the truth, without postulating beforehand what kind of truth it might be; otherwise you will meet your own formation in the brain.

You can certainly test and correct the information you get from your inner voyage by outside information, what others have found or what is recorded in books. The inner knowledge need not and should not replace the outer knowledge, but supplement it, both should support and complete each other. But there is a mixture about which you must be very careful. Your silent mind, your inner consciousness receives the necessary knowledge, but as you want to express or translate it in normal terms, that is to say, as your brain gets active again, it may and often does supply its own materials and formations and the original knowledge gets disturbed and distorted. Sometimes what you may do is to dictate most passively the things you see or perceive and let another take down in writing as you proceed. You must say exactly what you see and the other write down exactly what he hears.

It is the image of reading a book that I have given you. But it is, as I said, only an image. What it is really is a kind of perception. And the perception may be in the form of an image, it may be in the form of a narrative. At other times it may be a simple answer to a particular question. There are many kinds and

varieties of record, differing according to the types or levels of consciousness that you go to.

Naturally the process is not easy and available to everybody, like an ordinary book. It requires a special aptitude and a special discipline.

### Freedom and Destiny

From a certain point of view whatever happens here in the material world is a reproduction or realisation of whatever has already happened or existed on another level of reality. In this world then there would be no free choice, everything being predetermined. From another standpoint, however, one can say with equal truth that the world here is being recreated every moment; it is not a mere replay or flash-back of a past event, a pre-existent phenomenon, but something ever new and fresh. Take, for example, a material body, a particular chemical composition having some well-defined properties; it behaves according to that nature and produces inevitably results deducible from it. Now, if a new element is introduced into the thing at any moment, the whole quality of the composition and its behaviour will change. Something like that happens in the universe.

The universe is a huge mass of innumerable elements forming a certain composition and in accordance with this composition all are organised within itself. But such an arrangement is not the end or the culmination; it is not static, but moving forward; it is in the process of development. For at any moment, through the action of a different kind, one or more new elements can be introduced into the total mass that forms the universe at a given time and that will necessarily change the whole inner composition. The universe, the material universe, I mean, is a concretisation of a certain aspect or emanation of the Supreme. This concretisation is progressive, not necessarily in a constant and regular way, but in answer to a law, with a subtle kind or degree of liberty. Thus, in the composition of the universe at a given moment new elements penetrate and alter the organisation. The organisation that was perfect in itself and moved and unrolled itself according to a definite plan and pattern, suddenly finds itself changed and the inner relations too are modified and attain a different poise. That may give the impression of something incoherent or imprecise or miraculous, according to the manner in which one looks at the problem. So there are these two simultaneous facts or factors: there is a determinism which is absolute in its way with a complementary movement of liberty, the unforeseen addition to a fixed existing sum.

This addition comes from the aspiration of the supreme consciousness. There is nothing to wonder at the phenomenon. There is an aspiration acting in the world, moving with a certain end in view; the purpose is to bring back the fallen and obscured consciousness to its original and normal state of the divine

consciousness. Each time that this aspiring consciousness meets an obstacle in its working, a new resistance to conquer or to transform, it calls for a new Force. And this new Force is a kind of new creation. In the human being too there are different domains in obedience to a law of correspondence; in each there is for him a different destiny and each is absolute in its line. But there is also in him, through his aspiration, a capacity to enter into relation with a domain higher than where he happens to be and bring down an action of this higher domain into the lower determinism. So we can say that there is a horizontal determinism in each domain, absolute in its normal working; but there is also a vertical intervention from other higher domains or even from the highest and then the lower determinism is changed completely. Thus every human being is at once a sum of various determinisms, absolute in their way, and there is also an absolute liberty that can intervene by bringing down other forces into the apparently rigid frame of destiny of the lower worlds and alter it. That is how things in the world give the impression of the unforeseen, the incalculable, the miraculous.

You may call this intervention Grace; for without the Divine Grace this could not happen. There is a consciousness and a vision of things where all are brought back to this single source; Grace only exists, nothing else is there. That does everything. But as you have not risen to that summit, not had that extreme realisation, you have to take into account your own person, your personal aspiration, the thing that calls for the Grace and to which the Grace responds. The two are needed here. Both are ultimately ways of viewing the same truth. The mind, however, finds it difficult to conceive both in a simultaneous movement. The rigid distinctions it makes takes away much from the supple and subtle and integral truth of a total experience.

(From the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 3, pp. 309-15)



## A MANTRA AND ITS JAPA

Divine Mother,

Pranāms at Thy Lotus Feet.

On 5<sup>th</sup> December I do not know how, but I began to breathe this Mantra, "Sri Anubindo Sharanam Namah", quite spontaneously. Ever since, the Mantra has continued in my Consciousness<sup>ness</sup> and has given me Peace and Amrita.

May I do Its Japa? I seek Thy direction how to do it, if thou permitest.

Thy Child,

Lijun

17-12-1963

Let it be spontaneous as it came,  
it is the best  
With my blessings

## SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MOTHER'S HELP IN DIFFICULTIES

You must throw all that away. Such depressions can make you shut to what Mother is giving you. There is absolutely no good reason for such an attitude. The existence of difficulties is a known thing in the Yoga. That is no reason for questioning the final victory or the effectuality of the Divine Grace.

4.2 1933

### Psychic Development and the Mother's Grace

*Q: What is the Law of the working of the Mother's Grace?*

A: The more one develops the psychic, the more is it possible for the Grace to act.

13.8.1933

\*

What has to be gained is the constant prominence of that part which is always aware of the Mother—it is of course the psychic—for that though it can be covered over for the time being cannot be misled by the contrary suggestions. Once it is awake, it always re-emerges from obscurity—that is the guarantee of the final arrival at the goal, but if it can be maintained in front or even consciously felt behind in all conditions, then the stages of the way also become comparatively safe and can be passed with greater ease and security.

6.2.1937

\*

It is when there is no attachment to outward things for their own sake and all is only for the Mother and the life through the inner psychic being is centred in her that the best condition is created for the spiritual realisation.

11.11 1935

### The Mother's Constant Help

The Mother's help is always there but you are not conscious of it except when the psychic is active and the consciousness not clouded. The coming of suggestions is not a proof that the help is not there. Suggestions come to all, even to the greatest sadhaks or to the Avatars—as they came to Buddha or Christ. Obstacles are there—they are part of Nature and they have to be overcome. What has to be attained is not to accept the suggestions, not to admit them as the

truth or as one's own thoughts, to see them for what they are and keep oneself separate. Obstacles have to be looked at as something wrong in the machinery of human nature which has to be changed—they should not be regarded as sins or wrong doings which make one despair of oneself and of the sadhana.

\*

*Q: Today while engaged in work I felt a peaceful energy and something like ice touching my head. Then the knowledge came to me with a strong feeling and vision that though the Mother is not physically near us, she is always present near and around us and is constantly removing all kinds of difficulties with the touch of her affectionate hand. Was this a vision or realisation? Through what consciousness did it come to me?*

**A:** It is a realisation attended with vision and feeling. It is psychic and the mental together that produced it.

11 6.1933

### **Change of the Vital Nature with the Mother's Help**

The Mother's help is always there for those who are willing to receive it. But you must be conscious of your vital nature, and the vital nature must consent to change. It is no use merely observing that it is unwilling and that, when thwarted, it creates depression in you. Always the vital nature is not at first willing and always when it is thwarted or asked to change, it creates this depression by its revolt or refusal of consent. You have to insist till it recognises the truth and is willing to be transformed and to accept the Mother's help and grace. If the mind is sincere and the psychic aspiration complete and true, the vital can always be made to change.

15 7 1932

\*

It is this idea that you are helpless because the vital consents to the wrong movement that comes in the way. You have to put your inner will and the Mother's light on the vital so that it shall change, not leave it to do what it likes. If one is to be "helpless" and moved by any part of the instrumental being, how is change possible? The Mother's force or the psychic can act, but on condition that the assent of the being is there. If the vital is left to do what it likes, it will always go after its old habits; it has to be made to feel that it must change.

\*

What is still restless in the vital has to quiet down for the peace of mind to be even and constant. It has to be controlled, but only control will not be enough. The Mother's Power has to be called always.

10.4 1934

\*

Put the Mother's notice henceforth at the door of your vital being, "No falsehood hereafter shall ever enter here", and station a sentry there to see that it is put into execution.

18.5.1933

### **Straightforwardness and the Mother's Help**

Those who are not straightforward cannot profit by the Mother's help, for they themselves turn it away. Unless they change, they cannot hope for the descent of the supramental Light and Truth into the lower vital and physical nature; they remain stuck in their own self-created mud and cannot progress.

November, 1928

### **Calling the Mother in Difficulty**

When difficulties arise, remain quiet within and call down the Mother's force to remove them.

26.8.1933

\*

To call to the Mother always is the main thing and with that to aspire and assent to the Light when it comes, to reject and detach oneself from desire and any dark movement. But if one cannot do these other things successfully, then call and still call.

The Mother's force is there with you even when you do not feel it; remain quiet and persevere.

15.9.1934

\*

There is only one way if you cannot exert your will—it is to call the Force; even the call only with the mind or the mental word is better than being extremely passive and submitted to the attack,—for although it may not succeed instantaneously, the mental call even ends by bringing the Force and opening up the consciousness again. For everything depends upon that. In the externalised consciousness obscurity and suffering can always be there; the more the internalised consciousness reigns, the more these things are pushed back and

out, and with the full internalised consciousness they cannot remain—if they come, it is as outside touches unable to lodge themselves in the being.

21.8.1933

\*

Even when one cannot call in actively the Mother's Force one must keep the reliance that it will come.

26 8.1936

\*

It is the physical mind that feels too inert—but if some part of the being turns to the Mother, that is enough to bring the help.

25.1.1934

\*

It is an obsession from the subconscious physical bringing back the habitual thoughts, "I can't call rightly—I have no real aspiration, etc."; the depression, the memory, etc. are from the same source. It is no use indulging in these ideas. If you cannot call the Mother in what you think the right way, call her in any way—if you can't call her, think of her with the will to be rid of these things. Don't worry yourself with the idea whether you have true aspiration or not—the psychic being wants and that is sufficient. The rest is for the Divine Grace on which one must steadfastly rely—one's own merit, virtue or capacity is not the thing that brings the realisation.

I shall send the force to rid you of this obsession in any case, but if you can abandon these habitual ideas, it will make the disappearance of the attack easier.

4 1 1937

\*

It is always best in these difficulties to tell the Mother and call for her help. It is probably something in his vital that needs somebody to protect and care for—but you must accustom yourself to the idea that it is not needed and the best thing is to give the person to the care of the Mother—offer the object of your affection to her

15.11.1937

### Removal of Recurring Difficulties

*Q: What is the right way of meeting one's recurring difficulties?*

A: Equality, rejection, calling on the Mother's force.

1.8.1933

\*

What stands in the way is the recurring circle of the old mixture. To break out of that is very necessary to arrive at an inner Yogic calm and peace not disturbed by these things. If that is established, it will be possible to feel in it the Mother's Presence, to open to her guidance, to get, not by occasional glimpses but in a steady opening and flowering, the psychic perception and the descent of the spiritual Light and Ananda. For that help will be with you.

7 3 1937

*(Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother (1953), pp 734-43)*

## LIFE-POETRY-YOGA

### SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

AGAIN there has been an interval of silence. It reflects not only a non-communication with people but also non-communication with myself. Generally speaking, one may say that I have been in-drawn—that is, out of communication with the external world including my own external being. Not that I have been quite silent and entirely out of touch with everybody and everything. Such a state is neither possible nor desirable when I am living in a flat and not in a cave. What I mean is that the whole turn of the consciousness has been inward, cutting down traffic with the world to a minimum. But there is a further subtlety in the in-drawnness. I have not been trying to revel in my own depths, steeped in the quintessential Amal. In fact, the entire drive is towards an ultra-Amalism, beyond this being of mine into a condition where all past and even future cease and the present is something time-transcendent. I am aware every moment that there is within reach, though not easy to attain, an eternal poise which I can only call the Griefless, the Fearless, the Stainless, the Limitless. But it is more than an impersonal liberating poise. Within it there is the All-seeing, the All-embracing, the All-beautiful, the Heart of all hearts. It is into this Freedom, wide and warm and wise forever, that my central self longs to be caught up—not so much ultimately for an escape from everything and everybody as for the realisation of a Super-life and Super-light and Super-love upon this earth which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother made their home and which they will never abandon even when they are no longer embodied. Indeed I cannot but opt for these three Supers since the Freedom into which I yearn to be absorbed is the core of the earthward concentration which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have made from their infinity and eternity. What is a mighty freedom for me is the luminous bondage they have created for themselves with their untrammelled will for an endless work of terrestrial evolution. (27 12.1980)

\*

I am replying with as little delay as my lazy being allows. Perhaps I have become lazier now that the “voiceless supreme Delight” to whom the “arms” had taken seems to take notice of them off and on with the result that the body feels a little lost and doesn’t quite know what to do. I sit at the Samadhi as usual and there is the usual peace and wideness and the heart’s movement towards the Divine, but the body appears to sit quite alone, separate from all that inwardly goes on and feeling vague stirrings on its own which the rest of the self hardly understands. The sense of one whole Amal is only like a faint memory and I keep asking: “Am I this inner being or am I this body?” The body is on its own

and wants the wideness and peace and Godward streaming in its own right, but does not get them sufficiently. I feel as if I were in the kindergarten of Yoga and often disappointed without being depressed. Whatever has been spiritually gained dwindles in importance. “When will I be able to respond to the downward leaning of the Archetypal Physical to which I have suddenly become sensitive?”—this is the big question. The complete purification and dedication of the bodily *ensemble* is demanded—by the Archetypal Physical which is both above in its free magnitude and below in its state of “Godhead pent in the mire and the stone”. Perhaps it is the pushing up of the latter that has caused all this new strange turn in the sadhana, but the concentration is on the former. The cry is mostly for being absorbed by it, to experience its nearness and its enfoldment. What is difficult is to cope with its pressure of the Absolute.

I have read carefully your account of your wife’s condition. She is a blessed person to have all that sweetness and light and strength under the trying circumstances. Surely the psychic being is most clearly at work. You should be able to catch something of its aura and get treated for whatever nervousness, doubtng-Thomas-ness, Man-of-Sorrows-ness linger in you despite your sadhana. Your son dropped in this morning. The phrase “dropped in” in its current ordinary sense is said to have been first used by Shakespeare in Sonnet 90:

Join with the spite of Fortune, make me bow,  
And do not drop in for an after-loss...

Some commentators can’t accept the trivial interpretation. They feel the sense of a weighty motion or fall. Perhaps they are right, but my visitor did arrive with the sense of “come in or call unexpectedly or casually” which the Oxford English Dictionary reads into the Shakespearean words.

Your question about “offering” can have only one answer for the Aurobindonian yogi. We must offer to the Divine our ugly and mean things too. Otherwise there is no ultimate meaning in the master-formula: “Remember and Offer.” Even the most trivial and banal features of our life, even the acts we regard as unspiritual, all have to be set before the Holy Feet. Of course it is better not to have unspiritual acts, but if one commits them—*e.g.* sex-intercourse—they must be inwardly given to the Divine so that He might weave them into his incomprehensible pattern of human change and somehow make us aware of what is behind our urges and becomes diminished and darkened in the course of evolution. Thus, behind the sex-act there are three movements: the push towards ecstasy, the drive towards self-completion, the quest of physical immortality. The achievement is merely of a temporary excitement and release, a momentary sense of self-loss in a double existence, a vicarious perpetuation through a reproduction of our image in our children. The Ever-existent Bliss, the fullness of the Infinite and Eternal which is ever One, the Divine Physical which



by being intrinsically immortal will need no offspring to continue us—these are never reached. But by offering the misguided search for them to the Truth-Consciousness we start the transformative Hands remoulding our instinctive and passionate being. Those Hands will sooner or later bring forward the inmost soul which has the intuitive sense of the superb Reality behind *homo eroticus* and which by its inherent sweetness and purity and empathy will lessen the gross practice. (When I say “gross” I do not mean “sinful”, I simply mean: “rendered too outward and raised into too loud a pitch of the nervous system.”) The Psychic does not solve the problem but it makes it far less acute and does give a sort of substitute which prepares the ground for the final answer. It provides the happiness of a constant Divine Presence, the feel of a secure persistence through endless time, the awareness of a sexless form. Its experience offers a sanctuary to which the *homo eroticus* is like an outsider. Having its experience, one realises what the embrace of Sri Krishna truly is and that makes it impossible to believe that He and the Gopis had a carnal relationship as an expression of their love-communion. If, along with the psychic realisation one has the vast tranquil Selfhood in which the innumerable Many are an essential One and all excitements are a foreign element, one can keep *homo eroticus* very much at bay. But ultimately there is a scission of the being and since one is in some manner both the psycho-spiritual entity and the mental-vital-physical being, there is, at least in theory, the possibility of a “fall” or else the sense of a load of darkness hanging on to one’s winged luminosity. Such has been the state of the mystical life up to now. Now Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have set the Supramental Grace working and a future of a Wholeness which leaves no hole in the holy has opened before us, with the hope of a total transformation brought about if we “remember and offer” not only candles and incense but also scandals and nuisances. (16 3 1983)

\*

It was quite an extraordinary bit of news that you had a fall down fourteen stairs! Both Minna and I were very much concerned but were relieved to hear that you were still in one piece—no bones broken though many of them badly shaken. Nini said the lower back had been hurt and you were in pain, but mobile enough to come to Pondi soon. Your coming within a day or two would depend, according to her, on your receiving or not a certain message in connection with Brazil.

Your fall was rather dangerous. Collapsing on a flat surface is not a very rare occurrence—a banana skin can topple even the most stable-footed. A toss down a number of steps takes place once in a life-time, if at all. I had a tumble of this kind when I was a raw youngster. Since then a thousand and three dégringolades have been my lot—the last one as recently as last year, as you know—but a thunderous roll from height to depth is rare in world-history since Isaiah

echoed in a grandiose though unconscious hexameter the greatest of such mishaps with the exclamation.

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning!

If I may be a little flippant without seeming heartless I as one poet to another would like to ask in the style of Chesterton the way of your precipitate descent. In his fascinating book on Browning, Chesterton makes a comparison of that poet with Tennyson by describing the two different ways in which one could fall downstairs—the Browningian manner and the Tennysonian, the latter being smooth-rhythmed and conventionally thought-processed in contrast to the vigorous and striking movement of form and content distinguishing the former. Did you exemplify the cadences (literally “the falling sounds”) of *The Idylls of the King* or those of *The Ring and the Book*? Perhaps by looking at you and marking your gait the literary critic in me will get the answer. (13 4 1988)

\*

The Rose you sent is at once your Rose and the Mother’s. For it represents your dedicated heart. It may be said also to be my Rose, for you and I belong to the same sweet divinity, and the perfume of this flower wafts towards all fellow aspirants and devotees who share the same inner life and are one in their self-dedication. Particularly fortunate are those who are nearest to you in friendship and get the intensest whiff of you.

Life here is the same ever-deepening process—the attempt to belong more and more to the Truth of ourselves by making all our acts find their roots in our sense of the Mother’s presence within and grow their stems and leaves and petals towards the same presence felt everywhere without.

Early this morning, just before waking, I had a very vivid dream of the Mother. She was sitting as during the old morning pranams in her chair in the Meditation Hall. When I went towards her she held out her hands. I caught them in mine and my whole being seemed to flow out to her. She was radiantly smiling. As I remember this moment of happiness I recollect the poem I wrote on 6.6.1954. She not only read it with approval but passed it on to be read by all who were near her. May I quote it to you?

There are two ways of bowing  
 To you, O Splendour sweet!  
 One craves the boon of blessedness,  
 One gives the soul to your feet.

Pulling your touch to ourselves we feel  
 Holy and happy – we think huge heaven

Comes close with you that we may pluck  
A redder dawn, a purpler even.

This is but rapturous robbery  
Deaf to infinity's call  
That we should leap and plunge in you  
Our aching empty all

And, in the surge of being your own,  
Grow blind and quite forget  
Whether our day be a richer rose,  
A wealthier violet.

Precious each moment laid in your hands,  
Whatever the hue it bear—  
A flame and fragrance just because  
Your fingers hold it dear.

Make me your nothing, my whole life  
I would drown in your vastnesses—  
A cry to be ruled by your flawless touch,  
Your will alone my peace.

My last line echoes one of the greatest in European literature, that unforgettable verse in Dante's *Divina Commedia*:

En' la sua voluntade è nostra pace

which I may freely translate by—

And in His Will alone we find our peace.

The original has at once a simplicity and directness of intuitive utterance matched with a natural effortless sonority which is impossible to reproduce in the mainly monosyllabic English tongue. A poet has tried his hand at the combination and I believe he succeeds as much as one can under a different linguistic regime:

And in His Will is our tranquillity.

What lacks here is the right balance between the two components "His Will" and "our tranquillity". What belongs to us—"our tranquillity"—seems more weighty than what is God's: "His Will".

It was very kind of you to send me your book. In my present preoccupations it has not been possible to go through the whole of it word by word, but I have dipped into it at several places and appreciate the zeal with which you have carried out your task. But I am not satisfied with your chronological position in all respects. As you will see from the end of this letter, I too am inclined to give consideration to the traditional-Puranic time-scheme, but not in every respect. My forthcoming book, *Ancient India in a New Light*, whose publication may coincide with that of your own chronological *magnum opus*, will make clear at great length how far we can go together and where we part company.

As for Sankara's date I have no fixed opinion, but for me two dates are there to choose from and both hinge on the period in which we may put Kalidasa. You admit that Sankara has to be subsequent to this poet since Kumarila Bhatta who is associated with Sankara has quoted from Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* and therefore must be later than he. The traditional date of Kalidasa is in the first century B.C., during the reign of the legendary Vikramaditya. If this is tenable, Sankara cannot be earlier. The alternative is in view of the present-day idea that Kalidasa was a contemporary of one of the Vikramadityas in the Imperial Gupta line—either Chandragupta II or Skandagupta, preferably the former. You have mentioned, in the course of rejecting it, the reign-period of Chandragupta II, which is towards the end of the 4th century A.D. But if we go by the traditional-Puranic chronology the founder of the Gupta Dynasty—Chandragupta I—and not Chandragupta Maurya would coincide with the time of Sandrocottus, the contemporary of Alexander the great, whose accession has to be within the time-bracket: 325-305 B.C. In that case, Chandragupta II would come around 250 B.C. Then Kalidasa would flourish during the same time and Sankara along with Kumarila Bhatta would have to be later than the middle of the 3rd century B.C., fairly far from the 6th century before the Christian era which is your choice.

So, even if one differs from the generally favoured present theory, one cannot go to the date you favour—unless one can prove the Bharata War to be datable to 3138 B.C. and the alleged time-lapse from the Kaliyuga to Sankara to be reliable. As I try to show in my forthcoming book, the possibility of Sandrocottus having been the founder of the Imperial Guptas does not compel us to accept 3102 B.C. as a historical starting-point for Indian chronology. For one thing, the impossibility of the Nandas flourishing in the later part of the Harappa Culture should give us pause.

However, I haven't closed my mind and will be interested in your next publication. I am returning the present book as promised by me. (15.6.1988)

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

## MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of June 1996)

*Firmly*

LIFE is a quicksand of mediocrity ready to engulf all our aspirations, imaginations, idealistic thoughts and upward tendencies in its absorption with the problems of day-to-day living. We get enmeshed in trenchant reactions to the ordinary and the immediate things like who has insulted us and who has helped us. We bestow smiles of gratitude for some temporary help in solving some problem of the moment, or bitterly react to an insignificant or even imaginary harm done to us. And the worry about contingencies, the preoccupation with food, the constant anxiety about our own health and that of those who are near and dear to us. I know of a person who worries about what would happen to us in Pondicherry if the polar ice were to melt due to the greenhouse effect or if there were to be a mishap at the Kalpakkam Nuclear Power Station.

This attack of ordinary thoughts and feelings is the quicksand we face. It is the graveyard of many of our upward efforts, the coffin of our radiant aspirations. On January 4, 1914 the Mother wrote in a prayer,

The tide of materialistic thoughts is always on the watch, waiting for the least weakness, and if we relax but one moment from our vigilance, if we are even slightly negligent, it rushes in and invades us from all sides, submerging under its heavy flood the result sometimes of numberless efforts. Then the being enters a sort of torpor, its physical needs of food and sleep increase, its intelligence is clouded, its inner vision veiled, and in spite of the little interest it really finds in such superficial activities, they occupy it almost exclusively. This state is extremely painful and tiring, for nothing is more tiring than materialistic thoughts, and the mind, worn out, suffers like a caged bird which cannot spread its wings and yet longs to be able to soar freely

To escape the degradation of the above state we have to be constantly alert, our attention has to be fixed unwaveringly on the thin strip that would keep us safely on our path leading to the goal. Even a little letting down of guard would immerse us in dense *tamas* and our hard-won poise would be annulled. There is some truth behind the 19th-century belief which showed poets as delicate people. When one lives in an exalted consciousness or is immersed in intense and harsh *tapasyā*, thoughts of food and comfort and the body's need lose their supremacy and matter little, for the consciousness vibrates with thoughts and feelings of the higher Verities. The Mother says,

But perhaps this state has its own use which I do not see.... In any case, I do not struggle; and like a child in its mother's arms, like a fervent disciple at the feet of his master, I trust myself to Thee and surrender to Thy guidance, sure of Thy victory.

Ups and downs are inevitable in the soul's journey to the Supreme. When the tide is low and the aspiration is left stranded on the beach, surrounded by dead sea-weed and pieces of wood, we have to wait patiently holding our Mother's hand, so that once again she floods us with her Light, to annul the effects of our fall and bring back our straying feet to firmer grounds.

### *Total Identity*

How human can the Divine be? How totally identified does she become with her human children? These are questions which, from time to time, crop up in the minds of aspirants. There is a lurking suspicion or rather a flawed understanding that the Divine being the Divine, She cannot suffer the indignities we suffer. How can She be as ignorant and dull as we are? And in some exasperating moments we do reproach the Divine, "What do you know of our miseries, our crippling limitations and debilitating deficiencies?"

But we have no reason to be suspicious. The Divine does identify herself with our darkness, for only thus can light be brought into the Inconscient. How total this identification is, we can see in one of the early prayers of the Mother. On January 5, 1914 she wrote in her diary.

For a long while I have been sitting with this note-book before me, unable to make up my mind to write, so much is all within me mediocre, worthless, insipid, hopelessly commonplace. Not a single thought in my head, not a single feeling in my heart, a complete indifference to everything and an insurmountable dullness.

How can such a state be of any use?

*I am a veritable zero in the world*

This is the dull inertia which plagues our days and from which our ego tries to come out at any cost. Sometimes we plunge into degrading entertainment to somehow wake up from our sensual torpor, sometimes we indulge in dire deeds to get rid of our *tamas* and sometimes we sit doing nothing, only reproaching Fate.

These are egocentric actions and reactions which lead us away from our true Being, taking us farther away from any true thought or feeling, even though they sometimes give us the illusion of doing great deeds.

To know what the Mother did when she was faced with this state will be

illuminating and beneficial. When feeling like a *veritable zero* she did not fret or fume but rather resigned herself to the Lord's Will and wrote:

But all this is not at all important. And provided Thy work is accomplished, Thy manifestation takes place and the earth becomes more and more Thy harmonious and fruitful kingdom, it matters little whether I accomplish this Work or not.

And as it is certain that It will be done, I should have no reason to worry even if I felt like it. From the depths to the outermost surface, all this, my being, is only a handful of dust; it is but natural that it should be scattered on the winds and leave no trace behind.

This indeed is the height of humility and in this attitude lies the supreme felicity. We—who would like to be always at our creative best and who in our goodwill worry about all that we can, but due to one reason or another, are not able to do—should know that ultimately what matters is the Divine Intention in things and that Intention will be fulfilled one day, in spite of our inability to act. Then what is there to worry about? Let us do our best and then leave it in her hands. The Divine can, if she so chooses, use us but is not bound to do so. Who can reproach the artisan for using one tool in place of another? If we are called to participate, well and good, yet if the call does not come or owing to some inability in us, or some action of the hostiles, is not allowed to succeed, then what does it matter? Her work will be accomplished in her own Way, in her own Time.

Only Peace can annul Inertia.

### *Whuther?*

The invention of paper has resulted in an extraordinary proliferation of the printed word which nobody could have imagined in the olden times. In earlier ages books were precious things and only the authors, who were generally saint-philosophers, or very rich people, owned books. Knowledge was mostly imparted by spoken words. The students recited the lessons after their teacher and in the process they were influenced not only by the knowledge in the words but by the knowledge embodied in the person of the teacher. Generally the personality and attainment of the teacher made a greater impact on the students' character than the text. Even the proportion of the power and knowledge in the text that could be grasped depended on the invoking power of the teacher. A village matriculate cannot teach thermodynamics to his pupils.

One expected that with this proliferation of the written word there would emerge a better educated humanity. After all, today books can be had for very little money. But the hope of universal education and consequently of a more

civilized world has been belied. There were never so many illiterates on the earth, as a result of the population explosion, and we humans were never in such a sorry mess, intellectually, emotionally or morally, as now.

For the past 2000 years we have had a sort of continuity of civilization. As a result we have had hundreds of thinkers and sociologists, biologists and messiahs. With so many who have spoken so beautifully of lofty ideals, and have been examples to us, why has humanity landed in its present moral bankruptcy and intellectual futility? There are wonderful books on every conceivable subject, yet the average educated human being prefers to pay homage to falsehood and avarice in place of truth and generosity. Today nations hold the flag of Mammon high and fraternity is sacrificed on the altar of vested interests. Without compunction the so-called civilized nations poison the third world countries with their nuclear wastes. They have fouled the earth's atmosphere to such an extent that many people fear for life on the planet.

What is the reason of humanity's downward slide? What have all the books and their genuinely well-intentioned words achieved? How is it they have led the world to this sorry pass? The Mother makes it clear in her prayer of January 6, 1914:

Thou art the one and only goal of my life and the centre of my aspiration, the pivot of my thought, the key of the synthesis of my being. And as Thou art beyond all sensation, all feeling and all thought, Thou art the living but ineffable experience, the Reality lived in the depths of the being but untranslatable in our poor words, and it is because human intelligence is powerless to reduce Thee to a formula that some, a little disdainfully, label "sentiment" the knowledge that it is possible to have of Thee, but it is surely as far from sentiment as it is from thought. So long as one has not attained this supreme Knowledge, one has no solid basis or lasting centre for one's mental and emotional synthesis, and all other intellectual constructions can only be arbitrary, artificial and vain.

The Lord is All-Knowing, and any thought or teaching can become true and potent only in the measure it is connected to the Source. Since spiritual knowledge is beyond intellect, the baffled intellectuals have raised their heavy philosophical edifices excluding the Eternal. Thus they have led humanity into successive greater morasses. Mammon-worship never held such a sanctified status as it does today in the Western countries and their blind followers in the East. Once people trembled at the thought of denying the existence of God. Yet, thanks to Karl Marx, we did it with impunity and tried to live only for material well-being. Humanity paid a terrible price for the materialist's denial and is just now burying the corpse of the defunct communist ideology. The worshippers of Mammon will find earth slipping from under their feet in the same way.



Thus end all our knowings if they are devoid of spirituality, of supreme Knowledge. And that is why all our *intellectual constructions can only be arbitrary, artificial and vain*. Due to this reason our millions of schools and billions of books have not raised the level of human consciousness. A century back the peoples of earth were more God-oriented and God-fearing. Today education is leading us into ever smaller circles where dragon-like we are left chasing our tail. There is no high exit. If we colonise the stars we would take even there our guns, porn and intolerance

The only way out and up is to hold on, howsoever feebly, to the hem of the Lord The Mother writes further:

Thou art eternal silence and perfect peace in what we are able to perceive of Thee.

Thou art all the perfection we must acquire, all the marvels to be realised, all the splendour to be manifested.

And all our words are but children's babbling when we venture to speak of Thee.

In silence is the greatest reverence

Always we approach the Lord with our imperfections, yet a mother likes the senseless babblings of her child too.

### *Relume our Night*

We human beings are like bats that have been suddenly expelled from their dark and dank caves into broad daylight. The exposure to strong light panics the creatures of night and they fly frantically, dash into objects and dash even against those who would guide them. In the process they hurt others and wound themselves. Compared to the sun-expanses of the spiritual living, ordinary lives lived for ordinary self-serving aims are like the stifling caves inhabited by countless bats We humans love our darkneses and recede as far away as possible from light But the Divine did not create this world to leave us stuck in the mire of blind passions and shameless avarice, or in alleys of fierce prides, individual, national or racial. We are like recalcitrant students who learn even one lesson with difficulty and having somehow learnt their first reader try to call a halt. As the first readers of a child cannot by any stretch of imagination be called the summit of education, in the same way the small steps that we have taken in civilisation do not end the process. We, who are animal in most of our physical functions and vital instincts, think because of our unique mental growth that we are the last species and ideal specimens of the creation. We, who have misused and still misuse our mental power to subjugate and exploit others, who perpetuate inequality, injustice and cruelty, who are self-centred and callous to

others' suffering, who would want all the world to serve our personal interests, how can we satisfy the Lord?

Yes, human beings are always causing pain to others, sometimes wittingly and at other times unwittingly. Why are we so unjust and destructive? If we leave aside the demoniac and the Asuric beings, our extreme self-assertion with its resultant perversions is caused by a sort of insecurity, a sense of loneliness and of being lost. Death is there always looming in front. This lack of permanence in things creates a void which humans try to fill with more and more wealth and power. As a result our lives are always full of restlessness and unnecessary movements. Most of our activities are like walking in an endless maze which has no outlet. Aeons pass thus.

On January 7, 1914 the Mother wrote in a prayer:

Give them all, O Lord, Thy peace and light, open their blinded eyes and their darkened understanding; calm their futile worries and their vain anxieties. Turn their gaze away from themselves and give them the joy of being consecrated to Thy work without calculation or mental reservation.

This conception of division, of being a separate entity, of being an individual facing hostile others, is at the root of all the problems of the world. If we could see the Divine everywhere, and realise that all is the Divine's working, then the countless problems of life would vanish like a thin spring fog revealing an enchantment all around. We would recognise the Divine in everything, would understand the reason behind things and then if we could do what the Divine Will in things is, then all would be harmonious. But then we should act *without calculation and mental reservation*. We would have to make a supreme act of surrendering our well-being to the Divine, and even if he chooses what seems to us contrary to our perceived good, we would have to bow our head in trust, with what is called "blind faith". Then only would be realised what the Mother prays for us—

Let Thy beauty flower in all things, awaken Thy love in all hearts, so that Thy eternally progressive order may be realised upon earth and Thy harmony be spread until the day all becomes Thyself in perfect purity and peace.

Oh! let all tears be wiped away, all suffering relieved, all anguish dispelled, and let calm serenity dwell in every heart and powerful certitude strengthen every mind. Let Thy life flow through all like a regenerating stream that all may turn to Thee and draw from that contemplation the energy for all victories.

This then is the content that she has put in her loving prayer for her

children. Whatever the Mother has aspired for is bound to happen. The race and its civilisation will be divinised. It is up to us to take advantage of the proffered light to find the way out of our dark caves of ego and step into vast and serene sun-spaces.

Tears are today an aberration because the Supramental Power has manifested. We will be protected and looked after—if we fulfil the conditions.

*(To be continued)*

SHYAM KUMARI

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## WHO AM I?

RUSTLING leaves of the Peepal tree  
 And whisper of the evening breeze  
 Evoke deep within an ardent cry:  
 Who am I? Who am I?

The mellow light of the sunset  
 And mystic murmur of the sea reply:  
 "Thou art His bairn, His eternal pet,  
 O Golden one of the sky."

SATISH TALREJA  
 (16 Years)

# RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY

## THE INDIAN APPROACH

WE have said in one of our previous articles on Indian culture that a scientific, pragmatic and psychological approach to religion is one of the main features of the Indian cultural genius. This article will explore the Indian approach to religion and its relevance for the present and the future of religion.

One of the positive trends in modern thought is the increasing interest shown by the scientific mind, especially modern psychologists, in Religion, Yoga and Mysticism. This is a salutary development which in the long run is bound to have a positive impact on religions. For most of the religions, except a few of the eastern ones like Hinduism and Buddhism, ignore the simple fact that their dogmas and systems, if they are to have a universal and scientific validity, have to be based on some common verifiable truths and laws of the psychological and spiritual constitution of Man. This is one of the strong points of Indian religions. The yogic systems of Hinduism and Buddhism have withstood the strictest of scientific and rational scrutinies of the modern mind precisely because they are based on a deep and profound knowledge of the psycho-spiritual nature of man and the laws which govern this inner dimension of the human being

In fact, Indian religion in its essence is nothing but a system of psycho-philosophical knowledge applied to the psychological and spiritual evolution of the individual and the collectivity. For the soul and core of Indian religion is not a theological dogma but Yoga, which is, as Sri Aurobindo points out, nothing but “practical psychology”. And Indian philosophy is the intellectual formulation of the psychological explorations and discoveries of Yoga. The other very unique feature of Indian Yoga is that it is, like modern science, an unbroken tradition, “*parampara*”, of progressive spiritual quest and discovery and not confined to a single prophet or scripture. Only such a scientific, progressive and psychological approach to religion can bring new life to world-religions and save them from becoming an obsolete human activity

Every religion claims to “save the soul” of man. Again, all religions, —whatever may be their differences regarding the nature of the soul and its relation to God—accept the fact that the human Soul is the spiritual source of man’s psychological personality. If this is true then the claim of religions that they can save the soul of man should be based on a sound knowledge of the psychic and spiritual constitution of man. If salvation of the soul is based purely on faith and on the whimsical fiat of an arbitrary and extracosmic creator, then religion gets excluded from rational, scientific and spiritual enquiry. Such religions have no use for the evolutionary progress of humanity. They neither lead to advancement of knowledge and culture nor to a better understanding of religion

Faith by itself is not something unscientific and irrational. Faith in some form or other, either faith in God or faith in one's own self, potentialities or capacities is indispensable for success in any human endeavour either spiritual or secular. And in religion, which is primarily an intuitive quest for an invisible and supra-rational Reality, faith becomes all the more important. Nor is the belief in a creative Godhead a superstition or delusion. It is one of the constantly repeating spiritual intuitions of the race, tested and verified in the experiences and realisations of some of the greatest spiritual masters of the world right from the Vedic seers of ancient India to modern sages like Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Sri Aurobindo. But the present evolutionary status of human consciousness—which has acquired a highly developed rational and scientific mind—demands that faith, belief and intuitions of religions should be expressed through a sound psychological reasoning. Pompous and rhetorical assertions of theological dogma can no longer satisfy the modern mind. Religion of the future has to be based not on prophetic revelations but on a spiritual psychology which reveals to man the laws of the subjective dimensions of his own being and universal Nature. The primary emphasis has to be not on an outer culture of ceremonies, worship, rituals and the church but on an inner culture of consciousness by which, through a gradual deepening, heightening and widening of consciousness, man can ultimately arrive at God-knowledge as the crowning fulfilment of Self-knowledge. This includes all forms of theistic religions which believe in a personal God of Love who responds to the human aspirations, an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent creative Godhead and His love, power and wisdom behind the world-process and the redeeming action of His inscrutable and mysterious Grace. The modern tendency to deny these intuitions and experiences of theistic religion on the basis of modern psychological theories is not conducive to the progress of the science of psychology. We must remember here that modern psychology is still an infant science which has not yet explored all the multiple dimensions of human consciousness. It is still groping half-blind in the subconscious and subliminal realms of human consciousness. It has still a long way to go to acquire the maturity, knowledge and the appropriate faculties to explore the higher realm of consciousness.

The seers of ancient India discovered long before Freud that our conscious waking mind is only a minor surface wave in a vast ocean of consciousness which sinks below into the subconscious and inconscient and rises above towards the superconscient. An ancient hymn of the Rig Veda describes the whole of existence as established above in the seat of the divine Purusha, the superconscient being, below in the ocean of the subconscious, *antah samudre hrđi antar āyusı*. Using a more modern and scientific analogy, if the consciousness can be compared to the electromagnetic energy spectrum—violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red—the normal conscious mind can be compared to a thin band of the frequency range forming visible light; the invisible infrared and

ultraviolet frequency ranges of the electromagnetic energy below and above the frequency of visible light-energy represent respectively the subconscious and superconscious ranges of the human consciousness. Interestingly, this is the central idea behind the "spectrum psychology" of Ken Wilbur, one of the pioneering figures of what is now called the "Fourth Wave" in modern psychology.

But to the modern psychologist these are theoretical concepts. For the seers and sages of India these are not just concepts but a living experience. In ancient India, psychology was not an academic pursuit, but a practical discipline aiming at self-knowledge, self-realisation and spiritual liberation. The ancient Indian psychologists, after an initial encounter with the subconscious and subliminal realms of consciousness, did not linger long in these regions, but went beyond into the superconscious. And once they became familiar with these higher ranges of consciousness, they found that the real key to the highest self-knowledge and human fulfilment lies not in the subconscious and subliminal but in the superconscious. So these lower ranges of human consciousness are not given much attention in ancient Indian psychology except as intermediate stations full of illusory distractions against which the seekers of self-knowledge are repeatedly warned not to pay too much attention but observe and pass over them with detachment and discrimination. Exploring further the domain of the superconscious, Indian sages have found that this higher realm of consciousness has itself many levels and ranges, each with its corresponding faculties and powers giving an increasingly deeper, clearer, vaster and more and more comprehensive and concrete perception of truth. They have also found that the individual consciousness is an integral part of a cosmic consciousness and the energies of each level of the individual consciousness from its subconscious depths to superconscious heights are derived from the corresponding levels of the cosmic consciousness. Exploring still further, these tireless cosmonauts of the inner space have found that even this cosmic consciousness is only a partial expression of a transcendent Reality and the highest point of the superconscious self in man is one with this ineffable Transcendence. This is the crowning discovery of the ancient Indian sages of the Upanishadic expression in those famous words "Thou art That", "*Tat tvam asi*".

The other great discovery of Indian sages is that the essential nature of this supreme Reality and Self is an infinite and eternal Being-Consciousness-Bliss, Sat-Chit-Ananda, and an absolute indivisible Unity and Oneness of all that is. We must note here that this is not the "One" of monotheistic religions but the one without a second, the "Advaita" of the Indian Vedantic vision. This Oneness is the very existence, ISness, BEness, or THATness, "Sat", "Tat" of all that exists, consciousness "Chit" of all that is conscious, the original Energy or Force, "Chit-shakti", of all the energies in man and the universe and the eternal Delight, "Ananda", which is the source and substance of the emotional, sen-

sational and subjective experiences of man. This delight expresses itself on the emotional, aesthetic and spiritual levels as Love, Beauty and Joy respectively and in the sensational experiences of man in the triple values of pleasure, pain and neutral indifference. Thus, in Indian religion even metaphysical and theological concepts are based on a deep and profound psychological exploration, experiment and reasoning, arriving at and pointing to the supranormal spiritual realities through the normal psychological principles and experiences.

The third important spiritual discovery of Indian sages is the multi-poised and multi-aspected manifestation of the Divine Reality. The supreme Reality is not a colourless monotone but a multiple Unity expressing its potentialities and powers through the many names and forms of its cosmic godheads. "Reality is One, Sages call it variously." Even the transcendent status of the absolute Reality has many poises like impersonal and personal, creative and uncreative, infinite-qualified and qualityless, which may appear as absolute contraries to reason but reveal themselves to the spiritual consciousness of the seer as complementary principles of the one Reality. The divine Reality can be compared to an infinite Dancer who can dance simultaneously in many postures or styles, each posture giving birth to a unique spiritual experience in the consciousness of the spiritual seeker. This is the spiritual source of the conflicting philosophies of various religions. The intuition of theistic religions—polytheistic or monotheistic—corresponds to the personal, creative and qualified poise of the divine Reality in which the highest aspirations of the heart and life of man for love, beauty, joy and power find their absolute fulfilment. The intuitions of the monistic or non-theistic religions correspond to the impersonal, supportive and qualityless poise of the divine Reality in which all the highest aspirations of the mind and soul of man for unity, universality, freedom, immortality and transcendence find their absolute fulfilment. But the absolute Reality even while revealing and expressing its spiritual truths and potentialities through these poises is bound by none of them. It at once transcends and unifies them all in its supreme ultra-transcendent Mystery. This idea of a multi-poised divine Reality is a unique contribution of Sri Aurobindo to spiritual philosophy. This idea is implicit in the ancient spiritual traditions of India like the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, and Tantras. But only in Sri Aurobindo's writings the idea acquires an explicit metaphysical clarity.

Though this is an idea which belongs more to the realm of metaphysics or spiritual philosophy than to psychology it had a profound psychological impact in moulding the religious attitude of the Indian people. The positive result of this spiritual idea in the religious mind and culture of India is that mind and culture's proverbial tolerance, assimilative capacity, freedom for experimentation, progressive flexibility and innovation. This is also the reason why Hinduism, the most unorganised religion of the world, is still the most spiritually creative among world religions. While in all other religions, with the advent of the

modern age, the mystic with a genuine spiritual experience—who alone can give the progressive creative impulse to religion—has become a rarity, the spiritual culture of Hinduism still remains as a living source of spiritual inspiration, giving birth to mystics of the highest calibre even in this modern age.

The point which I am trying to emphasise here is that the basic ideology of religion has much influence in shaping the culture and the psychology of its followers. The spiritual ideology of Hinduism has moulded the psychology of its average representative follower into “a mild and tolerant Hindu” and that of its elite leaders towards synthesis, progressive assimilation and inward contemplation. It gave birth to a culture which is tolerant, non-dogmatic, contemplative, inclusive, assimilative, flexible, progressive and universal with an emphasis on self-knowledge, inner seeking and experiential realisation. The nature of the impact of Indian religion on the world is primarily intellectual, moral and spiritual, working mostly as an invisible and subtle infiltration of ideas.

On the other hand, the ideology of semitic religions with their emphasis on exclusive monotheism, single Book, single Prophet, sectarian pan-religious universalism, external worship and dogmatic belief has moulded the psychology of their average representative followers into that of a dogmatic, orthodox and intolerant fundamentalist and its leaders into closed theologians and aggressive and proselytising missionaries seeking for external expansion and economic, social and political power for the church rather than for an inner renovation and enlightenment of the spirit of religion. The result of such a religious culture is there for all to see in the history of Europe and the Islamic world in the form of bloody religious wars, inquisitions, mass slaughter, destruction of temples, forced conversions and what not.

So, if the idea of unity of all religions, now getting established in the cultural consciousness of humanity, is to have a lasting impact on society leading to a living and practical harmony between religions, there must be a definite positive change in the religious ideologies. The leaders of different religions have to openly give up every form of intolerant ideology which divides humanity into two distinct camps of the believer and the non-believer with the former asserting his superiority over the latter and his right to convert him. The second condition is that there must be complete freedom for mutual dialogue as well as criticism between religions. We must remember here that criticism is not always bad; sometimes false and superstitious ideas can be weeded out only by enlightened criticism. In the west, it is such a dissolving criticism by rational, scientific and humanistic thinkers which broke the stifling hold and authority of dogmatic religion over the society and paved the way for secular freedom and material progress.

So fundamentalist religious ideas which are the source of much violence, bloodshed and fanaticism and have wrought great havoc in history should not be given any political or ideological support and protection. Neither should they be



much suppressed or persecuted, for that will give them a halo of martyrdom and increase their mass appeal. They have to be weeded out by enlightened criticism—exposing them persistently in the clear light of a higher and progressive truth in which their darkness and falsehood are revealed to themselves and others.

It may be true that the psychology of the average fundamentalist religious mind is impervious to reason. But, as the Upanishad declares, “Satyameva Jayate”, “Truth alone triumphs”. Falsehood, however obstinate and well-entrenched it may be, cannot stand for long against the persistent pressure of truth. But this pressure has to be applied constantly. Especially when the falsehood and its representatives are obstinate, aggressive and powerful, truth and its representatives should also be equally aggressive, obstinate and persistent and not weak or passive.

Here a clear understanding of the psychology of an average religious mind can be of great help in combating this malady of religious fundamentalism. The average religious mind is not interested in any disinterested seeking of spiritual truth or values but craves for the satisfaction of certain pietistic emotions,—which it cannot get in the average social life—social security which comes from belonging to a group, spiritual solace provided by a comfortable belief-system which promises post-mortem salvation in heaven and finally a God who can fulfil its desires. Add to this the sense of superiority in belonging to an elite group favoured by God, and we have the motives which shape the average religious mind. In this average religious consciousness all other higher ethical or spiritual impulses are subordinated to or get heavily mixed up with these lower religious motives. A religion which caters predominantly to the motives of this average religious mind without making any attempt to enlighten or elevate it through a higher intellectual, moral, aesthetic or spiritual culture and discipline may have a large mass-appeal but cannot bring any cultural or spiritual upliftment to mankind. On the contrary such religions are likely to degenerate soon into some form of fundamentalism. Thus fundamentalism is only an intense, narrow and degenerate expression of the average religious mind.

This brings us again to another important difference between Indian religions and semitic religions. In Indian religions, especially in Hinduism, even while catering to the motives of the average religious mind, a conscious and systematic attempt is made to progressively enlighten, elevate and purify their lower religious motives by a deeper and higher intellectual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual culture. It is precisely this higher culture which is missing in most of the semitic religions. And the result is that the average religious mind, instead of opening itself to higher motives, becomes an instrument of the ordinary motives of the vital ego in man for power, wealth and expansion. Religion becomes for all practical purposes a political creed seeking for economic, social and political power in the name of God.

So the struggle against fundamentalism has to be mounted on two fronts: an enlightened critical onslaught on all forms of fundamentalist ideologies and education of the masses in the deeper, higher and universal truths of religions. But this religious education, to be truly effective, has to be an integral part of a culture which promotes free and critical inquiry in thought, a deep and fine moral and aesthetic sensitivity in feelings and a warm universal humanism based on the sentiment of the oneness of mankind. It must be an education which develops in each individual the intellectual capacity and the moral sensibility to evaluate the various religious paths, ideologies and their history in the light of some universal human and spiritual values and come to his own conclusions.

M. S. SRINIVASAN

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## FOR AND AGAINST

In me, was a debate  
 For You and against.  
 'For' unfurled its banner  
 Then raged 'against'  
 And ransacked all.

In this turbulence  
 The silent Observer,  
 Seated within  
 Just intervened ...  
 Then 'for' took the lead  
 And everything went well  
 And kept going indeed.

The troubled heart,  
 The tormented mind  
 Are now calm and wide  
 To welcome You inside.

ASHALATA DASH

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of June 1996)*

ON August 4, 1914 the first World War broke out in Europe. It was a fateful year in which cataclysmic changes swept over the world. It also made a change for Sri Aurobindo. His period of 'Silent Yoga' was coming to an end. On August 15th the journal *ARYA* commenced its publication in which Sri Aurobindo gave to the world the new knowledge he had gained through his Yoga. There was another event of momentous significance preceding this event. on March 29 Mirra Richard arrived in Pondicherry for the first time and met Sri Aurobindo.

That meeting was an important milestone in the life of Sri Aurobindo. It was on this day that he received an extraordinary person whom he was later to install as the MOTHER of his Spiritual Ashram. This was the beginning of a spiritual collaboration of the utmost consequence.

On 29th March Mirra with her husband Paul Richard met Sri Aurobindo in the Guest House at 3.30 in the afternoon. As soon as she saw Sri Aurobindo, she recognised him as the very person who had been guiding her in her spiritual self-culture. Ostensibly Paul had come to get elected as the representative of French India in the French Parliament. But Mirra's purpose was different. She had enough inner signs that Sri Aurobindo was the person with whom her spiritual life was connected. She explains in her answer to a question by Motilal Roy in 1920:

“When and how did I become conscious of a mission, which I was to fulfil on earth? And when and how did I meet A.G. [Aurobindo Ghose]?”

“For the knowledge of the mission, it is difficult to say when it came to me. It is as though I was born with it, and following the growth of the mind and brain, the precision and completeness of this consciousness grew also.”

Who was Mirra?

What was her mission?

A brief sketch of her life and her illuminating work upon earth has been given in the following passages.

Mirra Alfassa was born on February 21, 1878, more than a century ago, the second child of Maurice Alfassa, a Turkish Banker from Adrianople and his Egyptian wife, Mathilda Ismaloun of Cairo. Both the families were affluent. Even as a child Mirra was unusually serious and was more prone to sitting quietly than to playing with other children. Her mother who was out and out a materialist, a strict disciplinarian, never took kindly to the child's strange silence and withdrawnness into herself.

The child used to sit for long periods on a small seat that was provided for her. At the age of five she became conscious of a light above her head. It was not a vision, it was a continuing experience. Her child's brain could not realise what

it was. She felt that it must be God. From the age of eleven she began to have certain experiences in her sleep. Many teachers came to her and guided her regarding spiritual matters. In her later life she was to meet some of them. And one of them who was darker of complexion, she happened to meet more frequently than others. She was led to call him Krishna, though at that time she knew very little of Indian names.

About the age of thirteen, she used to see a particular dream as soon as she went to sleep. She found herself soaring in the sky higher and higher. Her golden elongated robe spread out till it covered the entire town below. Rows of men, women and children, those who were in distress would come up and tell their tales of woe, touch the hem of her garment and get healed, smile and return. By her side there would be an old man standing with an encouraging smile. She was to identify him later as the Man of Sorrows. She found this experience highly interesting and for six months she would look forward to it every day. She realised more and more that it was the mission of her life to carry succour to the distressed, to heal the maimed.

Her inner life was thus built up over the years. By the time she was eighteen she had established constant communication with the Divine Presence in herself. But she was not satisfied with that much.

How to proceed further? There was no one to guide her in those days in Europe. But the Grace never fails. A volume of Swami Vivekananda's teachings came into her hands. She describes how, when she opened the pages, she was amazed by its spiritual contents. Soon an Indian met her and gave her a copy of an old imperfect translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and asked her to look upon Lord Krishna as the indwelling Godhead and to surrender to Him. Within a month the work was done.

She had observed certain occult capacities in herself. She could go out of her body and explore different realms of the universe. She could commune with the world of Nature, plants, animals and so on. As if ordained, she came into contact with a powerful occultist who called himself Théon, a Polish Jew. His wife, an Englishwoman from the Isle of Wight, named Alma, was an even greater occultist with a finer consciousness.

Perhaps due to her inclination towards the inner life Mirra was late in learning and writing but when she did begin, the progress was very rapid and her thirst for acquiring knowledge and understanding was insatiable.

She became an excellent artist and became a fine musician. She was a seeker who sought to break through the prevailing conceptions and institutional barriers of religion and mental dogmas. She became a centre of progressive interests and forces.

In 1912 Mirra was closely associated with a group of spiritual seekers named *Cosmique*. It was a small group consisting of about twelve persons who met once a week to discuss the subject. "What is the aim to be achieved, the work to be

done, the means of achievement?" Her answer was, "The general aim to be achieved is the advent of a progressive universal harmony."<sup>1</sup>

Some time during 1912 the Mother started to keep a diary where she used to record her own spiritual experiences and aspirations. This diary continued for several years. Later on some of its entries were translated by Sri Aurobindo into English. Along with translations by others of other entries, they form the book, *Prayers and Meditations*

During that period a number of people gathered around her seeking her guidance for a higher life. Some of them confessed to her how they would have preferred to devote themselves exclusively to the search for a higher life, based on a higher truth but their various involvements and social ties prevented them from such pursuit. It was from that time that Mirra had deeply felt that a collective life should be organised in such a way that individuals would not have to spend their time getting their creature comforts, but be provided with all the daily requirements of their lives so that they could dedicate themselves entirely to the higher quest.

To fulfil that long-cherished desire events took a turn when Paul Richard came to Pondicherry in connection with the elections to the French Senate. Later on in 1920, Mirra wrote to Motilal Roy:

"In the year 1910, my husband came alone to Pondicherry where under very interesting and peculiar circumstances, he met A.G. [Aurobindo Ghose]. Since then we both strongly wished to return to India, the country which I had always cherished as my true Mother-country and in 1914 this joy was granted to us. As soon as I saw A.G. I recognised him as the well-known being whom I used to call Krishna and this is enough to explain why I am fully convinced that my place and work are near him. In India."

On 30 March after her meeting with Sri Aurobindo Mirra wrote in her diary:

"It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance; He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

"O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.

"My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent."<sup>2</sup>

On Sri Aurobindo's side, what happened on his first meeting with the Mother is caught in the following report:

"Years later, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother who had just come back from the Andamans, asked Sri Aurobindo. 'The Mother has written in her Prayers what she felt after she saw you. But what was your feeling when you saw the Mother?' Sri Aurobindo thought for a moment and told him: 'That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender to the last physical cell was humanly possible; it was when the Mother came and bowed

down that I saw that perfect complete surrender in action.' ”

According to Anilbaran Roy, Sri Aurobindo later said:

“When I came to Pondicherry a programme was dictated to me from within for my Sadhana. I followed it and progressed for myself but could not do much by way of helping others. Then came the Mother and with her help I found the necessary method.”<sup>3</sup>

The Mother has stated their relationship more absolutely:

“Without him I exist not, without me he would be unmanifest.”<sup>4</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

### *References*

- 1 *Glances of The Mother's Life*—Compiled by Nilima Das & edited by K. D. Sethna, p. III
- 2 *Prayers and Meditations*, March 30, 1914—The Mother
- 3 *Glances of the Mother's Life*, p. 252
- 4 *Ibid*, p. 132

## SOME PERSPECTIVES OF THE SAVITRI UPAKHYANA

THE story of Savitri narrated by Rishi Markandeya to Yudhishtira appears as a minor episode or *upākhyāna* in seven cantos of the Book of the Forest in the Mahabharata (Pativrata Mahatmya, Chapters 293-299, Vana Parva, Gita Press, Gorakhpur). The immediate purpose of the narration seems to be the alleviation of grief of the eldest of the Pandavas, afflicted as he was by the sad helpless plight of his brothers and more so by the plight of their common wife Draupadi. This virtuous daughter of Drupada, the king of Panchala Desh, was born in the purity of a sacrificial flame and was radiant and beautiful like a damsel who had come from the city of the gods. Warrior princes and heroes from far and near lands were attracted by her bewitching charm, but among the suitors who had come to claim her hand only Arjuna in his shining valour could win her. Noble as she was, she always remained chaste and faithful in her conduct; she was learned and intelligent, she observed the sacred vows, she respected the elders and the wise, and she was a lady of great determination. Fate had in many ways humiliated her in life, and its wretched ignominy she had to suffer almost without end; the cousins of the Pandavas were only instruments in that cruel working. Even after the Eighteen-day War all her five sons, one each from her five husbands, were treacherously butchered by Aswatthama. But she, by her sacrifices for the righteous cause, was going to prove for the Pandavas a saviour and fortune-bringer. Issues far deeper than battles and kingdoms were involved in which human merits and misdemeanours were superficialities; in these Draupadi was a player who had accepted her lot with the strength of will that is born of a flaming life-instinct. Eventually the overmastering agents of evil and falsehood were exterminated and the rule of fair law established, though at a very high price. If she had emerged from the Fire-Altar, as is said to be, it is in it that the Past had to be consumed, the old Karmas of ages and all the Sanskaras put to flame. The Princess's sufferings were therefore poignantly characteristic of the great upheavals that shake up a society on the eve of a coming Era. In it a new Yuga, a new world-order was ushered in. Rishi Markandeya holds the same promise, perhaps even a more splendid promise, in the Savitri-example he prefers to give to Yudhishtira. The Princess of Madra, King Aswapati's daughter, had suffered greatly for her husband's sake and had won noble satisfying boons, including the exceptional boon of Satyavan's life, from Yama the King-Father Lord himself. Occult-symbolically, the God became the sun-bright giver of immortality to the Soul of Man on the Earth.

The Rishi begins the narration with Aswapati's worship of Goddess Savitri for eighteen years. He is issueless and his concern is to beget children for the continuance of his ancestral line engaged in performance of the sacred dharma;

hence he decides to undertake this long and arduous tapasya. Every day a hundred-thousand oblations he offers to Savitri even while observing the strictest ritual-vows during the entire period. The Goddess is immensely pleased by his devotion to her and approaches the Father-Creator Brahma to grant a son to him. But he is to get the gift of a radiant daughter and he is told not to have any uneasy feeling in accepting what has been sanctioned. When a baby-girl was born, she was appropriately named Savitri, given to him as she was by the Goddess Savitri herself. In course of time she enters into youthful maidenhood but, because of her fiery splendour, no one approaches her and woos her to marry. The father suggests to the daughter, as was the custom in those days, to seek a husband of her own choice. Accompanied by the elderly counsellors of the royal court she sets out on the missioned task. Savitri travels to distant lands in her unknown search and visits proud capital cities on river-banks, and holy shrines, and several penance-groves of the kingly sages. She offers her prayers to the deities in pilgrim-centers and gives away great charities to the learned and worthy ones as she moves in her quest from place to place. In the meanwhile sage Narad visits Aswapati and, as they are engaged in conversation, returns Savitri to the palace. She pays her respects to the elders and, on being asked by her father, discloses that in the forest of the Shalwa country she met Satyavan and it is in him that she has made her choice of a husband. But Narad, without a moment's pause, declares the choice of Savitri to be something accursed, and hence blameworthy. When solicited, the sage describes the wonderful qualities of Satyavan and also tells that the only blemish in him is that he is destined to die one year after the marriage. Aswapati suggests to his daughter to go on another quest, but she is firm in her resolve. She asserts that she has chosen him as her husband and that she would not choose again. Narad sees in it a fine luminous understanding and discernment, in conformity with the dharma, and recommends the marriage. In fact, he blesses it and wishes it to pass off without any ill-happening. Then Aswapati, following the age-old tradition, makes a formal proposal to Satyavan's father Dyumatsena and the wedding of Savitri and Satyavan is solemnised in the presence of the Rishis of the sacred Forest. One year is about to end and Savitri is greatly afflicted when only four days are left in the life of her husband. She decides to undertake an austere vow of standing for three days and three nights continuously at a given place, without taking food. On arrival of that fated day she worships the Fire-God and, after receiving the blessings from the elders, accompanies Satyavan to the wood where he has to go for his usual work. But, while engaged in cutting a tree-branch, he suddenly feels very tired and exhausted and begins to perspire profusely. Savitri takes him in her lap and reckons the coming of the moment foretold by Narad. Not too long thence, she sees standing there a bright God with blood-red eyes and with a noose in his hand. When Savitri asks as to who he is, he introduces himself to be Yama and tells her that, as Satyavan's life here is expended, he has come to take



away his soul. He then pulls out the soul forcibly from his body and, carrying it with him, starts moving in the southerly direction. Savitri follows him determinedly and offers him high and truthful eulogies in the strength of eternal values. In the process she receives several boons from him, including finally the release of Satyavan from the noose of death. On their return to the earth, they realise that the forest has already grown dark in the evening and that they must make haste to go back to the hermitage where the elders must be waiting for them with all the anxiety in their heart. Actually, Dyumatsena is very much disturbed and almost becomes unconsolable. But then the Brahmins and Rishis of the holy Forest assuage his fears and help him recover his composure by giving him comforting assurances. In a short while Satyavan and Savitri arrive at the premises and there is great jubilation. Sage Gautama, asserting Savitri to be the effulgence of the Goddess herself, possessing the knowledge of all that happens in the divisions of space and time, and beyond, requests her to tell the secret of their coming late, when it had grown so dark in the night; he knows that something unusual, something supernatural, must have happened in the woods during the day. Savitri reveals to them the several details, beginning with the prophecy of Narad about the death of Satyavan on that particular day, the purpose of her accompanying him when he went for the work, Yama's arrival and taking away his soul, and his granting her five boons including a long life of four hundred years for Satyavan to live with her and their begetting a rich progeny. Markandeya concludes the narration by saying that in course of time all the boons got fulfilled. In a like manner, he assures Yudhishtira, Draupadi too will carry the Pandavas across the shore.

Such in brief is the structural outline of the Savitri-tale given to us by Vyasa, a short composition of three hundred shlokas, mostly in Anushtubha metre, a creation belonging to the poet's early period. Compared with his own narrative using the Nala-theme written "in the morning of his genius", it is a "maturer and nobler work, perfect and restrained in detail, with the glow of the same youth and grace over it". We already begin to see in it the Poet of the Mahabharata proper with his austere and unornamented features, the verses lifted up by a robust and unerring intellect and the substance carrying the quiet compact strength of his style and diction. Whatever is there is most often poetically functional, holding to the dictum of manner shaped and formed by matter. But very rarely is this taken note of while renarrating such a difficult author's work; even departures are made at times in textual details that give quite an un-Vyasian picture, almost falsifying what the creator meant to convey. This bane of the vernaculars is pretty frequently transferred to the English versions also. Severity of the classical Sanskrit language, further heightened by the "pale and marble Rishi's" mountain-poise, is conspicuous by its absence in these effusive renderings; these tend to forget, or ignore, that the packed density of Vyasa's thoughts is indeed the quintessential feature of his style and narrative. Bearing its full

charge, the epic movement always courses with unhampered speed and momentum, reluctant to linger in purely lyrical descriptions. He alone, says Sri Aurobindo, could “paint the power of a woman’s silent love rejecting everything which went beyond this... There has been only one who could have given us a Savitri ” This tale has in it already the dimensions of a masterpiece, carrying the vision of a bright tapasvin who, though may appear seated far, is yet amidst us to impart the knowledge of the occult-mysterious. The seer-poet, with the impersonality of the Purusha, yet participates dynamically in the actions of the world, remaining “steadfast and unshaken by even the heaviest of storms”. The calm and sober manner of the original has to enter into any rendering if we are really to get the delight of this detached poetry; its rasa is not in the thickness of the honey, but in the unconcerned matter-of-fact flow of felicity bearing some luminous sweetness in its current. Let us take a few examples to see in contrast the difference between the art of a supreme aesthete of non-emotional grandeur and the easy facile way of retelling the Savitri-tale by others.

The following version from the children’s section of a daily has many merits and is worth narrating in full:

‘Ashvapati means owner of horses. In the days when a man’s wealth was measured by the number of horses, elephants and cattle he had, to be an Ashvapati meant to be rich. King Ashvapati was rich indeed. He was wise too. But he had no children. He and his wife practised penance and offered sacrifices in order to get a son. They meditated on Goddess Savitri.

The goddess was pleased with Ashvapati’s devotion, but out of the sacrificial fire came not the son he had hoped for, but a lustrous girl child. Ashvapati named her Savitri. This girl was to be the redeemer of two households—her father’s as well as her father-in-law’s.

When Savitri grew up, so great was her beauty, wisdom and accomplishment, that no man felt himself to be her equal. So no one came to ask for her hand. Her father suggested that she could indicate her choice. “Father, why don’t you let me go on a long pilgrimage?” she asked. It was a discreet way of finding eligible men, and her father agreed.

Accompanied by a sober retinue, she travelled far and wide. Finally in a forest she saw a young man hewing wood. The lustre of his body was such that she knew he was not born to that occupation. Enquiries revealed he was the son of a blind king whose enemies had driven him out of his kingdom with his wife and infant son. The grown-up prince Satyavan was the woodcutter Savitri saw.

She returned to her father and told him she had found the young man she wished to marry. At that time, sage Narada was present in the court. He was horrified at her choice. Ashvapati wondered if there were any shortcomings in the young man’s character. “No”, Narada assured him, “He has all the virtues a young man should have.” What was the objection then? Narada revealed that

Satyavan had only one year more to live. One can imagine Ashvapati's anxiety and confusion. Not only had his daughter chosen a man without wealth or power or prospects, but one without even the gift of long life. But Savitri's mind was made up. "A woman gives her heart only once," she declared.

The marriage took place. The royal princess went to live in the forest hut and looked after her husband and her parents-in-law with great devotion. Every one was pleased with her but no one realised the burden she carried in her heart. A couple of days before the appointed day of Satyavan's death she started observing a fast. On the fateful day, weak though she was, she sought permission to accompany her husband when he went to work.

In the afternoon Satyavan suddenly took ill and lay down with his head on her lap. Ominously the moments ticked away. Suddenly Savitri became aware of the presence of Yama. He whom nobody had ever seen was visible to her because of the power of her virtue. He politely told her that her husband's time was up and dragged his soul away. Savitri followed him through dense gloomy forests and refused to turn back though he repeatedly told her "Child, go back. Your time has not come yet."

Finally he offered her three boons but not the life of her husband. She asked for restored sight and restored kingdom for her father-in-law and heirs for her father. Yama agreed but she still did not turn back. Yama offered one last boon for herself as all her wishes had been for others, but not the life of her husband. She said she wished to see the happy and prosperous life of her sons. "So be it," said Yama unthinkingly. Savitri pointed out she could not have children without her husband. So Yama was tricked into restoring life to Satyavan.

Savitri's is a cherished name in India. Women observe fasts in her honour and pray for long life for their husbands. But as with all accomplished women in India, it is only her 'Pativrata' aspect that gets highlighted. This does not do justice to Savitri's many-sided personality.

She had the courage to be unconventional when she went out to seek her husband. She showed high spiritedness in opposing her father's will with her own. She showed fearlessness when she met Yama. She displayed generosity and large-heartedness in the boons she asked for. She gave so much to the household in which she had spent less than a year. She was the embodiment of all that men desire for themselves when they chant the Savitri or the Gayatri Mantra. She personified 'Dhi' or higher intelligence which in turn brings everything else—knowledge, material and transcendental, courage, fearlessness. All this Ashvapati's daughter had. After all, the element she came out of was fire.'

The narration is not only simple and absorbing but is also pretty faithful, though the shades and emphases at times are unacceptable because of their extra-textual irrelevances; in it we immediately notice that the dharmic dignity is more of an ethical-religious kind than spiritual—an element of preaching has

entered in, which does not permit the revelatory truth in its dynamics to emerge. In any case, this is a much better presentation than Kamala Subramanian's hurried assessment in her digested Mahabharata wherein she depicts Savitri as someone "who was able to outwit Yama the god of death by her wise talk and her devotion to her husband". Poor Yama! Nor does this make Savitri great. But why indeed ignore Savitri the tapasvini accomplished as she was in the Yoga of Meditation, *dhyānayogaparāyanā*, as the seer-poet tells us? People have made Savitri a social model. We may perhaps pardon Arthur Macdonell and John Dowson for this sin of theirs but not a good well-versed Indian. But first let us see how these Western authors give the Savitri-account in their brief introductions.

In *A History of Sanskrit Literature* MacDonell writes: "In the story of Savitri we have one of the finest of the many ideal female characters which the older epic poetry of India has created. Savitri, daughter of Asvapati, king of Madra, chooses as her husband Satyavan, the handsome and noble son of a blind and exiled king, who dwells in a forest hermitage. Though warned by the sage Narada that the prince is fated to live but a single year, she persists in her choice, and after the wedding departs with her husband to his father's forest retreat. Here she lives happily till she begins to be tortured with anxiety on the approach of the fatal day. When it arrives, she follows her husband on his way to cut wood in the forest. After a time he lies down exhausted. Yama, the god of death, appears, and taking Satyavan's soul, departs. As Savitri persistently follows him, Yama grants her various boons, always excepting the life of her husband, but yielding at last to her importunities, he restores the soul to the lifeless body. Satyavan recovers, and lives happily for many years with his faithful Savitri." The entry under "Savitri" in Dowson's *Hindu Mythology and Religion* has the following relevant material: "Daughter of King Aswa-pati, and lover of Satyavan, whom she insisted on marrying, although she was warned by a seer that he had only one year to live. When the fatal day arrived, Satyavan went out to cut wood, and she followed him. There he fell, dying, to the earth, and she, as she supported him, saw a figure, who told her that he was Yama, king of the dead, and that he had come for her husband's spirit. Yama carried off the spirit towards the shades, but Savitri followed him. Her devotion pleased Yama, and he offered her any boon except the life of her husband. She extorted three such boons from Yama, but still she followed him, and he was finally constrained to restore her husband to life." If Savitri had claimed back from Yama Satyavan's spirit, it seems necessary to get back from these authors the spirit of Savitri in its multifold richness given to us by Vyasa. This is particularly important if we have to live in the splendour of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* which is at once a legend and a symbol.

But it is unfortunate that some scholars, though knowing its dignity well, should have freely romanticised the tale while narrating it to audiences in the West. Let us read, for instance, a passage from one such lecture to see how amu-

sing it can be: "... Savitri didn't find anyone she thought was worth her attention until she came to a forest. In the forest there were some huts, and in one of them was a King who was dispossessed of his kingdom on account of his enemies getting the upper hand. He lost his sight and became blind, and, dispossessed of his kingdom and driven out of his territory, he was living in the forest outside his kingdom. The King and the Queen were, so to say, living in exile and their son was looking after them. Savitri thought that this young man was really an ideal young man, so she decided in her mind to select him as her future companion. She came back from her travel to report to her father. And when she came back, Narada, the great divine sage, was sitting with the King and Queen. They were talking when Savitri came. When the King asked her about her choice, she declared her choice and said that Satyavan living in the forest was the person whom she had selected. The King thought that it was quite right because it was her choice. But he asked the divine sage Narada: 'Cast this horoscope and see the position of the constellations in their future life and see whether this is happy'. So Narada cast the horoscope and said, 'Yes, it is all right. But there is one catch: this young man will die after one year. He is going to die after one year.' ...Savitri insisted that she was going to stick to her decision and take the consequences. The result was that they were married, and after one year the God of Death came and Satyavan died. But Savitri pursued the God of Death to his home in the upper regions or in whichever regions the dead go. And she persuaded him to release the soul of Satyavan. Satyavan was revived and they went back home." This may be a good story but it is not Vyasa's story as present in the original Mahabharata. It seems that the lecturer did not use the Sanskrit text but went by some secondary source when he introduced the legend to his American audience. Similarly, let us hear a part of another such version of the Savitri-myth. Yama has taken away the soul of Satyavan. "Savitri pursues the god of death and entreats him to return her husband; but he is adamant. As she follows, they come to a zone where there is a large river which no human being can cross. But by the sheer force of her purity of character she crosses the river, confronts the god of death, and prevails upon him to return her husband." Surely, these are not the versions used by Sri Aurobindo for his magnum opus.

It is true that there are any number of editions of the Savitri-legend, recounted differently in different regions, with local nuances adding to the confusion of interpretations. Poets of lesser caliber down the ages have often allowed fancy to run loose. The result is not very famous. If in one part of the country the day of Satyavan's death is observed to be the no-moon night, in another it is the full-moon. These free-hand exercises are often casual and Prakritic without the elevating sublimity of the Sanskritic and make the tale a puerile and insipid document of decadent practices. But when we are chiefly concerned with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* the safest thing to do is at least to follow Vyasa's original text. It has the dignity of substance, dignity of style, dignity of

delight—it has throughout a general overhead atmosphere. In it the idea-seeds of the spiritual perception and truth-knowledge are golden and bright. Even if the tale is to be taken as a kind of précis of universal metaphysics put figuratively in the language of a myth, it is also a sufficiently elaborate symbol carrying in its living and expressive details the power of occult workings of the transcendental in the mortal world. The flame-charge of the symbol is too esoteric, too sacred to be profanised. About it Sri Aurobindo writes: “The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Asvapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.” This mystic symbolism of the tale gets further corroborated by his remark made during a conversation of 3 January 1939: “I believe that originally the Mahabharata story was also symbolic, but it has been made into a tale of conjugal fidelity.. . Satyavan whom Savitri marries is the symbol of the soul descended into the Kingdom of Death; and Savitri, who is, as you know, the Goddess of Divine Light and Knowledge, comes down to redeem Satyavan from Death’s grasp Asvapati, the father of Savitri, is the Lord of Energy. Dyumatsena is ‘one who has the shining hosts.’ It is all inner movement, nothing much as regards outward action. The poem [*Savitri*] opens with the Dawn. Savitri awakes on the day of destiny, the day when Satyavan has to die. The birth of Savitri is a boon of the Supreme Goddess given to Asvapati. Asvapati is the Yogi who seeks the means to deliver the world out of ignorance.” Because it is the boon of the supreme Goddess, it has the sanction of the Supreme. It only means that great issues are presently involved in the creation and that they have to be dealt with by the transcendent Power acting in a decisive way. The operative phrase is “the day when Satyavan *has* to die”.

Sri Aurobindo has revealed the importance of the Savitri-myth by saying that it belongs to the Vedic cycle. It is not just a great tribute, but is an assertion of the Divine Word expressing itself in a new manifestive glory here. The fact that its structural outline can hold the profundity and the wideness, the twofold infinity of his spirituality, is itself a recognition of the substantiality of its

splendour. We must understand that, although it is a symbol, people moving in it are not algebraic substitutions of abstract characters, cartoon pictures jerkily portraying a cinematographic sequence; but they are dynamic personalities in flesh and blood shaping and fulfilling the drama of life: they are "...incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man..." The legend has therefore a certain historical basis as well, though may be not at one single point of space and time but spread over events in larger dimensions, yet all of them together unfolding the secret destiny. This is the Savitri we must accept and present and not the goody-goody stuff that is often given to us by the pious sentiment. It appears that the title of the poem as Pativrata Mahatmya was provided by the compilers-authors of the Mahabharata when they neatly incorporated it as a tale in the huge and cumbersome body of the Epic; it should actually be called Savitri Mahatmya to bring out the glory of the Vedic cycle it recreates in a new milieu to recreate that milieu itself in its spirit. The Word of the Rishi has that power and its object is to set out the universal Truth in the working of man and his soul, to achieve through its mantric utterance a concreteness of reality triumphing over all that opposes it in the worldly affairs, that it be the vehicle of the highest dharma, of the inner movement finding its way in cosmic modalities. Savitri Mahatmya can therefore be appropriately proclaimed as the tale of a decisive divine action in this evolutionary unfoldment. If it is to be considered as a book, then it would qualify to be the precious life-blood of a master-spirit.

When the poet becomes the seer and hearer of the Truth-Word, *kavayah satyaśrutah*, then through his creation we experience aesthetic delight of the spirit, we receive supreme revelation in a flame-body of the symbol he gives to us, a symbol that is more than an image. A good painter has two chief objects to paint, man and the intention of his soul—says Leonardo da Vinci. A good poet adds to it the expressive power of the ineffable transcendent, coming in rhythms of its calm and silent delight. Such indeed is the Savitri given to us by the Rishi. Nowhere in English literature is to be seen such restrained dignity and such poetic completeness as we have in this little episode. The theme is universal, the poetry is epic, the style is impersonal and bare, the diction is simple and direct, hardly anywhere an uncommon simile or epithet; no rancour against fate, no mad elation in the victory; the self-confidence of the heroine giving a solidity to the narrative; brief phrases packed with contents that at once summarise the achievements of a whole life; everywhere and through the subtle nerves flow quiet streams that sing of the nobility and grandeur of imperishable values, death-triumphant in their assertion; looks as though a well-faceted diamond were stuffed with a rare splendour, sometimes blue-shimmering, sometimes creamy bright with an orange tinge, shining in its natural brilliance, as does the sun spreading its gold of radiance; no fetish of poetry offering "criticism of life",

no abstraction of *l'art pour l'art*, no cerebration through a discovered objective correlative, nor any gushing of uncontrolled spontaneous feelings; its substance is spirit and its ethereality is material; the ends and the means fuse in one gleamingly suggestive manner; it has gains which need not be set against losses; death and life move in one fulfilment. Death indeed occupies a very large space in life, perhaps a disproportionately large space at the moment. That could be the entire meaning of things in this purposeful mortal creation, not a fixed settled unevolving glory or a spectrum of typical existences, but a quest to newer infinities that may come here and work themselves out in the unending Time's process. Death is truly an aspect of life, for it to become deathless life. That would remind us of Francis Thompson's lines from his *Ode to the Setting Sun*:

The fairest things in life are Death and Birth,  
And of these two the fairer thing is Death.

But this is not crucified Christ as a setting sun giving his beauty to death; it is another Satyavan, arising out of death, and luminous in the everlasting day, that we see emerging from the legend. It answers more than Nachiketa's query to Yama: "A man who has passed, does he exist or does he not?" If he exists, then Yama is not all that powerful; if he does not, then how is he there with him? This perplexing situation becomes clear only when we assert that he does exist but is bound by Yama, is under the sway of the Law of the mortal World. Death cannot dissolve him but can only cover him with a thick veil of darkness. As long as this death is there, thralldom is inescapable. Immortality of the soul is always incontinent, but its freedom or bondage, in life or after departure of the life-breath, depends upon the Yoga-Yajna performed on the earth. In the Aurobindonian interpretation of the Savitri-myth, even enlarging the original Vedic vision, this incontingency of soul's immortality has been fully claimed in life itself, thus making death dispensable, in fact as a starting prerequisite for the superconscient delight's existence here. That would make the operative phrase about the day when "Satyavan *has* to die" preciously significant.

To match with this mythic-symbolic substance is also its language. And the language of poetry has the supreme power to make that substance itself a living flame to set akindle in its splendour a rapturous heart. It bears with equal nobility the full sense of the aesthesis of the spirit. Not just the power of thought and artistic imagination but the power of a happy joyous expression, of saying what is at once seen and heard, the subtle truth-sight and truth-audition carrying together their power of giving to matter a bright-lustrous manner, to substance a lucid and apt style, harmoniously calling and echoing each other,—all that has come into dynamic play. In Vyasa's narrative we do not mark any climax or anticlimax, but there is a steady, almost unconcerned, flow from the source to its sea of calm emerald accomplishment. Where does this source of inspiration lie,



this Hippocrene of the Mystic? In the overhead and not in the underheart, not in the secret region behind the throbbing center of emotions, not in the psychic, but somewhere on the northern slopes of Mount Helicon, somewhere in the luminous hierarchies above the mind. The Word he receives that itself possesses in its fulgent intensity the tapasvin's austerity, snow-white and sublime in its grandeur. His sublime snow-white appears in thought, in phrase, in figure, in image, in idiom that is direct and extraordinarily bare in description. Truth, beauty, power are the elements of the classical art whose one supreme creator he was. Universal theme, tightness of presentation, trans-Longinian loftiness filled with the light of the sun make the myth a perfect expressive vehicle for the charge of the spirit. His was not a "dim religious light" in a Gothic cathedral, but a solar orb of golden mass spreading its radiance in the wideness of heaven. Alexander Pope's "there is a majesty and harmony in the Greek language, which greatly contribute to elevate and support the narration" is even more true for the ancient writers of India who used Sanskrit as the language of the gods, *devabhāṣā*. While this *devabhāṣā* lent itself to hymns and chants, to deep esoteric utterances, it also gave us revealing myths such as the victory of the Angirasas, or Indra's companionship with Kutsa, or the boons of Yama to Nachiketa, or the cosmic-transcendent strides of Vishnu. The very tongue is epic. Add to that epic majesty the power of mantra of the seer-poet and we have Vyasa's Savitri. All the attributes of the epic described in a text-book are present in this poetry: noble, heroic, pathetic, remorseful, tragic, lofty and benign, carried out in the greatness and sweep of a mind open to wider movements of speech and thought, bearing the rhythm of a dynamic life lived in the spirit, all in an astonishing perfection of the form. Savitri is a masterpiece in miniature. The story unfolds with the relentless force of a narrative. Bare, simple, direct, without embellishments, to the point everywhere, with casual mention of several qualities of the persons it is presenting, be it Savitri, or Satyavan, or Yama, or the King, or the Rishis of the Forest, whatever is needed is given with minimum detail. The scenes stand out vividly in front of us. The swiftness of flow is of the nature of a streamline, without whirlpools or turbulent patterns. The story begins by introducing Aswapati just in a couple of shlokas and proceeds rapidly from event to event. The manner of introducing Aswapati makes it subtly clear that there is some issue involved about which we should be deeply concerned. From the very word "go!" the tone is set:

Long ago in Madra there reigned a saintly king, devout and a follower of the dharma; he lived in the pious company of the Brahmins and of the great virtuous, and he was united with the truth, and had conquered the senses. Performer of Yajnas, presiding over charities, skilful in work, loved by the city-dwellers and by all the people of his kingdom, one who was absorbed in the welfare of everybody, there ruled the Sovereign of the Earth, named

Aswapati. Of a forgiving nature, one whose speech was truth, and who had subdued the senses, though he was so he had no issue; with the advancing of age this increased his affliction greatly.

With this confident ease the verses unroll and in their calm composed poise carry the poetry forward. The atmosphere is certainly not joyous-lyrical, but there is neither in it melancholy of the tragic though dealing with the theme of death in the blaze and youth of life. Its quiet gloom is filled with the warm shadow of the gods of heaven. There is everywhere the sense of sunlight diffusing in the darkness. The tears in mortal things gleam in the purity of a mountain-source and become pearl-drops aquiver with the life of the spirit. In the whole process the poet has accomplished an alchemic miracle. That is the power of mystic-spiritual poetry and Vyasa possesses it in full abundance. That is why the work endures across the spaces of time and does not get attenuated by exoteric considerations. When this power is absent, this power that comes from some deep and genuine fountain-head, also fails with it the creation, howsoever appealing it may look to a given temporal taste. The same substance, then, becomes pale and insipid, or turns into old wives' tale. This would immediately put in question Walter Pater's contention, though deserving a certain merit: "It is on the quality of the matter it informs or controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends." But poetry is written, a la Mallarmé, not with ideas but with words. Substance all right, but more than that the creative word. The same matter, the same sublime myth, when retold by different authors, always does not go home.

Take, for instance, Romesh Chunder Dutt's rendering of the Savitri-tale; by way of example, let us compare the passage of the original with the verses of Dutt pertaining to Narad's prophecy of Satyavan's death:

"Whence comes she," so Narad questioned, "whither was Savitri led,  
Wherefore to a happy husband hath Savitri not been wed?"

"Nay, to choose her lord and husband," so the virtuous monarch said,  
"Fair Savitri long hath wandered and in holy *tirthas* stayed.

Maiden! speak unto the *rishi*, and thy choice and secret tell."  
Then a blush suffused her forehead, soft and slow her accents fell!

"Listen, father! Salwa's monarch was of old a king of might,  
Righteous-hearted Dyumat-sena, feeble now and void of sight.

Foemen robbed him of his kingdom when in age he lost his sight,  
And from town and spacious empire was the monarch forced to flight.

With his queen and with his infant did the feeble monarch stray,  
And the jungle was his palace, darksome was his weary way.

Holy vows assumed the monarch and in penance passed his life,  
In the wild woods nursed his infant and with wild fruits fed his wife.

Years have gone in rigid penance, and that child is now a youth,  
Him I choose my lord and husband, Satyavan, the Soul of Truth!"

Thoughtful was the *rishi* Narad, doleful were the words he said:  
"Sad disaster waits Savitri if this royal youth she wed.

Truth-beloving is his father, truthful is the royal dame,  
Truth and virtue rule his actions, Satyavan his sacred name

Steeds he loved in days of boyhood and to paint them was his joy,  
Hence they called him young Chitraswa, art-beloving gallant boy.

But O pious-hearted monarch! fair Savitri hath in sooth  
Courtied Fate and sad disaster in that noble gallant youth!"

"Tell me," questioned Aswapati, "for I may not guess thy thought,  
Wherefore is my daughter's action with a sad disaster fraught,

Is the youth of noble lustre, gifted in the gifts of art,  
Blest with wisdom and with prowess, patient in his dauntless heart?"

"Surya's lustre in him shineth," so the *rishi* Narad said,  
"Brihaspati's wisdom dwelleth in the youthful prince's head.

Like Mahendra in his prowess, and in patience like the Earth,  
Yet O king! a sad disaster marks the gentle youth from birth!"

"Tell me, *rishi*, then thy reason," so the anxious monarch cried,  
"Why to youth so great and gifted may this maid be not allied,

Is he princely in his bounty, gentle-hearted in his grace,  
Duly versed in sacred knowledge, fair in mind and fair in face?"

"Free in gifts like Rantideva," so the holy *rishi* said,  
"Versed in lore like monarch Sivi who all ancient monarchs led.

Like Yayati open-hearted and like Chandra in his grace,  
Like the handsome heavenly Asvins fair and radiant in his face,

Meek and graced with patient virtue he controls his noble mind,  
Modest in his kindly actions, true to friends and ever kind,

And the hermits of the forest praise him for his righteous truth,  
Nathless, king, thy daughter may not wed this noble-hearted youth!"

"Tell me, *rishi*," said the monarch, "for thy sense from me is hid.  
Has this prince some fatal blemish, wherefore is this match forbid?"

"Fatal fault!" exclaimed the *rishi*, "fault that wipeth all his grace,  
Fault that human power nor effort, rite nor penance can efface.

Fatal fault or destined sorrow! for it is decreed on high,  
On this day, a twelve-month later, this ill-fated prince will die!"

Shook the startled king in terror and in fear and trembling cried:  
"Unto short-lived, fated bridegroom ne'er my child shall be allied.

Come, Savitri, dear-loved maiden, choose another happier lord,  
*Rishi* Narad speaketh wisdom, list unto his holy word!

Every grace and every virtue is effaced by cruel Fate,  
On this day, a twelve-month later, leaves the prince his mortal state!"

"Father!" answered thus the maiden, soft and sad her accents fell,  
"I have heard thy honoured mandate, holy Narad counsels well.

*Pardon witless maiden's fancy, but beneath the eye of Heaven,  
Only once a maiden chooseth, twice her troth may not be given.*

*Long his life or be it narrow, and his virtues great or none,  
Satyavan is still my husband, he my heart and troth hath won*

*What a maiden's heart hath chosen that a maiden's lips confess,  
True to him thy poor Savitri goes into the wilderness!"*

"Monarch!" uttered then the *rishi*, "fixed is she in mind and heart,  
From her troth the true Savitri never, never will depart.

More than mortal's share of virtue unto Satyavan is given,  
Let the true maid wed her chosen, leave the rest to gracious Heaven!"

"*Rishi* and preceptor holy!" so the weeping monarch prayed,  
"Heaven avert all future evils, and thy mandate is obeyed!"

Narad wished him joy and gladness, blessed the loving youth and maid,  
Forest hermits on their wedding every fervent blessing laid

Creditable and impressive as these couplets are, in them we also at once see the difficulty of the translator to render the majestic Anushtubha of the Sanskrit, with its quantitative basis of word-music and rhythm, into accented language which is so alien to the expression and spirit of the ancient seers and Rishis. Not only the substance and meaning, but also the measure and cadence of sound that is the soul of poetry defy translation from one medium into another. Romesh Dutt in this respect has succeeded in his endeavour in a way and it is no mean achievement to maintain it on such a long-sustained pitch and level. The song is vigorous and unstrained in its flow, with the natural ease of a streaming gusto. However, perfect as the verses are, they seem to roll out like well-made fiats from a modern factory, absolutely identical in shape and size and in performance, even their nose-colour and engine-throb repeating flawlessly. The translation is, as Enid Hamer would say, "spirited and musical, but the lines show the same tendency as Tennyson's to break after the fourth foot, and the whole technique is very similar" to *Locksley Hall*. The couplet, with curtailed eight-foot lines, can easily be broken up into an eight-seven-eight-seven syllabic stanza in trochaic metre with the falling rhythm as, for instance, in the last couplet of the above-quoted passage:

Narad wished him joy and gladness, blessed the loving youth and maid,  
Forest hermits on their wedding every fervent blessing laid.

Sounds more like a ballad-run or a Marathi Lawani in its loud hilarious question-answer session, a folk-tale dealing through a social theme matters pertaining to men and gods and nature. The composition is more lyrical than epic and, like happy flying birds, cannot, by that very lightness, accommodate thought in its substance and in its dignity for it to deepen and strengthen those very feelings of the song. The coming of the calamitous event is made known quite cheerfully and quite bardically; to adapt a couplet from the above-quoted passage, we could say:

Ho! Ho! It is decreed on high,  
Soon this ill-fated prince will die!

Not only are the reserves of sound absent, but even the contents robbed of their high genuineness, of their high purity and poise. The *dhwani*, the inner music of the language which gives to verses their poetry and which holds poetry together, is no more to be heard in it. We have to only listen to Vyasa and understand and appreciate what solid dense force he has put in that death-sentence. A whole world of meaning and mystery is packed in the sixteen-syllabled announcement: Satyavan will in one year from today abandon his body, his life here expended, *samvatsareṇa kṣīṇāyurdehanyāsam karīṣyati*. The sentence is pronounced in the active voice and has the ring of authenticity of a marvellous power that judges and governs our life's many-wending ways, assuring that Satyavan *has* to die one year hence. It is brief and direct; there is no hue and cry, no sourness, no sentimentalism, no quarrel with anybody. Romesh Dutt gives us not Vyasa's Savitri but a Bengali Savitri; as Sri Aurobindo commented in a conversation, he portrayed her as weeping whereas in the original epic there is no trace of tears: "Even when her heart was being sawn in two, not a single tear came to her eyes. By making her weep, he took away the very strength on which Savitri was built." In his hand English has as if become another Indian vernacular. The moral is, the sixteen-syllabled Anushtubha cannot be converted into a trochaic fiftener howsoever close it may seem to the original. But, more importantly, it is the spiritual inspiration that here matters the most. Not that all great Sanskrit poetry is so, nor do all spiritual compositions give us such poetry; but Valmiki and Vyasa are at first poets as much as they are, unlike Kalidasa, Rishis and the underlying aesthesis of their poetry is overhead.

The first quality of this Rishihood we recognise in Vyasa is his wonderful sense of detachment, even while remaining in the midst of life's activities. His art, says Sri Aurobindo, "is singularly disinterested, *nuskāma*; he does not write with a view to sublimity or with a view to beauty, but because he has certain ideas to impart, certain events to describe, certain characters to portray. He has an image of these in his mind and his business is to find expression for it which will be scrupulously just to his conception. This is by no means so facile a task as the uninitiated might imagine; it is indeed considerably more difficult than to bathe the style in colour and grace and literary elegance, for it demands vigilant self-restraint, firm intellectual truthfulness and unsparing rejection, the three virtues most difficult to the gadding, inventive and self-indulgent spirit of man. The art of Vyasa is therefore a great, strenuous art; but it unfitted him, as a similar spirit unfitted the Greeks, to voice fully the outward beauty of Nature. For to delight infinitely in Nature one must be strongly possessed with the sense of colour and romantic beauty, and allow the fancy equal rights with the intellect." Romesh Dutt saw in Vyasa only that which is not in him and gave a vernacular version of it in a shout of sentiment.

Narad's proclamation of Satyavan's death is a great imponderable in the Savitri-myth. But what is clear is that it is Satyavan who is going to abandon his

body and others are universal agents in the deep and occult play. There are conflicting forces, and there is fate, and there is the circumstance in the working of Time; yet the individual's free-will is the primary factor in moulding and shaping his destiny. Of course, very characteristically, Vyasa does not speak of these metaphysical factors in his little narrative. but it is neither the ill-fate nor the decree of the high that the sage is highlighting. He is making a very simple and plain statement, and true to the process of life, about Satyavan's own decision to leave this body. It is spoken of as *dehanyāsa* and not *mṛtyu*, not meeting or falling to death but giving up the body. There is no helplessness or succumbing but in it a self-mastery and choice in freedom of life are indicated by the seer-poet. In fact, the connotation of *dehanyāsa*, Relinquishing of Body, as a profound voluntary act is almost Yogic and a great esoteric-mystic aspect of it is brought out through this fine truthful phrase. If we are to believe in the body-gestures, *mudrās*, *nyāsas*, as a part of the deistical worship, then giving up the body itself becomes a worshipping gesture in totality of renunciation.

If *dehanyāsa* is such a masterful phrase given to us by Vyasa, then we at once recognise the loftiness of his poetic conception achieved through a very highly developed art which becomes a vehicle for carrying the overhead inspiration. We have here an astounding result, a miracle indeed: not small or unworthy but large and serene and consistent in its quality is the idiomatic development suffused with and made enduring by another breath. In this creative and expressive aesthetic achievement not only inspiration and technique but the presence of things deep and wonderful, although at times seeming to be tragic and remorseful of life's failure, occupy a larger space in the poetry, giving to it its real value. In that way does the creator bring a satisfying completeness to Art, putting his own stamp of greatness on it. There is no doctrinaire approach, no fetish of a theory; but it is the work of a forceful artistic urge which finds the inevitable and inspired word to tell and assert the genuine experience it brings with it and embodies it in perfect form. A Johnsonian critic would be extremely happy with Vyasa, but he goes far beyond the Johnsonian canons and seizes in his line and metaphor the glowing intensity of a realised utterance. In him there is no tendency of massing of an effect; there is only the discovery of a dense word that releases from its warm rich womb multiple suggestions more in a vertical than horizontal direction. We may perhaps appreciate the merit of Vyasa's art better in terms of the values, and not mental conceptions, he upholds most. "Art is not only technique or form of Beauty," says Sri Aurobindo, "not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty—it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or, to put it otherwise, there are not only aesthetic values, but life-values, mind-values, soul-values that enter into Art... In Valmiki and Vyasa there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare..." Thus more appealing, even





..Come, thou mortal wretch,  
 With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate  
 Of life at once untie: poor venomous fool,  
 Be angry, and despatch.

There is nothing austere here; instead some imperial glow of life's passion illumines more than destroys the nobility that stands above death in death. There is tension and drama but it is so intense and so dramatic that it, by a strange mechanism, becomes totally impersonal. At once the breath of a tall life-god gathers into its oceanic lungs the power of a vibrant spirit, imperious in will and impatient in reaching the violent end, and yet acts in a sense of supreme abandonment. The poet in an exceptional moment of intuitive vitality has objectified the life of feelings without getting touched by those feelings. The subjective does not muddle up the objective. The song of saddest thought has in it the majesty of unconcern which makes it a song of sweetest cherishment. It is not the personality of the poet that we see in this poetry; what stands out is rather the great personality of a universal force that takes shape and emerges from this life-world in its unsurpassable creative urge. The purple anger is commanding, grand. Cleopatra had immortal longings and she fulfilled them through one life-stunning despatch of the infallible fool. But it was not Cleopatra who did it; it was some archetypal aspect of overlife that embodied itself and accomplished the death-and-life transcending wonder. If we are to see it in the reverse, then it looks as though the remarkable queen had no emotion but possessed only the intent of doing and achieving something she had set out to do and achieve in the greatness of her queenhood, making that death too queenly great. She has immortalised a quintessential life-mood in concreteness of the terrestrial gain. To what we attune ourselves in this suicide-poetry is therefore the noble unconcern, *niṣkāmahāva*, of the poet. He himself becomes impersonal, yet allowing the stream of some impetuous energy to flow through him. We do not get the joy, *rasa*, of the same detachment in, say, Duncan's murder in Macbeth's castle. Lady Macbeth wants to be unsexed and filled with direct cruelty, that with the help of murdering ministers, she would let a hell loose in her design of ghastly ambition. And the poet is true to the occasion, that the thick blood dripping from murderous hands could make a whole green sea red. Yet the dead body of Duncan, ugly and mutilated by infamous agents, would not really frighten us; instead, it is made more living by the power of poetry. Still, this power is not splendid enough to lift it up from the royal couch that it may wear a beauty's face. Even the simplicity with its richly suggestive compliment in

After life's fitful fever he sleeps well

makes us doubt if indeed he slept well enough when the fever had run down.

Poetic identification-mark of a total detachment is still not very distinct on this corpse's forehead. In that respect the Cleopatra-passage stands far above the Macbethan incarnadination. It is a supreme achievement of the poet becoming completely impersonal, a most difficult job in the riot and colour of life's million moods. The artist has portrayed a very violent event, but the unquietude does not seem to touch him. The object is not swallowed up by the subject and vice versa. He has taken hold of a skylark to pour all his unsung melodies and yet remained the grand witness Purusha of the ancient Indian psychology, a dispassionate judge who does not tamper with evidence in a complex case. Indeed, in a certain manner of speaking, we may say that no great art is possible without the sense of true detachment, not only classical but also dramatic and even romantic. Not only poetry but every art perhaps. Then the statue of the Buddha carved in a rocky mountain loses itself and becomes some infinity of calm, as does the marble Radha-Krishna in the Brindavan of Bliss. Monet's painting of his dead wife still in the bed also greatly belongs to this superior class.

But the *niṣkāmahāva* of Vyasa is altogether of a different quality than that of Shakespeare. He is a poet of men and empires and is seated in the midst of warring heroes and hears the loud deafening battle-cries, yet even in this rough-and-tumble his Rishihood remains rooted in the strength of the spirit's dynamic silence. The bright lustre of a steady fire glows in him everywhere, even while participating energetically in the dramatic action of the world; but he has the detachment of a true spiritual aesthete, "being steadfast and unshaken by even the heaviest of storms", as the Gita would say. That is why we see in Vyasa a constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements. With that power he can become a moulder of a society and of a nation, things which are unquestionably beyond the capacity of Shakespeare. To put it in other words: Vyasa's sense of detachment is a Rishi's whereas Shakespeare's aesthetic-vital; in the one *niṣkāmahāva* has brought out soul-values and in the other, by a kind of channellisation, life-aspects.

In fact Vyasa's Savitri is a *tria juncta in uno*, written on three levels—as a piece of poetic composition narrating a tale, the tale used to illustrate and establish truth-values in life, the legend and the myth taken on an occult-cosmic scale. A great luminous power of revelation is released by poetry when it becomes paradoxically the speech of sight and the image of sound seen and heard with subtle senses attuned to invisible and inaudible perceptions of things that are eager to take form of some flaming beauty in a body of truth borne by the authentic delight of a splendorous urge. In the tranquil receptive blank of the seer-poet the Word arrives from distant shores and delivers its riches that are carried to deeper interiors making them rich with its own wonders. When Vyasa speaks of Savitri as *dhyānyogaparāyanā*—Adept in the Yoga of Meditation—Satyavan as *guṇasāgara*—Ocean of Merit—an epithet of Brahma himself—Yama as *pitrarājastām bhagavān*—King-Father Lord—the saints guiding the sun,

upholding the earth, giving refuge to the three divisions of Time, and protecting the world, or the incantatory verses about the divine Savitri, or Savitri's growing like Goddess Fortune—*śrīrvyavardhata*—or the epic details like the bifurcation of the path in the forest at the group of *palāśa* trees, or Savitri's trembling with fear on hearing the cruel howling of the she-jackals, or the repeated assurance of the Rishis to the afflicted Dyumatsena, or the aphoristic utterances that abound throughout the narrative—in all these not only do we perceive the overhead atmosphere pervading the poetry, making it also classically sublime, but there is as well the pure-white solidity of substance elevated to calm poised dharmic heights. Charged with several minute particulars as the tale is, a whole system of social philosophy can be, without much effort, gleaned from it. Take, for example, Aswapati as a king and as a father: he was saintly in nature, devout, and a follower of the dharma, lived in pious company of the Brahmins and the virtuous; he was engaged in performance of Yajnas, gave away great charities, ruled over his kingdom wisely and with skill and hard work and had the welfare of the state at his heart; he respected the elders and the learned; always accepted and followed, even in the extreme situations of life, the advice of the high-souled; considered as a part of his duty the continuance of the ancestral line important, basically for the performance of the dharmic sacrifices; attended to the upbringing of his daughter and arranged for her all-round development, thus fulfilling the fatherly responsibility; that Savitri was well-versed in the sacred lore and was highly qualified in logic, reason, speech and the rules of grammar, and was one who did all her actions in the serene poise even while holding the excellent tenets of life firmly, indeed certify how properly her parents had brought her up; Aswapati was of a forgiving nature, always spoke the truth and strictly observed self-control and good abstinence and gave himself to moderation; even when Narad made the prophecy of Satyavan's death, he remained unperturbed and accepted it as the will of the Supreme. Many other incidents that have come in the course of narration in this small tale also drive home well the nobility in which the ancients lived and pursued their high goals, not only on the earth but in life beyond too. And everywhere the master-touch is "infinite and lends a yonder to all ends"—to use Meredith's phrase. In the vision and work of a Rishi man's twofold need always finds satisfaction in a most complete way. He maintains the harmony between the life of an ascetic and of a householder, each fulfilling the other. The aim is to achieve perfection in the world as much as in the state after death. The claim of the spirit and the claim of matter present no conflict to him. That was the Idea-Force which had urged Vyasa in this great creative endeavour; in it he did business with men and gods. To uphold dharma and social order is a working translation of the Gita's conception of *loka-saṁgraha* for the individual developing self-consciousness in the dynamics of the day-to-day. Even though noble souls may suffer in the process, that itself, on participation in the endeavour, becomes their reward. The gods and the sages

help mankind grow in the dharma, which is in fact the law of the inner being in perfect accord with spiritual truths. That is the work of supreme sacrifice, of the offering of the will-to-be, of the bright Yajna dear to the creator and to the builders of society cherishing enduring values. The foundation-stone is laid high above and it is on it that here the entire edifice is built downward. Of this temple-tower Vyasa was one luminous builder. It was because he could possess the total sense of detachment, *niṣkāmbhāva*, that the impelling force came to him from the inherent potency of the Word which is not only descriptive but also injunctive and revelatory.

We may appreciate the significance of the injunctive aspect of the tale better from what Śrī Aurobindo has written in a larger context regarding the old Vedic tradition that was carried forward by the poets of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. "The poets. . . wrote with a sense of their function as architects and sculptors of life, creative exponents, fashioners of significant forms of the national thought and religion and ethics and culture. A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea runs through these poems and the whole ancient culture of India is embodied in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation. The Mahabharata has been spoken of as a fifth Veda, it has been said of both these poems that they are not only great poems but Dharmashastras... That which was for the cultured classes contained in Veda and Upanishad, shut into profound philosophic aphorism and treatise or inculcated in Dharmashastra and Arthashastra, was put here into creative and living figures, associated with familiar story and legend, fused into a vivid representation of life and thus made a near and living power that all could readily assimilate through the poetic word appealing at once to the soul and the imagination and the intelligence." The Savitri-tale is also written entirely in the same epic spirit and bears witness everywhere to the mission it purports to accomplish as a fine document of Dharmashastric ideals in moulding a social philosophy

But of supreme importance beyond poetry and the concerns of society is the third term of *tria juncta in uno* bringing with it the revelatory power of the Word. It is said oftentimes that in the Veda the Word itself is the speaker and that it alone explains itself. We have to hear its sound in the deep hush of the heart and allow the meaning to emerge in the wideness of silent mind. If the tale of Savitri belongs to the glory of that Vedic attainment, then, surely, it too must be received in that very special way by which it was given. It possesses in its secret and esoteric symbolism the gleaming contents of a transcendental truth that has formulated itself by occult means seeking self-expression here. It is a pregnant legend delivering to us the profound mystery of existence in the world of death; it bears the breath of a superconscient awakened life that from every limb of the mortal creature may radiate the same immortality which it carries with it. But even if the tale is to be taken as a simple narration of a historical event which

might have happened somewhere and sometime in the far legendary past, it yet escapes all association of space and time and assumes a permanent universal significance without losing touch with them in its and in their dynamics. The pragmatism is a recognition of the law of Life by Death through which Life sans Death should be possible. The dark riddle of the world may be complex but is certainly not insoluble and is waiting for the conscious light to brighten it from within and from above. If in the enigmatic unforeseen there is a meaning, perhaps it has to be discovered in this possibility of an adventurous experiment in delight. Vedic parables are always rich in several hues of a basic truth-principle operating in the play of forces and have the power to actualise the realisable. Savitri belongs to these. And there is always the benign hand leading and guiding a true aspirant to his goal of sunlit immortality. Take, for instance, Rishi Kutsa who by his tapasya had become Indra's companion and favourite and had acquired such similarity with him that only a luminous perception could distinguish between them. About it Sri Aurobindo writes: "The human soul is Kutsa, he who constantly seeks the seer-knowledge, as his name implies, and he is the son of Arjuna or Arjuni, the White One, child of Switra the White Mother; he is, that is to say, the sattwic or purified and light-filled soul which is open to the unbroken glories of the divine knowledge. And when the chariot reaches the end of its journey, the own home of Indra, the human Kutsa has grown into such an exact likeness of his divine companion that he can only be distinguished by Sachi, the wife of Indra, because she is 'truth-conscious'. The parable is evidently of the inner life of man; it is a figure of the human growing into the likeness of the eternal divine by the increasing illumination of Knowledge." The Lady of the Rik, *nārī*, who could not distinguish between the God and the human Aspirant as they had grown one in likeness, *sarūpā*, has been suggested by Griffith to be Kutsa's wife; this interpretation can stand but hardly does it add anything spiritual to the contents and Vamadeva, the Rishi of the Hymn, would not have bothered to mention it. However, it is an interpretation which is far superior to Sayana's suggestion in which this Lady is taken to be Sachi; but that would immediately deprive her of the native truth-consciousness she always possesses. Indeed, though the human soul may grow in the likeness of the divine soul the two yet remain distinct, though one in identity yet separate. The individuality of the individual in the infinity of manifestation is a fundamental fact and, unless the soul decides to merge and go out of existence, ever remains so. Kutsa's taking a seat in Indra's chariot and accompanying him was in the pursuit of immortality and not for disappearance. The Kutsa-Indra parable belongs to the set of the two Vedic-Upanishadic birds on the same tree, or of Nara and Narayana of the Puranas, or of the later-day Aitihasic human Warrior and the divine Avatar on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Everywhere the soul, instead of losing itself in the oversoul, gets enriched in a shining and superior oneness as the first basis for carrying out its role in the divinity of manifestation to

enjoy Truth and Light and Life's incontinent immortality. But if that immortality has to be functional in the wide terrestrial scheme, another cosmic-transcendental dimension of the infinite has to emerge. The Satyavan-Savitri myth has that suggestion in its lustrous Vedic symbolism. Satyavan's death is the death of the Immortal in this mortal creation whose travail he had come to bear that, through it, it be got changed into fullness of the fourfold beatitude. The arrival of the process of Time at the precise moment, the presence of Savitri as the executive Will behind this transformative action, and the granting of the boons as a sanction of the Supreme have as if designedly come together to accomplish this exceptional miracle. The birth of Goddess Savitri as Aswapati's daughter in response to his ardent prayer born out of intense tapasya of eighteen years, Narad's prophecy of Satyavan's death at the end of one year of the marriage, getting back the soul of Satyavan fit to do her work on the earth,—as Yama had told Savitri,—and their taking the path towards the north at the bifurcation near the group of *palāśa* trees are greatly connotative of momentous happenings. There is no doubt that, in his far-reaching intuitive vision, the Rishi saw all these as a clear image of the sun in a tranquil lotus-pond at the foot of the ancient Hill. That makes the poetry too as marvellous.

Aswapati had offered every day a hundred-thousand oblations to divine Savitri with the objective of receiving a boon from her to have several sons for the continuance of the holy Yajna. The boon is granted, but he is told that he would get an effulgent daughter and that he should not have any hesitation in accepting it. Already a high intention is seeded in the tale and the events have to develop with assured rapidity towards the unrevealed purpose and end. Again, most unexpectedly, Narad comes and makes an announcement of Satyavan's death exactly one year since then: *sarṁvatsarena kṣiṇāyurdehanyāsaṁ kariṣyati*. A luminous imponderable has appeared on the scene and Narad, perhaps "concealing the truth with truth", declares of it in a very definite way. He does not cast the horoscopes of the two young souls and mark the conjunction of the stars to foretell their future. Instead, carrying the knowledge that only one year is given to them, a mighty force is put by him in the decision Savitri has already arrived at; he had come to "steel" her will. But why one year? Is it a mystery to the sage as well as to the seer-poet? Or do they have the sure intuition of a higher working which prompts them to state it so? The period of one year, namely, one full cycle of seasons in the earthly time, is very pertinent for the great purpose of the story; so also the exact hour and moment of death which Savitri reckons when Satyavan is about to die in the forest. But the year is symbolic and the hour is symbolic. About it Sri Aurobindo tells: "... in the Puranas the Yugas, moments, months etc. are all symbolic and it is stated that the body of man is the year." Therefore abandonment of the body, *dehanyāsa*, at the end of the year, *sarṁvatsara*, is the abandonment of the year itself. Satyavan leaves the scales of time and steps into some larger dimension where death would have no hold on

him. If this is true, then we begin to see the power of spiritual poetry with its occult and living symbolism; we also begin to appreciate how the poet is consistent everywhere in his descriptions and notations—obviously because it is not by the method of ratiocination that he reaches it, but it is by direct spiritual contact, by the truth-sight that he sees the whole thing in one single wide glance. Equally significant is the mention of the group of *palāśa* trees; again, the poet is not simply luxuriating here in epic details for the satisfaction of some aesthetic demands. The *point d'appui* is the significance of the flower of this tree, not the botanical *Butea Frondosa*, not even the very poetic and appealing *Flame of the Forest*, but what the Mother sees as the *Beginning of the Supramental Realisation*. Satyavan asks Savitri to take the path turning towards the north at the group of *palāśa* trees, north, *uttara*, conveying again not only the northern but also the upward direction, superior, surpassing, excelling in every merit:

Near the group of *palāśa* trees the path bifurcates and moves in two different directions, take the one which leads to the north, but now speed up –

tells Satyavan to his timid as well as pretty and bright wife, *bhīrū*, *śubhā*, asking her to hasten the pace for reaching the hermitage without further delay, to join the parents and the Rishis.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

## AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—IV

NISHIKANTO (KOBI) ROY CHOWDHURY

### A man who walked in his shadow

HE IS an exception to the series of “Among the not so great”. For, long before I thought of writing on him, he was great and well-known. He was commented upon by our Lord Himself. He called Kobi (Poet) a “Brahmaputra of Inspiration”! I was and am overawed and I nearly shied away from writing on this giant of a river, I, who may just be a trickle privileged to run for a short while along the banks of this Brahmaputra. A fond hope or wish that something may rub off led me on. Moreover did I think of a rarer part of him not much discussed or written about? I cannot say anything about his poetry. You could find out about that from Bengali literateurs like Nirod-da, Jugal-da etc. — or better still find out what our Master said of him. The part of him I speak about is not so well-known, more down to earth business, where we met and enjoyed each other’s close encounters.

Nishikanto was just Kobi for us (no “DA”-appendage). Kobi was not an inspiring figure to behold. The head seemed too narrow towards the top. It was covered with long hair hanging in curly locks, well-oiled. The nose too long and straight to enhance anything but itself — it even tilted ever so slightly upward. He sniffed in a bit of snuff — that didn’t help matters. Round cheeks that gave him a “baby” look. Mouth usually ajar — to help intake of oxygen. This help was needed to combat a chronic cold, a nasal blockage. Narrow sloping shoulders atop an immense pot-belly completed the picture. No redeeming feature it would seem. But what of the eyes? They were large, dreamy, benign and smiled at all he saw. And what did he see? Certainly more than what most of us see. He was a poet, a seer, a visionary. He often walked down to the “old Balcony” (Ashram) at an hour when for us the Mother was apparently not there. Surely he did not go just to see the Balcony. It is said he could see the Mother there.

Let us now travel back down the corridors of Time to Shantiniketan. Kobi spent a few years there. Rabindranath Tagore was there. They could have revelled in each other’s poetry (if they would). Kobi was at that young age (and till the end) not only a great poet. He was also an excellent painter and a good cook and lover of good food and plenty of it. Many of the escapades then and later, and their effects on his body, had their cause and beginnings in the cooking pot. The earliest exploits I know of were at Shantiniketan. He had an able companion and conspirer in his brother Shyamakanto.

The first story starts with the Shantals of the area. They had killed a tiger. The two Kantos heard of it and hurried to the Shantal village. They bargained,



pleaded, coaxed and got one of the hind-quarters of the tiger, smuggled it home, set about cooking this choice piece of meat. They boiled it a long time, yet it was tough, sort of chewy. By then the news got around — the Kanto brothers were eating a tiger — “tiger-eating men”! All were horrified. Some tried to dissuade them from this ultimate “carnivorism”. But the two would not let such a bargain go waste merely because of the queasiness of a few mere men. Finally the Guru himself — Rabindranath Tagore — had to intervene.

The next gastric outing was at the expense of one of their neighbours. That young man planted a coconut seedling, tended it lovingly. The plant grew into a tree. The first flowers, then the fruit appeared. The care doubled. He planned to offer the first fruit to Gurudev. The nut grew, and grew, under the dotting eye of the owner. Then, one day he noticed that the fruit seemed to be shrinking. The next day showed a further wasting away. The third day the alarmed man went up the tree and to his dismay found a hole on top of the fruit — all the water gone! I leave you to guess who drained the fruit (from the top) — certainly not gravity — though the episode had some gravity (for the owner).

Nishikanto broke on the Ashram scene in 1934. I say “broke on”, but it was nothing of the sort. No one broke on the Ashram scene then or now. There was no fanfare or garlands. The contrary was nearer the truth — at least in those days. Kobi arrived and had to stay a few days on the footpath in front of the Ashram, awaiting Sri Aurobindo’s permission to enter for Darshan or for joining the Ashram. He sent word “Up” through Dilip-da (Dilip Kumar Roy) about himself and his intentions. A few days later Nolini-da came out, and talked to him. The following is a gist of their conversation.

Nolini-da: So you want to stay in this Ashram?

Kobi: Yes, Sir

N: But do you know this Ashram is not like other Ashrams you have been to. Here great and equal freedom is given to all — boys and girls, men and women alike. You have not seen the like before. It may go against your sensibilities and moral standards. That will not do.

Kobi: (*Just heard and digested — no comments, no answer. Then slowly*) Yet I would like to stay here.

He gave me the above conversation to counter and silence some remarks I had made on his sense of morals — all this half in jest — a dig and counter dig we often had.

I knew Kobi from the early days i.e. 1945-46, just as an elder, who was a friend of my uncle. He dropped in, at our house, when invited for lunch on some special occasion. We had heard Kobi was a great poet and a great cook. My uncle too was a good cook and scholar. They got along well. To my aunt he was just “Nidra Moham” — sleepy face — because of his dreamy eyes. What interested us children was his eating. He ate with deep-felt delight. Once he was served hot vadas (what the Bengalis call *bada*) on his banana leaf. He liked them

well as they slipped down his gullet. Thinking of reliving the experience he quietly slipped some into his kurta pocket. My sharp-eyed uncle caught him in the act and, "Hey, you fool, they are oily. They will ruin your kurta." Kobi smiled sheepishly and reluctantly stopped filling his pocket. My aunt brought him a can to fill and take home. He was so glad.

He had, as most of us do, several photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in his room. But, unlike most of us, one of the Mother's photos was always smudged with a patch of oil. It was called "Mecho-Ma" — Mother of Fish. The oil patch was from his well-oiled hair, where his head touched in pranam as he prayed to her: "May good and big fish be caught today. I am going to the market to buy some."

He was inducted into our group (now 'group D', at that time 'group C') sometime in the late fifties — for his abilities as a cook. (No sports for him, his body couldn't and his mind probably wouldn't ) It all started like this. Our group went to the Lake for a daylong picnic. In those days the Lake was considered a beautiful enough, far enough and rare enough place to go for a day's picnic! Times and values have changed. Kobi was taken along. He naturally took charge of the kitchen. Breakfast was simple and frugal — a round bun with condensed milk or butter and tea. Tea was made in a big — very big brass vessel. Some miscalculation — and quite a quantity was left over. It would be a pity pouring it to the plants — what to do? A problem? — Not with Kobi around. He just cooked the "Dal" for lunch, in it. We were none the worse for it. Kobi was then and there adopted by our group as an honorary member. He wore grey shorts, sleeveless banian, attended the Mother's distribution (ground-nuts etc ) standing in our line. All the groups stood in a line, each in its place along the perimeter of the Playground. The Mother walked in front of the lined groups and with a wooden ladle gave the ground-nuts into our cupped hands. We had to tell Her "plein", "moitié" or "très peu" (full, half or very little) and She would give accordingly. Kobi was not keeping well (we will see later about his health). He had not to specify. She gave "très peu" every day as "prasad" only. Kobi wanted more than just "prasad". He went about the procurement very methodically. He stitched himself a bag from a "Kurta" sleeve. Then contacted some sympathetic children (mostly girls — they always were afraid to eat well) who would normally ask for "très peu" or "moitié" and told them, "Ay — tora roj plein nibi (ask for full every day). He then stood with his bag at a pre-arranged spot. His suppliers would drop into his bag the extra they got from the Mother. This well-knit net-work served him well — for some time. The Mother came to know of it and quietly put an end to it. Later Kobi's health deteriorated, his quota was further reduced to just ONE nut. It is said "prasad" should be in such quantity as not to even reach the stomach. It should be absorbed before that! Kobi now realised how true the saying was. From that deprived stomach welled up a couplet: "Play Grounder Madam — aar dayna badam" ("Playground's Madam,

no longer gives ground-nuts"). Such was the situation, not going Kobi's way at all, when one day a rare treat was in the offing for Distribution. Instead of the usual ground-nuts, large round chocolate-covered biscuits wrapped in colourful silver paper were piled up on the Distribution tray. That day the Mother was in a hurry, so the groups formed two parallel rows facing each other. The Mother walked in between giving away alternately left then right. Kobi's sixth sense warned him of the approaching events — so he planned ahead. He asked two of us boys to close up. He himself stood a step behind stretching out only his joined palms through the gap between us, his two conspirators. He hoped thus to elude divine detection. On came the Mother. She came fast not looking left or right, gaze more turned down, only placing the chocolate on our joined palms. Kobi shrunk himself as much as possible. He stood a very good chance it seemed. The Mother picked up a chocolate, was about to place it on these disembodied outstretched hands. All on a sudden She stopped — in mid-action —, looked up. Oh Goddess! it was complete disaster. Kobi got all muddled up, his mind was, for once, benumbed. All he could blurt out, in desperate tones was, "Mother, Mother, I will take it in milk." The Mother broke into a beatific smile — and all was saved — She placed the chocolate in Kobi's eager palms.

Of Kobi's kobita (poetry) I can't say anything but of his paintings I could venture an opinion. To me he was one of our best artists. I have rarely seen him paint, (maybe only once) but I have seen his paintings, mostly of Nature. He used to walk to the Lake long before we ever did and roam around the countryside in those days when much of it existed — it in fact started right from the Boulevards' (North, West and South) outer edges. He was slow, slow as can be and, with those large 'seer' eyes of his, must have drunk in slowly and deeply all that beauty, come home and transferred it onto canvas. His paintings were heavy. He painted layer on layer and took a long time over them. They had to be kept on heavy stands and so they were. They would be ruined if dismantled from the stands. (Wonder where they are all now?) Later he stopped painting. I asked him: "Why don't you paint? You are not too well and can't roam around. You have time on your hands. I will help you gather the materials." He said: "Aar na!" ("No more") I asked why. He replied, "It takes a great amount of concentration, thus energy, and I have not much energy." He was already suffering from quite a few ailments.

1956 — Kobi never was in full, good physical shape. He suffered constantly. Only the degree of suffering varied every few days. When he first arrived he was told by Nolini-da that if he stayed here, he would have to undergo great physical suffering. Fame too would not come his way. But if he chose to go into the wide world, he could achieve fame (as a poet). He chose to stay here. Later even in great pain, he would say that it did not matter (the pain), for it is the Mother's world! We could only admire him, helpless, unable to do much to alleviate his pain. Some time in 1956 or 1958 his diabetes became acute. He went into

diabetic coma. Dr. Sanyal pronounced that the end was near — maybe a few days! Everyone had given him up. But some spark which did not register on the doctor's instruments nor on his "know-how" was there. That took over where the doctor left off. He came out of the coma and improved. Bed-ridden he needed constant help. His sister, Aparna, arrived and looked after him during the day. Some of us boys were called in for the nights. We talked deep into the night. He told us tales, tall ones and true ones. He told of his escapades, hilarious encounters with other men, ghosts and doctors — often heavily spiced with unmentionable comments. He could bowl us, young men, over on our own 'home-ground' (of speech and thought). He did not modulate his voice, raise it in excitement, no gesticulating — nothing. All would flow, slow and steady in a husky monotonous drone! Yet he held us captivated, as he did all who came into contact with him. He held us, but himself, eluded us. His sister protested, saying, "The doctor has forbidden so much talking." He replied "Dactar ki jané? ("What does the doctor know?") I am talking with my group boys," and continued. He recovered enough to move about indoors, and later to come outdoors.

One morning after the Balcony Darshan I noted Kobi standing at the back edge of the crowd that was funnelling itself into the Ashram. He was smiling, I noticed, at someone in front of him. I approached and asked "What's so funny?" He pointed in front of him — Khoda-bhai and Mr. Wellinkar were having a tête-à-tête. Their "têtes" often shaking in the negative. Their talk was audible to us. The topic was the general condition of their diabetes and the hard time coping with it (diet restrictions etc). Kobi said: "Hear them. A simple diabetes and so much palavering. What if they had, like me, a whole catalogue of problems?" He was amused by their negative head-shaking and the mutual concern evinced on their faces.

Once when he was ill again, again seriously enough to cause concern, he asked to be taken to see the Mother. He was taken on a stretcher to the Meditation Hall and laid at the foot of the stairs. The Mother came down and looked long at him. He could not rise but prayed to Her to press her foot on his chest, and She did so. What a sight it must have been! What a feeling for Kobi to lie under Her foot! Again he recovered, was up and about (at his same old speed i.e. 2-3 km/h).

Kobi had to undergo the group medical check-up. He was already playing host to various illnesses. A new doctor happened to be checking us. The gentleman looked Kobi up and down and asked, "What have you got?" Kobi in his slow, somnabulist tone started reciting, "Diabetes, high B.P..." then thought better of it and said, "Doctor, ask me what I haven't got. I am a zoological garden of bacteria." Kobi had in fact high B.P, acute diabetes (ants would swarm to wherever a drop of his urine chanced to fall. His night-pot had to be islanded by a ring of DDT), TB, thrombosis (leg or somewhere else), ulcers, the

usual cold. The doctor was completely lost. Mona (Captain) or someone stopped him before he ran out to consult his big books, reassured him: "It is OK to give a cursory check-up, for the rest is already taken care of." Now, who took care of the rest? Many a doctor can claim to have been Kobi's caretaker — rightly so — from their point of view and level. But what Kobi himself knew and most of us believed was a bit different. Why did we think so? The following should justify these thoughts.

Jipmer came up and many of our more serious cases were taken there. The doctors, who came to know Kobi, loved and respected him, but could hardly fathom him. He was admitted in his now habitual condition — flat on his back. He was x-rayed, probed and percussed — the usual reception you get in a hospital. He joked and talked with all around him, doctor, nurse, me, etc. as if it was someone else undergoing all this. He was finally wheeled into his ward. The condition was not very good. The high B.P. and diabetes were taking their toll. Darshan was a few days away. The Mother would appear on the new Balcony. Kobi wished to have the Darshan. The doctor gave a firm "No" and said, "You can't be moved in this condition." Kobi persisted. The doctor was friendly but would not budge. Then Kobi struck on one of his "hallowed" plans. He told the doctor, "You sit in the car with me and hold my wrist, feel the pulse. We start for the Ashram. If you feel any deterioration (in the pulse) we turn around and back to bed. But, if no change, then we both have the Darshan of Mother." The doctor gave in to this simple, strange solution to the impasse. He probably thought it an easy way out — he was in for a surprise. The car was brought and off they went, a strange duo — a smiling sick man and an anxious doctor, holding hands it seemed. As the car approached the Ashram, Kobi's smile grew broader, the doctor's eyes wider, amazed. The pulse got better and better. The Mother appeared and both had Darshan. Their hearts were full, the doc's mind felt empty. Both went back (to Jipmer) the richer by the experience. Such was Kobi — always down, never out!

We have seen now Kobi the poet, the painter and the cook. He relished cooking and relished too what he cooked. But may none make it out that his main occupation was cooking and eating. These were only two of his outward activities — most visible to most of us (and understood by most). Probably the greater part of his activities were inward oriented, not suspected, not felt by the casual onlooker. (Like the writer who had a hard time convincing his wife that he was actually working when just looking out of the upstairs window!) Maybe my story shows much of Kobi's outer and more surface facets. Those who would, could look elsewhere for a deeper look into Kobi-da.

He carried on for nearly four decades with the same sleepy smile, slow of pace and speech. The ups and downs (mostly downs) didn't seem to affect him greatly. He seemed much the same in 1945 as in 1970. Yet his playing host to so many illnesses had a telling effect on him. The decline was slow but steady. The

body was giving way, but not the spirit. He quipped even in the presence of Yamaraj. He used to say, “Bujli Batti, Jom niyé gechhilo Dékhé bollo — é niyé kí hobé — aar phirod niyeshché!” (“Batti, Yama took me, had one look and said what to do with this wreck and returned me.”) Does this sound a sad and discouraged Kobi? Not when you heard it from Kobi. You rather felt he was patting Yama in sympathy. Having lived so close for so long with Death, there was no room for fear. Yama came when he wanted, and Kobi quietly slipped away with him. This was on 20th May 1973. Someone called me to his room. He was having breathing difficulty. Some others were there, a doctor too. We tried to ease his pain by giving an oxygen (or air) bag (much like a bag-piper’s bellows. You put a nozzle into your mouth and gently squeeze the bag to pump air into your lungs). Feeling better he told me to go have dinner and come. When I returned he was gone — to lay himself down again under the Mother’s feet — to a greater awakening!

He used to say, “Batti, I am going to die, but I will come back here. Do find me a nice, young, healthy couple who can bring me forth here.” Suggestions were given, maybe he has taken one. “Look out,” he said, “for a boy with big eyes and a penchant for sweets.”

Twenty years or more have passed — yet can we measure our Kobi? His mind dwelt in and drew inspiration from some higher world. The light he lived in we could not see, but he threw a shadow, we saw the shadow. I suspect now, that he never stepped down from his heights to meet us, just stooped to conquer. So lives Kobi, a seer, in our minds, a dreamer in our dreams. The mighty Brahma-putra flows yet along the little streams.

*(To be continued)*

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

## ABSTRACT ANALYSES ABRIDGED

### What External Worship can lead to

WHEN we externally worship Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in their photographs or in their Samadhi or in any other way, our sincere worship, in time, changes into the inner adoration; the true Bhakti then starts. This Bhakti deepens into the intensity of love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and brings us the joy of closeness to them. This joy of closeness can pass into the Bliss of Union with our Divine Parents. When that takes place, our heart which always is wiser than our mind gets its true rank. Mind registers the heart and manifests it in life. All mental faculties and mental mechanisms become the expressing agents of our heart's will. The heart's wisdom becomes distinctly manifest and obvious. Mind comes into the complete control of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Consequently it shares their Bliss. Eventually the whole being becomes one blissful person centred upon Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

### 'Time'—a Concept and an Approach

'Time' strikes the human from his birth and consistently strikes him till his death. 'Time' enters a man's life when the conception takes place in his mother's womb and leaves when his heart stops. Between the birth and the death, 'Time' is the ruler. 'Time' is present in every beat of the heart and remains until it beats no more. 'Time' germinates and 'Time' terminates. 'Time' is creative, formative and destructive. 'Time' torments and tortures. 'Time' triumphs and becomes a torch. 'Time' 's play is tricky in many ways because 'Time' does not always rhyme with life. 'Time' creates prime problems in life because 'Time' is also an executor of Karma. 'Time' is the force that evolves the soul. 'Time' works the aging processes and 'Time' causes the delay in fulfilment.

'Time' (T.I.M.E.) is the Truth In the Mother's Eternity,<sup>1</sup> put into play by Her, but 'Time' being tricky leaves no clue as to when it began and how it began. It is perhaps as old as space but no one knows as to when space emanated from the Mother's being of light, for, when it emanated, 'Time' had not yet begun—'Time' is a dimension of space<sup>2</sup>

However, the point is: from where does 'Time' come on earth? It remains guesswork until we have spiritual knowledge. Perhaps the Sun is the concentration of earth's 'Time'. 'Time' is projected on earth through sunlight which creates day and night to measure by 'Time'. The Sun's radiations seem to dictate the earth's time...

When there were timeless ages on earth, 'Time' had suspended the creative activities to the minimum. Since there was no movement and action on earth.

earth looked timeless. But 'Time' was always present on earth because earth always received sunlight

### What is the Spiritual Age of Eternity?

At no stage of time and at no stage in time, can this age be ascertained or identified because however far we move backward in time and however far we may have moved forward in future time, the only clue we get is that eternity is always beginning. The concluding point that follows this constant beginning of eternity is that for eternity 'Time' has a static meaning: an eternal present-tense. 'Time' comes into the picture only for all creations that flow from eternity's eternal beginnings. Eternity is the maternity of 'Time' but itself is 'Timeless'.

### Should we fear Sri Aurobindo? Can He be Taken for Granted?<sup>3</sup>

To fear Sri Aurobindo, the ultimate supremacy, is not wisdom but foolishness because Sri Aurobindo is love and love should not be feared. On the other hand not to fear Him does not mean that we can take Him for granted. If we willfully go astray out of ignorant courage, we pay for it spiritually and He will not intervene. His responses and interventions come only if they are sincerely aspired for and called. If we go off the track we may miss the bus and it may take many lives before we catch the same bus again. We pay heavily for our insincerity and for missing an opportunity offered by Him. He offers no concessions here. He does not budge from the divine laws that He has created. If there is no sincere effort to do Sadhana according to the directions laid down by Him, there may be no escape from the original Karmic destiny.

Having lost the chance in this life, a person could be drifted away by his own Karma in many more succeeding lives before he could board the bus again. No one goes scot-free from the Karmic clutch, no matter who he is, merely by becoming a so-called devotee or an inmate of the Ashram. Karmic formation in the Ashram does not get suspended. Perhaps with prayer, faith and devotion it gets altered or reduced in intensity. It can be positively checked by a sincere continuous attempt of self-giving to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But Karmic laws of operations and formations continue if we do not avail ourselves of the spiritual opportunity offered. There is no protection from more Karmic layers covering the psychic being if the freedom given is not used for doing Sadhana. While for such cases this life may become a wastage, Sri Aurobindo transfers these specimens into His laboratorial experimental list. Using them as a medium He sends powerful forces into the world to influence the types each such specimen represents. One way or another His influence penetrates the world to effect world-change. But once these types leave their bodies they have no chance of return until they answer the demands of their Karmas.



### **Can the Mother be Taken for Granted?\***

Conditioned by our earnestness, our hefty and persistent endeavour, conditioned by our receptivity, the Mother, who does Sadhana in us based on the conditions mentioned above, may fail to take up the Sadhak completely if the revolt and opposition have too much sway over him. If a Sadhak fails to give himself to the Mother's leading and expects the Mother to yield to the conditions of his own making, then he attracts defeats and delivers a self-blow to his spiritual life. Destiny is the decree that will go on striking the Sadhak with its own designs derived from a Sadhak's past lives and times, if he fails to make honest, genuine and earnest efforts to do Sadhana. If it is so fated that he has the set-up of a peculiar nature that contradicts the conditions of Sadhana, the Mother would surely intervene to change him or overrule the karmic problem, but only if he sincerely pursues the path of self-giving by making earnest efforts in this direction. She responds, she does not drive the Sadhak. Karmas are the challenges in the Integral Yoga to be fought and conquered by the principle of surrender to her. Without karmic challenges the Integral Yoga would cease to be adventurous. The whole of humanity is caught and held in karmic confines. If in the Ashram we are successful in rising out of karmic compulsion, the whole of humanity would be benefited because the Ashram is the epitome of the whole world. When the Integral Yoga is accepted as an adventure, all problems become challenges and with every conquest we are rewarded with joy.

We therefore should not submit ourselves to our karmic shortcomings because the abundance of the Mother's grace is available for us to overcome them. If we fail to do so and permit ourselves to be pawns in karmic hands, then in spite of the tie established with the Mother in this life, in spite of our soul carrying her emanation with it, we will recede into the karmic circulation of births and rebirths, away from her, until we can reroute ourselves back to her. We would take a lot of time to return to her because it would need the exhaustion of karmic excesses which cause karmic imbalance. It would be a slow evolution through the karmic experiences as against the fast progress that is ensured by the Mother's grace. However, if once, once in this life, the psychic being of a Sadhak, piercing through the karmic cordon, expresses and announces through mind and the vital being a categorical statement, "I do not want to be what I want to be but I want to be only what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother want me to be", such a powerful utterance would enable the Mother to save the psychic being from going into the karmic circulation of succeeding births and rebirths in ignorance. Sincerity that sums up aspiration, honesty, earnestness is the key. When this projects from the psychic being into the outer person, it leaves a powerful stamp even if it recedes into the background for the rest of one's life. The return to the Mother is ensured in succeeding lives.

### **The Life Divine, Savitri, The Synthesis of Yoga**

To a technological age, which always is in search of explanations for life, and which throws a challenge to all explanations which are religiously oriented, the core books by Sri Aurobindo, namely *The Life Divine*, *Savitri* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, give the answers. They explain in intellectually satisfying ways which are not only understandable, plausible and logical but also motivating and uplifting. To the truly searching heads and hearts who are open to the new approaches, the purpose of existence will at last be clear. This is so because although these books are not science-texts, they mystically hold the messages of science and mysteriously reveal the valuable lessons of physical research. These books cannot be ridiculed or resisted by the true scientists. For them *The Life Divine*, *Savitri* or *The Synthesis of Yoga* would appear self-evident if they chose to go through them, for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will give all the needed revelations.

*Savitri* may be too mystic for many intellectuals. For those who are part of the advanced science group *The Life Divine* tells all that they have been searching for in the context of life and existence. These exploring scientists feel somewhere deep in them that there is more to existence than a life victimised by mortality. Therefore, not satisfied by the confines of the terrestrial realm, they unconsciously divert themselves by seeking for the clues of existence in outer space. *The Life Divine* gives them all the clues that indicate that earth contains in essence all that exists in space and all that will be created in space. It also reassures them that mortality is not an inevitability, and mind is not an end in itself. They will also realise that although mind on its own level can go on in endless progression horizontally, there is a much greater certainty in mind evolving vertically—a movement in which mind can grow into supermind.

### **Pinpointing the Problem of Suggestions in the Integral Yoga from Different Angles**

In the Integral Yoga, many are the victims of the suggestions that come from adverse or alien forces. The suggestions can cause emotional hell for the sadhaks if they are successful in getting hold of them. They are successful because we listen to them. They are successful because having listened we believe them. They are successful because we are not firm in our faith in the Mother. We should be determined in our mind not to listen to or believe what they say, we should be firm in our conviction that even though they may be convincing to the ignorant mind, they are false, because they are the products of masters of frauds, and so should not be given credence. Ignored, they would eventually lose their force and disappear.

But there are other tricky and subtle ways by which these fakers operate. Without our knowing, they make their inroads into our mind. Once lodged

there, by their promptings they make us misinterpret, misunderstand and misapply what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said and written. Having done this, they create rigid blocks of misconceptions in our mind. These fallacies are created in such simple forms that we believe them to be the truth. Then these misconceptions get rigid and push themselves into the subconscious. From there they can have a better hold on us to disturb and delay our progress. Some enlightened parts of our mind may try to convince them that they are incorrect but their rigid structure will not budge. These “inputs” of the falsehood-fellowship granted by the school for scoundrels, driven into our subconscious mind can have their hold on us for a lifetime if we do not psychically detect and defuse them. These “inputs” ingrained in our mind are really great obstacles to our progress because they are complex and cunning compositions of a malignant falsehood. These “inputs” are prejudices harboured in the brain as its integral part, constantly “outputting” themselves into functional, crooked concepts with the support of subconscienting strengths.

To those who are powerfully caught in the web of these suggestions the remedies are to repeat constantly the names of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and loving and constant service to the Mother. Devoted work diverts the mind to the Mother and is very useful. However, if we had had the firm faith in the Mother from the very inception of the Sadhana, it would have stalled the entry of such suggestions or stopped them going deep into our subconscious. So categorical and emphatic should be our faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that doubts that are debtors to devils would consider it prudent not to press their suggestive proposals on us. As the Mother said, “Cling to Truth.” The Mother is the embodiment of the Supreme Truth. When we cling to her with arms of faith, trust and confidence, her arms enclose us. No power then can do anything to us because we are clinging to the Mother as a helpless child always safe in her arms.

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The whole issue of the success of suggestions in the Integral Sadhana arises because by habit we go into the substance of suggestions and try to evaluate them. Having so evaluated them we try to prove them wrong by arguments. This puts us right in their clutches. No one ever won an argument with them because suggestions are not amenable to reason. They can tighten their grip on us because by trying to argue we have accepted them in principle. To give any importance to them would mean giving them an entry and giving them a right to return. Massive attacks of suggestions become possible because we have not attempted to abandon the suggestions altogether. Viewed optimistically and positively, in Sadhakas’ spiritual life on the lines of the Integral Sadhana, a tenure of suggestions is an inevitable necessity for many. It is so because conquest of this problem causes a definite clearance in the being; new ground is

gained for the Mother in the *adhar*. Conquest of the problem of suggestions has a positive association with an important aspect of the Integral Yoga, namely, the clearance of the subconscious.

JAGAT KAPADIA

### *References*

1 "In its fundamental truth the original status of Time behind all its variations is nothing else than the eternity of the Eternal " Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p 362

2 " Time could be a dimension of Space necessary for the complete action of Energy " Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p 360

3,4 "If your desire is ignorant, unconscious, obscure, selfish, you increase in yourself ignorance, unconsciousness, obscurity and selfishness, that is to say, you move away more and more from truth and consciousness and happiness, away from the Divine Each time you put material things in front of you, you become more and more material, you push behind more and more the Divine you have bartered truth for falsehood " (The Mother)

## TOWARDS THE FUTURE

### A HOMAGE TO SRI AUROBINDO

*SAVITRI* as a mere legend has no importance for the future. What we need is to realise its inner content and its full meaning as a symbol. Based on this conviction I am working on a full script in a futuristic setting of the year 2020. Aswapati, a renowned physicist, announces his retirement at the peak of his career—on the day he receives the Nobel Prize. He retires to his native country India to seek a spiritual breakthrough within. “So far science has explored matter, now with the help of yoga it can explore Spirit too.” He represents the whole of humanity, the aspiration of the human race to conquer suffering and death.

Ashwapati is in the inner Chamber of Matrimandir. The Divine Mother reveals herself and promises to take birth as his child. When he comes out of his meditation, he is alone in the Chamber. The shaft of sunlight slowly wavers, flows and forms itself into the shape of a little girl-child dressed in futuristic attire. The child floats down to her “father”... She grows up in Paris, to become a biochemist who over time discovers the means to conquer all known diseases.... except death (which alone resists a material and psychological means of conquest).

One reason for this modern symbol is, when we use the Mahabharata characters and try to give them whatever symbolic meaning, the masses relate it to the past experience (because of their mental fixation on physical appearances and forms) and they can't identify themselves with the present. Here our aim is to bring the sense of the One Divine in All into the present state of consciousness and to allow it to take a leap towards the future Transformation which is inevitable in the Earth-consciousness.

Yet another reason is that we are going to present it as a scientific adventure, an imaginative story of science entering into a sense of the Spirit by the year 2020 and exploring it through the characters of Ashwapati and Savitri. So naturally we can't show get-ups of the Mahabharata which is 5000 years past. We have to give a 2020 look to the characters and sets. For this reason we can take the Mother's own Dream-city of future humanity, the cradle of the Superman, AUROVILLE, “a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity” as our backdrop, assuming it will be ready in the 21st century to establish Human Unity.

There are Sri Aurobindo's own words referring to his epic poem, *Savitri*: “...Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.”

This is actually the story line for a film conceived in '94 when I was in Bombay, which I am aspiring to produce by the year 2000. Meanwhile to see the response from various lovers of *Savitri*, I am planning to do a play for Aug. 15, '96, as a Homage to Sri Aurobindo, "TOWARDS THE FUTURE", in which the presently existing 32 nationalities of Auroville will take part "as a symbol for Peace in the City for Human Unity," which will realise

That to feel love and oneness is to live  
And this the magic of our golden change...

Any suggestions or opinions are welcome to Matrimandir Camp.

SHIVA VANGARA

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## AUDITOR

I HAVE lost the Balance Sheet of life,  
But the balances stand  
In the file of my unknown Auditor.

I know not my debtors  
Nor my creditors  
Nor the outstanding liabilities.  
I am looking for my Auditor  
So that I can pay my debts,  
Write off my debtors  
And return the loan capital  
To the Original Lender.  
Then making the expenses  
Proportionate to the receipts  
I can have a NIL in my books

Then I can sit back and smile  
Or can visit the place of business  
Without any obligation;  
Until then, I have to keep looking  
For my unknown Auditor.

D.L.

# CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

*(Continued from the issue of June 1996)*

## Triune Unison

As soon as he arrived, I could sense it; something was different this day. His voice was firmer than usual—it roused me.

“Come out of your reverie, Halio,” he called “Now we move on to another phase. Let us get on with the purpose of the day, shall we?”

Taking me by the hand, he held me at arm’s length and said, “Let me look at you again—your eyes tell me everything. Ah! I can see the animals mirrored in them. They just cannot forget you, either. You are Earth’s Flower Halion for them—I heard them chatter on about your visit, a great event—when I happened that way.” And with this, he positioned my consciousness onto the level where he wished it to be for now...

“Come, we will sit by the river over there.” His eyes, full of light, sparkled even more than usual. There must be a reason for this, I thought.

“Halio,” he began, “I consider that the gift given you of visiting Auropolis was the very experience you needed to learn first-hand of what is in the offing for the future of earth. I hope that you realise this, hmm? This was the essential element needed in addition to what you had learnt until now... The knowledge of Auropolis is yours which is a crowning gift to me as well. Boundless is my gratitude to the great Mother of Love for this, and for all She has opened up to you and me. If I read your eyes aright, the same is written there.”

“Yes, Christalis, She lives in my heart, and there I talk to Her when I am alone, and Her reply reaches me in so many wondrous ways... As for yesterday’s event, every second of it lives within me... conscious of Auropolis of Omnipole waiting for us... I call to it to make us its own.”

“In time, Halio, in God’s good time.”

He stopped talking now, but the light in his eyes told me that there was more to come from his treasury.

“Would you mind, Halio”, he said presently, “if I left you here for some moments. I shall be back in no time. You will be quite safe here,” he assured me. “Here, at the foot of this hill, I thought you would like to watch the river and the water-birds whilst I am gone. I know their sight will make you happy.”

“I would love to do that; rivers and birds are my precious friends. I could watch them endlessly.”

“Yes, I do know, Halio. This is why I brought you here. I’ll be back before long.”

I looked about me, over the lush blue grass soft as velvet, whispering in answer to the tune of the river’s gently lapping sounds. My eyes travelled around, feasting on this unimaginable loveliness manifest in everything I looked upon... the trees, the gardens laid out in lovely designs. I recalled the ones I had seen yesterday round those unforgettably-shaped houses that shifted slightly toward the rays of the sun... And I, from the earth, sitting here, sighed with gladness that all of these would be ours to enjoy one happy day.

I wanted to tell it to the birds: “Dear flying friends, won’t you come near me and share my joy? Won’t you let me talk to you? I am so happy to be here!”

I called to them, but they replied—“Not without permission, earth’s Halio, maybe later on... We will ask Christalis. See, he is already returning.”

Flapping wings, swimming, floating, rocked by the ripples of the waves, delicate long-legged creatures coming closer in answer to my call, hoping for permission.

“I was not long, was I?” He sat near me; then, turning to the bird-people, “Not just now, dears, but you may stay around,” he told them and how glad was I for that!

Yes, something was different this day, I saw that light again in his eyes. He was silent, concentrated, and as I looked at him I thought: here love is before me turned into light.

“I have received permission,” was all he said, looking ahead of him, remaining silent. I too kept quiet—happy to be where I was, happy to be in his company, content to be watching those graceful birds. I was about to ask him if they would be allowed to talk to me later, when I noticed someone in the distance coming, it seemed, in our direction

I held my breath, because I knew that I could not meet anyone here—maybe it was a messenger from some other place. I looked toward the approaching figure with expectation. Christalis said nothing.

“What beautiful person is this coming toward us? She moves gracefully as a swaying flower in the breeze. Beauty personified!”

She stood before us. One hand raised in greeting, she called, “For Joy, Christalis!” then turning to me, “For Joy, Flower Halio!”

‘It is a Goddess of no ordinary rank,’ I said to myself. ‘Her voice is the music of silver chimes when the wind makes them sing.’

“For Love, Aureole!”—Christalis rose, and in like fashion returned the greeting—“The sun is shining upon this meeting, you carry its rays in your hair. This, then, is Halo, whom you wished to meet. Won’t you come closer and join us to make this circle whole?”

I was astounded, this was utterly unexpected. No word came to my lips, but my heart was singing, I heard it call, “For Glory, heaven’s Aureole!”



I looked to Christalis: “Who is this beauty, how do I know her name—I only just heard you saying it a minute ago ”

“Your soul knows her name, she belongs to our circle of service. Aureole, like myself, came in answer to your call. She also is born to fulfil your dream. Not so, beloved one? Come, let us join hands and ask for the blessing of the High.”

My love for her was instant. With hands joined—a garland of souls dedicated to a high purpose—we stood. The force of grace in answer to our call came pouring down in waves, making us a unit of its Will—these two of heaven, 1 of earth.

“Dear Halio,” she addressed me, “allow me to put this flower in your lovely hair, I brought it for you, see how happy it is to come to you.” She placed it there, its fragrance was truly wonderful.

“Thank you, beautiful one, but may I ask, as we haven’t met before, are you too lotus-born, like my sweet friend Christalis? I was present at his coming, you know! My life has changed since that time.”

Rays of affection came from her sunlit eyes toward me: this was a bond, I knew. She smiled radiantly—“Unlike Christalis, I am rose-born at sunrise.”

“Rose-born? How wonderful! Remarkable!” I exclaimed. “What marvel is this? I do not know of such a birth. Is that what it is?”

“It is that, but the time of its opening is appointed by the Great Mother, as she gives direction to the tasks for which we come. Your aspiration on earth, Halio, and ours here, are one... to serve the re-creation of the world. Thank you for calling us.”

I did not know what to say. This knowledge was one of the gifts that came to awaken my poor earth-mind and to enrich my soul. ‘Lotus-born... rose-born... birth by aspiration—oh, but why are we so poor, why are our ways not like this?’

“They will be, one day they will be, loving mother, earth’s Halio. Now we are three... a glorious unit, don’t you see?—and there are others, many more.”

She leaned toward me, took my hand, placed it into the waiting hand of Christalis. “You see the bond remains safe in his hands. I have to return to my work, Halio. We have met, we are linked by the Light and that is good.” Then she added in passing, “Christalis and myself... we shall be coming down.”

Turning to go, she lingered just for a spell to smile at Christalis. The light from his glorious eyes entered into hers... “Yes, we shall be going down.... For Love, Aureole,”—he waved to her.

“For Joy, Christalis, and Earth’s Halio,” she said... and he again: “Together we shall serve.”

“For Glory,”... I added .. “in Their name.”

They turned to part; she toward the hill, Christalis toward me, but there was no separation in this parting. This was a union unbreakable and I was part of it.

Heaven’s sun shone above us full gold in the sky, bathing the horizon in its

light... a moment of grace in God's time. The words echoed within me, "For Joy... for Love," and my heart answered—"For Glory for Earth... For Earth's..."—over and over again.

I felt Christalis touch me and heard faintly, "We must return, you to your garden below and I to my work. Can I leave you there?"

"Not yet, Christalis," I begged him—"please let me stay a little longer, all this is too sudden, far too overwhelming for my poor earth's heart. I fear it may break from all this happiness."

"Rest then a little, dearest, but really I do need to go. Come, I will help you, but do you not see your body and your garden waiting for your return? Come, make them happy too."

"You are right, take me back to them then, heaven's great. I am ready now."

Everything was vibrant inside me still. I would not let go of it! I musn't! I flung myself upon the earth full length and hugged it to my breast till it hurt, wanting to melt into it, to give all that I had brought down with me for it to keep.

I must have lain there for a long time, my body was aching when I stirred. I opened my eyes slowly. The sun was coming up, it must be morning. I clambered onto my feet and looked about me.

"Where am I, where are they? Where did they go? God of my soul, why did they leave me?" The voice of Christalis brought me to my senses—"Take my force, go back into the house, why are you lying there?"

With effort I staggered toward the door, the smell of the awakening garden told me it was daybreak. I turned toward the horizon—oh there is our Sun! I saw the orange-gold disk rising majestically and I raised my arms to greet it...

"Great Light, shine upon our lands, give us your life-giving warmth, illumine our souls!"

I remembered the bond, the high union—and making a conch of my hands I called—"Flame-child, Christalis... Rose-born Aureole, come to us soon! Please come!"

From afar yet so very near came their reply—"We will surely come."

Taking heart, I went into the house and bent down to kiss my Christopher. Smiling in his sleep he opened his eyes a little, then shut them again still smiling.

"Wake up, my darling, the sun shines upon another day. Today is harvesting time, we go out into the field, the children will be waiting..." He sat up looking at me, not quite back from his sleep, and there was light in his eyes.

"Mother," he said, "I have seen a wonderful dream... and it was true."

"Yes, darling," I said softly. "It is true, it is very true." Embracing him, I rocked him in my arms.

"Yes, it is true! Never doubt it, dearest! Go rest a little longer... hold on to the dream."

**Addendum**

The year was future time,  
All and everywhere  
Hours and eternity were one  
Knowledge and good  
Merged in harmony's suite  
And for purpose known.  
The gods lived now in human form  
Fashioned by them  
To suit their ways and use.  
The year was all time,  
A season on fertile ground,  
Auropolis the place,  
A town so named  
Which by the sea-shore grew.  
Joy was here and laughter sweet,  
Quite music-like,  
Filling the valleys with sound  
And light  
And colours so clear, so good  
That labour of men  
Was like precious stones formed  
With the knowing of the craft...  
On Omnipole the Continent called  
A Continent for all—  
Omnipole on Earth.

**THE END**

## MEDITATION AT THE SAMADHI

*"Beauty is an invitation to what is within us."*

—EMERSON

THIS is the Divine Moment,  
The Hour of God,  
The Hour for in-gathering at the *Samadhi*,  
A Centre of Peace and Tranquillity:  
'Tis Heaven crammed into one Spotless Speck  
In the Scheme of Infinity.

The Presence that is here  
At the *Samadhi*, the Soul's Repose,  
Is the same Cosmic Presence  
Which the spirit of Man,  
In its earliest awakening to realities  
Beyond this apparent world,  
Felt and sought, revered and invoked  
Within him and without;  
And thereafter, in Its Honour,  
Rose, in simple beauty or manifold grandeur,  
Temples and churches, mosques and places of pilgrimage.

Jerusalem is here, Mecca is here,  
Here Varanasi of old and Bodhgaya;  
They are where they are,  
For they are nowhere and everywhere,  
They belong to none and to everyone.  
They are people's shrines,  
The physical shrine-symbol  
Of the intangible Collective Self—  
The Universal Spirit without  
And within every man's inner Temple:  
The Varanasi or the Bodhgaya,  
The Jerusalem or the Mecca,  
Or the Kingdom of God within us all

Men from all walks of life,  
From all over the world flock here;  
Men of all colour, all manner, all creed  
Come here, stand or sit a while

To soothe or heal the severed Communion  
 Or to reflect upon the nature of things;  
 To feel the Eternal's Breath  
 Upon the waters of their being,  
 Or to impress the Infinite's Image  
 On the mirror of their finite self;  
 To aspire or pray,  
 To worship or pay their homage:  
 To cull from the Hallowed Haven a Moment's appeasement  
 And treasure it amidst the many cares and chores of life.

As they pray, out of their heart,  
 From the spirit's utter nakedness,  
 The best in Man rises up;  
 Then no figures of speech are they,  
 Nor figures of flesh and blood,  
 But silhouettes of aspiration or meditation,  
 Or entranced features of silent intimations  
 In varied psychic moods and modes  
 At the Altar of self-regeneration.

What do they pray for?  
 What wish or desire?  
 Are they granted what they ask for?  
 Is their effort worth their pains?

Granted or not, worth their pains or not,  
 Some day or other,  
 Before their inner Altar  
 Stand they must  
 To look into the depths of their soul  
 And squarely face the indwelling Deity;  
 Or come here they must,  
 Or proceed elsewhere—to other sacred places,  
 Like tragic moths inexorably drawn to light!  
 Thus self-flung,  
 Momentarily they shed their baser elements  
 And seem re-charged or re-possessed,  
 Indrawn or other-worldly

In the infinite endlessness of Space,  
 In the infinite timelessness of Eternity,

What relevance has Man or his vanity,  
When earth itself is almost a nullity?

Yet how fascinating  
To behold this undying Faith in God,  
This irrepressible Belief of Man—  
That his prayers are heard by a Superconscient Being,  
His wishes granted by a Gracious Bountiful,  
His sins cancelled by an All-Merciful!

Ah, hapless prisoner of self-delusion,  
Helpless victim of an ancestral Superstition,  
Like a trapped fly in the spider's web,  
Or a netted bird vainly struggling for release!  
It all seems like a mad rush after what is not—  
After a mirage or a will-o-the-wisp;  
Or 'tis only an ancient Fixation or Conditioning  
Remaining, across the ages,  
Through ceaseless repetition of rituals unrelated,  
A vestige of Man's First Awe and Wonder before the Unknown!

While doubts fail to touch the inmost self,  
Peace pulsates at the *Samadhi*  
And its throbbing Silence,  
Beneath the benign "Service Tree", proclaims.  
"All things in and around the Ashram Courtyard,  
Bathed in the Lord's Spirit-charged atmosphere,  
Whisper rumours of a blissful state,  
Between the sleep-world and the waking,  
Where Time and Space are one entity  
Under innocent light as in a Wonderland,  
And finer virtues and nobler potencies  
Await their opportune Moment  
To manifest themselves in time eternity;  
And the Human Aspiration,  
Compelled by Nature's upward urge,  
Impels the Gods to hasten  
The Dawn of a sunnier race upon earth:  
The Race of the Supermind—evolutionary beings  
Cleansed of nether passions and tales of woe  
Or the muffled moan of groping Humanity."

### A Note

This revised version of the poem is published within such a short span of time for the following reason. Before the original poem was published, I had shown it to Amal and he had passed it for publication. But a few months later when, for some reason, we reviewed it, he pointed out some discrepancies. Since the *Samadhi* to us disciples of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is very sacred and dear, I felt quite unhappy about them. So on having redressed them and made some other important changes at various places in the poem, I showed it again to Amal. He was satisfied. When I requested him to publish it at the earliest, he graciously agreed provided that I explained in a footnote why it was being reprinted.

## A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

### 86. CALL ME 'COOLIE'

THE River Vaikai was running in spate and the threat of its breaking its banks was there.

The panic-stricken people complained to their king Arimartana Pandian. The king told his prime minister Manikkavasakar to do the needful.

“The only way to save these people is to strengthen the banks of the river and it must be done immediately. The only way to do it in so short a time is to employ a large number of workers. But the royal treasury will go bankrupt if the workers have to be paid. And so we must call one volunteer from each house to share the burden of work. The volunteers must be asked to strengthen a sizeable chunk of the banks of the River Vaikai,” thus planned Manikkavasakar.

The town-criers in various parts of Madurai beat their tomtoms to attract the attention of the public and cried: “It is hereby brought to the notice of the public that the banks on either side of the River Vaikai have to be strengthened. One volunteer from each house should go to work without fail and strengthen the chunk of the bank apportioned to each. The defaulters will be severely punished.”

Obeying the royal command, the volunteers thronged to the banks of the River Vaikai, each one carrying a spade and a rattan basket.

But one found herself helpless. She was Vandhi, an old widow. She was a loner and eked out a precarious living from cooking and selling *puttu*.<sup>\*</sup> Age was telling on her and she could do no hard work like digging earth and depositing it on the river bank. Yet her quota of work had to be done lest she should be punished. She couldn't employ anyone to do the work for she couldn't afford to pay.

Vandhi trudged into the temple of Lord Siva and prayed to Him for help. At that moment she heard someone shouting in the streets: “Labour for hire.”

Vandhi staggered to the street. She saw a tall and healthy fellow shouting “Labour for hire.” She stopped him and beckoned him.

“What is your name, young man?” asked Vandhi.

“Hm. People call me by different names. You can call me Coolie.”

“I'll employ you, provided you take *puttu* as your wages,” said Vandhi.

“Yes! That's what I want. I am as hungry as a newborn. Give me some now. First of all, let me appease my hunger. And then, I'll do all the work you command me to do.”

Vandhi gave Coolie a handful of *puttu* and when he finished eating it she gave him another handful.

\* A tasty dish—steamed rice flour sweetened and spiced



“Come with me. Let us go to the river bank and you will be told what you should do there,” said Vandhi.

Together they went to the river bank. They saw a throng of people involved in the work of strengthening the bank on either side of the river.

Vandhi searched for the supervising authority, found him and said: “My name is Vandhi. My weak and old body may not cope with the strain this hard work will demand of me. Hence I have brought a man called Coolie who will do the work on my behalf. Show me that portion of the bank allotted to me for strengthening.”

The authority obliged.

Coolie took a spade and a rattan basket in one hand and stretched out the other for *puttu*. The old lady gave him a handful. He ate it and went to work.

He dug out a basketful of earth and deposited it on the river bank. He then dusted his hands and feet, sat awhile, then gambolled towards the lady and asked for more *puttu*. “What a delicious dish this *puttu* is! Tastes like the food of the divine beings.”

“Ha! You speak as if you have tasted the food of the gods!” heckled Vandhi, and gave him ungrudgingly a handful of *puttu*.

Coolie pretended to do the work but in fact he was playing a trick on the old lady. Only a few handfuls of *puttu* were left in the old woman’s bamboo basket. The day was coming to a close. And Vandhi’s quota of work remained incomplete.

The supervising authority noticed the incomplete work done by Coolie. His eyes searched for him and found him sitting under a tree happily eating *puttu*. He went near Coolie, raised his chastising cane above his head and brought it down heavily on the back of Coolie expecting him to wince.

But the unexpected happened. It was the supervising authority who winced. Everyone in Madurai winced as if the blow had fallen on their backs. But Coolie remained unperturbed as if nothing had happened to him.

King Arimartana Pandian and his prime minister Manikkavasakar were taken aback by the blow they had received. They probed the matter, found the reason and together they rushed to the spot with their backs stinging.

To their surprise they saw everyone on the banks holding their painful backs. But Coolie laughed at everyone.

“Who are you? You don’t seem to be a man of this earth! Speak,” commanded the king

Coolie laughed to his heart’s content and said: “You are right. I belong to the place above the earth.” Smiling at everyone, Coolie showed his true self for a second before he disappeared.

Vandhi wept tears of joy and raising both her hands above her head, she praised the Lord.

Manikkavasakar sang in praise of the Lord for coming down to earth to help

a poor old woman and thereby tell the world that whatever He receives He distributes equally among His disciples and followers.

### 87. PRAISED BE PONNAMBALAM

The people of Eezhanadu (later known as Ceylon and now Sri Lanka) were doubly surprised to see a Saivite Sadhu beg for alms in their streets. They were surprised because Eezhanadu being a Buddhist country, no man who adorned his body with holy ash and wore a garland of rudraksha beads ever dared to enter the country. Secondly, unlike others who begged for alms from door to door he moved along the street without looking at anyone and saying, "Give me alms Praised be Ponnambalam."

When the matter was reported to the king, he commanded his men to fetch the Sadhu.

The Sadhu was ushered into the court. He asked the king, "What do you need from a Sadhu? Praised be Ponnambalam."

The king looked at the Sadhu with contempt. "Repeat... Who is to be praised?"

"Ponnambalam "

"Who on earth is he?"

"Chidambaram is a temple city in the Chozha empire. In the temple built for Lord Siva there, the Lord dances his eternal cosmic dance for the people to get rid of their burdensome lives. The place where he dances is known as Ponnambalam. Utter the word 'Ponnambalam' and feel the tensions of life drain out of you."

The chief of the Buddhist monks seated in the court flared up at the mention of the word 'Siva'. He gritted his teeth and snarled: "No God in the world is greater than ours. What this man says is a blatant lie. Let me go to Chidambaram and teach the ignoramuses there about the divine powers of our Lord Buddha and show them that the one whom they believe in is nothing more than a statue."

"You are dreaming dreams. They won't come true," said the Sadhu.

"We Buddhists are no dreamers. We argue with our incomparable logic and efficiency, and disprove the existence of all the gods and religions," asserted the chief monk.

"I'll accompany you to Chidambaram," encouraged the king.

The chief monk was elated.

Accompanied by a class of Buddhist scholars, the king and his daughter, the chief monk reached Chidambaram. And when they proclaimed the purpose of their arrival, the brahmins at Chidambaram joined hands to drive them out.

"Swords of course must be met with swords. But look! We have not come with weapons. We are here loaded with logical arguments. Every argument must be met with a counter-argument," advised the king of Eezhanadu.

“So shall it be,” said the brahmins in a chorus.

“And we’ll never leave this place till you accept our Lord and become new converts to Buddhism,” said the chief monk.

“We’ll consult our king and fix the date and the venue for the debate. Till then wait,” said an elderly brahmin in the crowd.

That night Lord Siva appeared in the dream of the brahmins and said: “There is nothing to fear. Go to Madurai and request Manikkavasakar to help. He is a boon to Saivism and he will put the Buddhists in their place and convert them to Saivism.”

On the morning of the next day, the enlightened brahmins ran to their king and later to Manikkavasakar and told them of the arrival of the Buddhists and the appearance of Lord Siva in their dreams.

The Chozha king consulted Manikkavasakar. Together they fixed the venue—Rathina Mandap at Thirupulishwarar Temple; the date—the next day, and the time—early morning.

“But your Majesty! Please arrange to draw a curtain between me and the Buddhists. I hate to see the faces that speak ill of our Lord Siva,” said Manikkavasakar.

“I’ll also be with you during the dispute,” said the Chozha king.

At the palatial hall fixed for debate, a huge curtain was drawn. On one side sat Manikkavasakar and the Chozha king with his select ministers and courtiers. On the other side facing them sat the Buddhist monks and scholars along with the king of Eezhanadu and his daughter.

“Now begin, O Buddhists! your arguments,” said the Chozha king. “Saint Manikkavasakar, appointed by Lord Siva Himself, is here to vanquish you. And once you are vanquished all your tongues will be cut off.”

The Buddhists became panicky. Their chief mustered up enough courage and asked, “What if we win?”

“You’re thinking of the impossible. Yet if you win, we will be your slaves,” said the Chozha king.

“Well then! Let Manikkavasakar state his argument to prove that Siva is something more than a statue, for we think that Siva is just a name given to a stone statue,” guffawed the chief monk.

“Blasphemy!” howled Manikkavasakar. Then cooling down he said, “O Lord Siva! If my devotion to you is unflinching and if your powers are superior to those of all the other gods in the Universe, let these Buddhist monks lose their speech and let me hear no more blasphemy.”

Everyone on the other side of the curtain became jittery. Every monk and scholar tried to speak but all they could do was to warble incoherent notes. Shame began to gnaw at them and tears of pain trickled down their cheeks.

The king of Eezhanadu was both disturbed and delighted. Disturbed because of the plight of the monks. Delighted because he had found the right

man to cure his daughter's ailment. Hence he pushed his way through the screen and fell at the feet of Manikkavasakar and begged. "Your powers are beyond question. Lord Siva is no doubt the all-powerful God. If you can make all these Buddhists here dumb, then you can definitely make my dumb daughter speak. I beseech you Please help her I'll remember your help."

"I will... but on condition that you and your daughter will become converts to Saivism," said Manikkavasakar

"If you bless my daughter with speech, then everyone of us in my country will follow only Saivism," promised the king of Eezhanadu

Saint Manikkavasakar prayed to Lord Siva to bless the dumb girl with the power of speech.

To the surprise and awe of the Buddhists, the princess said: "Praised be Ponnambalam."

The Buddhist monks and scholars silently begged for pardon.

"Can't help you. You have lost your speech. What use are your tongues now? Lose them to our hatchets," intimidated the Chozha king.

"Pardon them, your Majesty! You'll please allow me to take them back to my land and employ them to spread Saivism," said the Princess of Eezhanadu.

The Chozha king pardoned them. Manikkavasakar restored their lost power of speech to them and all of them said in unison: "Praised be Ponnambalam."

They repeated the words all the time on their way to Eezhanadu.

During the times of Saint Manikkavasakar, the chief deity of Eezhanadu was Lord Siva and there was a mass conversion to Saivism.

*(More legends on the way)*

P. RAJA

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo Circle—Fifty-second Number, Sri Aurobindo Society Annual, 1996.  
Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry. Price: Rs. 35.

THIS 165-page volume follows its earlier Numbers in its structure. The contents are arranged in three sections: the first section consists of excerpts from the published works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; the second section contains poems of Sri Aurobindo and some of the well-known Ashram poets; the third section includes scholarly prose articles.

This time the third section includes a review-article on K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's book: *On the Mother: The Chronicle of a Manifestation and Ministry*, and we are also introduced to two new authors: M. S. Srinivasan and Sachidananda Mohanty. I admire and appreciate this approach of the editor to encourage new talent and new thoughts. S. Mohanty, writing on "The Emerging Crisis in Spirituality" pleads for an appreciation of democratic aspirations by the spiritual community and he stresses that "only then can the crisis of contemporary spirituality be turned into an opportunity for growth." An interesting proposition. This view deserves an open discussion.

M. S. Srinivasan, who is becoming known to the readers of *Mother India*, writes on "exploring the meaning and significance of the spiritual and cultural unity of India... in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision." A rather theoretical exposition. Maybe he would tell us one of these days what an ordinary Indian with aspiration but without knowledge can do to help in achieving such a unity. Both these interesting subjects deserve to be opened to a discussion by the readers. Will the editor of this annual or the Sri Aurobindo Society provide such a forum?

The other authors in this section are the veterans Kishor Gandhi, Prema Nandakumar, Dr. Dalal, and Jugal K. Mukherjee, all their articles being scholarly and interesting.

There are 24 poems in the poetry section. My favourites are: "O Pall of Black Night" by Sri Aurobindo for the sheer delight of its construction and mystery, "Gleanings" by Arjava for a superb description of one aspect of the Cosmic Music, and "Bird-Reveries" by Amal Kiran for its exquisite flight of fancy. I like Deshpande's "New Lake" but wonder if the "New bells for new temple towers" were made from the old bells by melting and recasting them.

The excerpts from the Master and the Mother are very topical, in the sense of pertaining to what is happening at present in the world around as well as what is happening to all of us caught in the collective Sadhana of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the same theme being dealt with by the Editor Kishor Gandhi in his article, "The World Today".

I particularly would point to two Talks from the Mother: "A New World is

Born” is a Talk from the 1957 *Questions and Answers* wherein the Mother explains in her typical succinct manner what has already *begun* and invites us to an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure, an adventure in which “One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed.” A very difficult proposition for most of us, or is it?

Then we have, to me, the most delightful and wonderful exposition on why serious persons are boring, why there always should be a sense of fun and laughter and how taking life seriously is not only stupid but harmful (pages 61, 62 of this Annual). Just for these two Talks I would go to SABDA and buy this Annual. Let me quote the last few sentences of this marvellous piece of the Mother’s commentary on some of Sri Aurobindo’s aphorisms:

“... it’s not that there are ‘some things’ where the Lord is and ‘some things’ where He is not. The Lord is *always* there. He takes nothing seriously, everything amuses Him and He plays with you, if you know how to play. You do not know how to play, people do not know how to play. But how well He knows how to play! How well He plays! With everything, with the smallest things: you have some things to put on the table? Don’t feel that you have to think and arrange, no, let’s play: let’s put this one here and that one there, and this one like that. And then another time it’s different again What a good game and such fun!

“So, it is agreed, we shall try to learn how to laugh with the Lord.”

Yes. It indeed is fun, this life, even though sometimes one has to force the smile from the depths and spread out the lips, it’s worth it, to take everything life offers with a sense of fun, to laugh with the Divine Beloved, whether amidst a storm or on a calm, fragrant day in mid-spring.

DINKAR D. PALANDE

## *Students' Section*

### THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Eightieth Seminar

25 February 1996

INSIGHTS INTO THE VISION AND WORK OF SRI AUROBINDO AND  
THE MOTHER

*THE TRUE AIM AND PURPOSE OF LIFE*

Speech by Kamal Shah

LIFE has so much to offer. It is given us for progress, growth and perfection. Its very fabric is made up of experiences which we have throughout our life and by which we grow rich, from the lessons they teach us. These experiences present themselves in the form of problems and difficulties. All problems and disturbances are essentially a conflict between the inner and the outer being of man, between his true inner aspirations and his surface desires, ambitions and greeds. Very often the aim of life is identified with one of these desires which is a combination of money, power, ambition and sex. It is only when we begin to dissociate ourselves from our outer surface being and begin to live deeper within that we perceive that our normal aim of life is inadequate for the deeper inner awakening. Each one of us has a special and unique character and temperament. Each one of us has a task that only he can perform, a place that only he can take. As the Mother says, "You have a great responsibility; it is for the sake of fulfilling a special mission that you are born upon earth. Only, of course, the psychic being must have reached a certain degree of development; otherwise, one might say that it is the whole earth that has the responsibility. The more one becomes conscious and individualised, the more one should have a sense of responsibility. And that is what happens at a given moment; you begin to think that you are not here without reason, without aim. You are aware, all of a sudden, that you are here because there is something to be done here and this something is not an egoistic thing. That seems to me to be the most logical way of entering upon the path—all of a sudden to be aware, 'Since I am here, it must be that I have a mission to fulfil. Since I am endowed with a consciousness, it must be that I have something to make of this consciousness—what is it?' Normally, it seems to me that this is the first question that one should put to oneself—why am I here?"<sup>1</sup>

Yoga is the means to find the answer to the question, "Why am I here?",

that the Mother talks about. Yoga is, as Sri Aurobindo says, “a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos.”<sup>22</sup>

Self-perfection and realisation have to be attained not at the cost of an impoverished outer life. Yoga has to be a power that unifies and not a power that makes inner and spiritual growth incompatible with outer life. As Sri Aurobindo explains: “No synthesis of Yoga can be satisfying which does not, in its aim, reunite God and Nature in a liberated and perfected human life or, in its method, not only permit but favour the harmony of our inner and outer activities and experiences in the divine consummation of both.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus we see that the aim of our life is knowing ourselves, and our mission on the earth is finding the true work to be accomplished by us. Yoga is our means, and life is our field. Sri Aurobindo clearly reminds us: “Life, not a remote silent or high-uplifted ecstatic Beyond—Life alone, is the field of our Yoga. The transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life must be its central purpose. The means towards this supreme end is a self-giving of all our nature to the Divine. Everything must be given to the Divine within us, to the universal All and to the transcendent Supreme. An absolute concentration of our will, our heart and our thought on that one and manifold Divine, an unreserved self-consecration of our whole being to the Divine alone—this is the decisive movement, the turning of the ego to That which is infinitely greater than itself, its self-giving and indispensable surrender.”<sup>24</sup>

It is time to question ourselves, ‘Why are we here?’ and ‘Why do we do what we do?’ To find the answers to these imperative questions, going within is essential along with remembering what the Mother said in 1953. I quote: “... we are not here to repeat what others have done, but to prepare ourselves for the blossoming of a new consciousness and a new life. That is why I address myself to you, the students, that is, to all who wish to learn, to learn always more and always better, so that one day you may be capable of opening yourselves to the new force and of giving it the possibility to manifest on the physical plane. For that is our programme and we must not forget it. To understand the true reason why you are here, you must remember that we want to become instruments that are as perfect as possible, instruments that express the divine will in the world. And if the instruments are to be perfect, they must be cultivated, educated, trained. They must not be left like fallow land or a formless piece of stone. A diamond reveals all its beauty only when it is artistically cut. It is the same for you.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, now we know the purpose of life, the way and means to realise it and



become fit instruments for the Divine Work. The choice is up to us, whether we want to achieve this quickly or waste our time on the wayside.

I end with this powerful Talk that the Mother gave in February 1956:

“Some follow the straight path and quickly arrive at the goal. Others, on the contrary, prefer labyrinths and need longer time, but the end is the same. I know by experience that there is no being who has had even for once in his life a great urge for the Divine (it does not matter how we called it, let us put it as the ‘Divine’ for the convenience of language) and was not sure of finding Him. Even if he turns his back on the Divine for a time, it is of no consequence, he will surely arrive. He will have to struggle more or less, to wait more or less a long time, but I repeat he is sure to arrive one day. When a soul has been chosen, he is bound to become conscious, because his hour is come. And once the hour is come, the result will follow more or less quickly. You may go the way in a few months, you may do it in a few years, or you may do it in a few lives, but you will do it.

“Note this particularly, you are given a full freedom of choice. If you decide within yourself that you will reach the goal in this life, you will do so. I do not mean that you will have to hold your decision constantly in your consciousness or repeat it continuously—in that case you would succeed in twelve months. I mean if you are suddenly taken up by this resolution: ‘This is what I want’—even once, in a flash—that is a seal put upon your life.

“It is no reason, however, to lose your time on the way; it is no reason why you should follow all the meanderings of the labyrinth and arrive at the goal, decreased by all that you have lost, spent, wasted on the way. But in any case it is a reason why you should never despair whatever the obstacles and difficulties.

“When you have something to do, it is better to do it as quickly as possible, that is my opinion. But there are people who like to lose their time. Perhaps they need turning round and round, falling back, going about in circuitous ways before they arrive where they should arrive. Unfortunately it is exactly people who have this habit of loitering, wandering away from the straight line, that complain the most of the way being long; they lament, but they themselves are the artisans of their own misery. But to each his choice.

“Finally, there are those who move forward only when they are caught by the neck and driven ahead with a terrific force. And then they cry that violence is being done upon them; but it is they who asked for it.

“If you decide to go straight, at any cost, to bear all difficulties and face without weakness all unpleasant things, you will avoid much trouble.

“Be fearless and resolute, all obstacles will melt away before you.”<sup>6</sup>

*References*

- 1 Message given by the Mother on 24 1963
- 2 *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 2
- 3 *Ibid* , p 4
- 4 *Ibid* , p 82
- 5 *Collected Works of the Mother, On Education* (Cent Ed , Vol 12), pp 72-3
- 6 *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Feb 1956, pp 93-5