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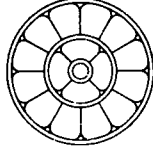
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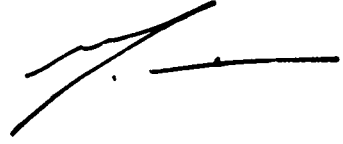
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. L

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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SAVITRI'S SCHOOL-DAYS

A LAND of mountains and wide sun-beat plains...
Where Nature seemed a dream of the Divine
And beauty and grace and grandeur had their home,
Harboured the childhood of the incarnate Flame
Over her watched millennial influences
And the deep godheads of a grandiose past
Looked on her and saw the future's godheads come
As if this magnet drew their powers unseen.
Earth's brooding wisdom spoke to her still breast .
A shoreless sweep was lent to the mortal's acts,
And art and beauty sprang from the human depths,
Nature and soul vied in nobility
Ethics the human keyed to imitate heaven,
The harmony of a rich culture's tones
Refined the sense and magnified its reach
To hear the unheard and glimpse the invisible
And taught the soul to soar beyond things known. .
Leaving earth's safety daring wings of Mind
Bore her above the trodden fields of thought
Crossing the mystic seas of the Beyond
To live on eagle heights near to the Sun .
All her life's turns led her to symbol doors
Admitting to secret Powers that were her kin,
Adept of truth, initiate of bliss .
She laid the secrecies of her heart's deep muse
Upon the altar of the Wonderful,
Her hours were ritual in a timeless fane;
Her acts became gestures of sacrifice
Invested with a rhythm of higher spheres
The word was used as a hieratic means
For the release of the imprisoned spirit
Into communion with its comrade gods
Or it helped to beat out new expressive forms ..
Intense philosophies pointed earth to heaven
Or on foundations broad as cosmic Space
Upraised the earth-mind to superhuman heights
Overpassing lines that please the outward eyes
But hide the sight of that which lives within
Sculpture and painting concentrated sense
Upon an inner vision's motionless verge,

Revealed a figure of the invisible,
 Unveiled all Nature's meaning in a form,
 Or caught into a body the Divine.
 The architecture of the Infinite
 Discovered here its inward-musing shapes
 Captured into wide breadths of soaring stone
 Music brought down celestial yearnings, song
 Held the merged heart absorbed in rapturous depths,
 Linking the human with the cosmic cry,
 The world-interpreting movements of the dance
 Moulded idea and mood to a rhythmic sway
 And posture, crafts minute in subtle lines
 Eternised a swift moment's memory
 Or showed in a carving's sweep, a cup's design
 The underlying patterns of the unseen
 Poems in largeness cast like moving worlds
 And metres surging with the ocean's voice
 Translated by grandeurs locked in Nature's heart
 But thrown now into a crowded glory of speech
 The beauty and sublimity of her forms,
 The passion of her moments and her moods
 Lifting the human word near to the god's
 Man's eyes could look into the inner realms,
 His scrutiny discovered number's law
 And organised the motions of the stars,
 Mapped out the visible fashioning of the world,
 Questioned the process of his thoughts or made
 A theorised diagram of mind and life
 These things she took in as her nature's food,
 But these alone could fill not her wide Self
 A human seeking limited by its gains,
 To her they seemed the great and early steps .
 A growing out there was to numberless sides,
 But not the widest seeing of the soul,
 Not yet the vast direct immediate touch,
 Nor yet the art and wisdom of the Gods

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 359-361)

MADHUCHCHHANDAS'S HYMN IN PRAISE OF INDRA

RIG VEDA 1.5

EXCERPTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO'S ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE HYMN

आ त्वेता नि षीदतेन्द्रमभि प्र गायत । सखायः स्तोमवाहसः ॥१॥

But approach, but sit down, sing out towards Indra, O friends who bear the burden of the psalm

स्तोम (*stoma*) From स्तु (*stu*), to establish firmly. *Stoma* is the psalm, the hymn of praise, it is the expression in the potency of speech of those qualities in the Lord of mental Force,—or whatever other Master of being is praised,—which the sadhaka is either calling to his aid or aspires to bring out in his own being and activity. The expression of a quality in inspired and rhythmic speech tends by the essential nature of Mantra to bring forward and establish in habitual action that which was formerly latent or vague in the nature. For this reason the psalm is *stoma*, that which establishes or confirms, as the prayer is *uktha*, that which desires or wills, and the simple hymn is *gāyatra*, that which brings up and sets in motion, or *śamsa*, that which brings out into the field of expression

पुरूतमं पुरूणामीशानं वायर्णाम् । इन्द्रं सोमे सचा सुते ॥

When the nectar has been distilled, then it is Indra I take for friend, the mightiest of all that is mighty, the lord of all highest desirable things

. . In the first verse the Rishi invites his “friends” or “life-companions” to sing the psalm of Indra, the second states the object and purpose of their singing which is to have this mighty and supreme Master of things as a friend,—the peculiar purpose of Madhuchchhandas as the acknowledged head of this group of sadhakas, यस्ते सखिभ्य आ वरम् (*yaste sakhibhya ā varam*); the third justifies the choice of the forceful God by affirming Indra’s faithful friendship and his perfect helpfulness.

स घा नो योग आ भुवत् स राये स पुरंध्याम् । गमद्वाजेभिरा स नः ॥३॥

It was he that was ever present to us in the union (with our desire), he ever for our felicity, he ever in the holding of our city, ever he comes to us with gifts of substance (in his hands)

... the Rishi... is explaining why it is towards Indra. . that the psalm must be upheld, for it is Indra that is there always in the getting of our desire, Indra always when felicity is the result of our active consciousness, Indra always when our getting and our felicity are attacked and our city has to be held against the Dasyus, the robbers, the foes He comes to us always bringing fresh substance to our mental faculties, increased resources of mental force for our active consciousness...

The idea of Yoga in all its Vedic senses is the reaching out of the being in us to unite itself with [the] being expressed in other persons, objects or forces, whether in the form of application of effort, contact of consciousness or acquisition of things desired....

Always attacked by spiritual enemies, Dasyus, Rakshasas, Daityas, Vritras, Panis, it [city, पुर] has to be maintained and upheld by the strength of the gods, Indra first, Indra always, Indra foremost.

यस्य संस्थे न वृण्वते हरी समत्सु शत्रवः । तस्मा इन्द्राय गायत ॥४॥

Sing to that Indra whose steeds no foeman in our battles can withstand in the shock.

. . When Indra and the enemy stand struggling together in the shock of battle, they cannot succeed in restraining the progress of his car; it forces always the obstacle and moves forward to its goal.. .

सुतपाव्ने सुता इमे शुचयो यन्ति वीतये । सोमासो दध्याशिरः ॥५॥

Distilled for purification are these juices of the Soma; pure, they are spent for thy manifestation, able then to bear their own intensity.

. . पावन् (*pāvan*) may... derive from the root पू (*pū*) to purify by modification of the root vowel, as in पावक (*pāvaka*) and पावन (*pāvana*) before the termination अन् (*an*). If we accept this account of *sutapāvne*, we get a deep and fruitful significance thoroughly in harmony with the subtle, suggestive and pregnant style of the hymns of Madhuchchhandas. The nectar juices are distilled for the primary process of purification of what has been distilled, सुतपाव्ने (*sutapāvne*)...

I take it [वीतये, *vītaye*], in the Veda, in its natural sense of manifestation, appearance, bringing out or expansion. The word वीति (*vīti*) describes the capital process of Vedic Yoga, the manifestation for formation and activity of that which is in us unmanifest, vague or inactive. It is वीतये (*vītaye*) or देववीतये (*devavītaye*), for manifestation of the gods or of the powers and activities which they represent that the Vedic sacrificer is initiated and conducted internally in subjective meditation and surrender, externally in objective worship and oblation. The

Soma juices purified यन्ति वीतये (*yantu vītaye*) go to manifest, are spent for manifestation,—in this case, as we see in the next verse वृद्धो अजायथाः (*vṛddho ajāyathāḥ*),—of Indra, the god of the hymn, Master of mental force...

त्वं सुतस्य पीतये सद्यो वृद्धो अजायथाः । इन्द्र ज्यैष्ठ्याय सुक्रतो ॥६॥

Thou for the drinking of the Soma-juice straightway onward didst appear increased, O Indra, for supremacy, O great in strength.

... The idea of the verse follows in logical order on the suggestions in the last. The Rishi has devoted his four verses to the reasons he has to give for the preference of Indra and the hymning of Indra. He then proceeds to the offering of the Soma, the wine of immortality, Ananda materialised in the delight-filled vitality, it is first expressed in the terms of joy and vitality; it is next purified; purified it is spent in the putting out of mental force for the manifestation of divine Mind, Indra; Indra manifests at once, सद्यः...अजायथाः (*sadyaḥ...ajāyathāḥ*), but he manifests increased; a greater mental force appears than has been experienced in the past stages of the Yoga or the life. Indra appears thus increased सुतस्य पीतये (*sutasya pītaye*) and ज्यैष्ठ्याय (*jyaiṣṭhyāya*), primarily for the drinking of the joy and vitality that has been distilled, secondarily, through and as a result of the taking up of that joy and vitality in the active mental consciousness for supremacy, ज्यैष्ठ्य (*jyaiṣṭhya*), that is to say, for full manifestation of his force in that fullness in which he is always the leader of the divine war and king and greatest of the battling gods. Therefore is the appellation सुक्रतो (*sukrato*) placed at the end in order to explain ज्यैष्ठ्याय (*jyaiṣṭhyāya*). The Lord of Mental Force is a very mighty god; therefore, when he appears in his fullness, it is always his force that takes the lead in our activity. We have in these two verses a succession of symbolic concepts in perfect logical order which express stage by stage the whole process of the divine manifestation in this lower material activity, *devavīti*, in Adhwara Yajna.

आ त्वा विशन्त्वाशवः सोमास इन्द्र गिर्वणः । शं ते सन्तु प्रचेतसे ॥७॥

May the fiery Soma-juices enter into thee, O Indra, thou who hast delight in the Word; may they be peace to thee in thy forward-acting awareness.

. . The joy and vitality are to pervade the mental force and, because this is to be done in the force of the word, the mantras, गिरः (*gīrah*), therefore Indra is addressed as गिर्वणः (*gīrvanah*), the word, besides, preparing after the fashion of Vedic interlinking the transition of the thought to the subject of the next verse....

The most serious obstacle of the sadhaka is the difficulty of combining action with a basis of calm; when intense force enters the system and is put out in

activity, it brings eagerness, disturbance, trouble, and excitement of activity and exhaustion of relapse There is अशान्ति (*aśānti*), absence of शम् (*śam*) It is easy to avoid this when there is quietude and the Ananda is merely enjoyed, not utilised. But Indra, as mental force, has to be प्रचेतस् (*pracetas*), consciously active, putting his consciousness forward in thought and action, he has to absorb the Soma-wine and lose nothing of its fire, yet preserve the peace of the liberated soul The Soma-juices have to bring added peace with them to the active mind as well as an added force

त्वां स्तोमा अवीवृधन् त्यामुक्त्वा शतक्रतो । त्वां वर्धन्तु नो गिरः ॥८॥

Thee the hymns of praise have increased, thee, the hymns of prayer, O Indra of the hundred might, thee may (let) our Words increase.

अवीवृधन् (*avīvr̥dhan*) The habitual past. In the past and as a rule, praise of Indra and prayer to Indra have increased and increase the mental force; let the words also of this mantra now increase it

गिरः (*girah*) takes up the गिर्वणः (*girvaṇah*) of the last line. It is the mantra that has to make the Soma effective in increasing Indra. The thought, therefore, takes up the प्र गायत (*pra gāyata*) of the first Rik and applies it to the office which is asked of Indra, for which he has been given the Soma-wine, the general purpose of the invocatory chant and the utility of this divine increase in the fiery strength of the Soma offering.

अक्षितोतिः सनेदिमं वाजमिन्द्रः सहस्रिणम् । यस्मिन्विश्वानि पौस्या ॥९॥

Unimpaired in his expansion may Indra safeguard this myriad wealth (of mind) on which all our strengths are established

. In the light of the symbolic interpretation, the verse like every other becomes both in sense and construction simple, straightforward, logical, well-ordered and full of subtle purpose and consummate dexterity ऊतिः (*ūtiḥ*) is expansion. Indra is supposed to have increased mental force in accordance with his experience, वृद्धो अजायथाः, अवीवृधन् (*vr̥ddho ajāyathāḥ, avīvr̥dhan*), and in answer to the prayer त्वां वर्धन्तु नो गिरः (*tvām vardhantu no girah*) he is वृद्धः (*vr̥ddhah*); the Rishi prays that that increased mental force may remain unimpaired, अक्षित (*aksita*), and that the Lord of the Force, thus preserved in the expansion of his power, may safeguard, preserve or keep safe, सनेद् (*saned*), this substance of mind, this rich mind-stuff full of the force of Indra, सहस्रिणम् (*sahasrinam*), in which all human strengths repose for their effectiveness and stability.

सहस्रम् (*sahasram*) means “a thousand”, if that be its only significance, सहस्रिणम् (*sahasrinam*) must mean myriad, thousandfold, infinitely numerous or varied. I

am convinced, however, that सहस्र (*sahasra*) meant originally as an adjective plentiful or forceful, or as a noun, plenty or force, सहस्रिणम् (*sahasrinam*) would then mean “abundantly plentiful” or “rich in force” In any case, it describes well the myriad-shaped wealth of mind-stuff and mind-force which is the basis of all our masculine activities or practical masteries, यस्मिन् विश्वानि पौंस्या (*yasmin viśvāni paunsiyā*) We may, if we choose, take the phrase to mean “wealth counted by thousands” of gold pieces or of cattle in which, says the Vedic Rishi, reside all forms of human strength and greatness. But I am not disposed to lend the sentiment of Mammon worship to men of an early age in which strength, skill and mental resource must have been the one source and protection of wealth and not, as falsely seems to be the fact in a plutocratic age, wealth the source and condition of the rest The Vedic Rishis may have been primitive sages, but primitive savages did not hold sentiments of this kind, they valued strength and skill first, wealth only as the reward of strength and skill

मा नो मर्ता अभि ब्रुहन्तनूनामिन्द्र गिर्वणः । ईशानो यवया वधम् ॥१०॥

Let not mortal men (or, let not the slayers) do hurt to us, O Indra who delightest in the mantra; be the lord of our bodies and give us to ward off the stroke.

मर्ता (*martāh*), Greek *brotos*, mortal. The Rishi has already prayed for protection of his spiritual gains against spiritual enemies, he now prays for the safety from human blows of the physical body. But I am inclined to think that मर्ता (*martāh*) here has an active rather than a passive sense; for the termination त (*ta*) may have either force. मर्तः (*martah*) undoubtedly means mortal in the Veda, but it is possible that it bears also the sense of slayer, smiter, deadly one like मर्तः (*martah*) in the Latin *mors*, like the transitive sense in mortal, which means either subject to death or deadly In any case I cannot follow Sayana in taking तनूनाम् (*tanūnām*) as subject to अभि (*abhi*). I take it only set to ईशानः (*īśānah*) which is otherwise otiose and pointless in the sentence. The significant use of गिर्वणः (*girvanah*) indicates that the safety from mortal strokes is also claimed as a result of the Vedic mantra “Let not those who would slay, do harm against us (अभि [*abhi*] in our direction); do thou Indra, lord of mental force, in the strength of the mantra, govern our bodies and when the blow comes in our direction ward it off or enable us to ward it off (यवय [*yavaya*], causal) ” The reference seems to me to be to that power of the mental force in which the Indian yogin has always believed, the power which, substituting a divine mental action for the passive helpless and vulnerable action of the body, protects the individual and turns away all attempts physical or otherwise to do him hurt. If I am right in my interpretation, we see the source of the Tantric idea of the *stoma* or *stotra* acting as a *kavaca* or mental armour around the body which keeps off the attacks of

suffering, calamity, diseases, wounds or death. We may note that if मर्ताः (*martāh*) be slayers, तनूनाम् (*tanūnām*) may be governed by मर्ताः (*martāh*); “Let not the slayers of the body do hurt towards us, O Indra who delightest in the mantra, govern them (our bodies with thy mental force) and give us to ward off the stroke.” But, in any case, whether we associate तनूनाम् (*tanūnām*) with अभि (*abhi*) or मर्ताः (*martāh*) or ईशानः (*īśānah*), ईशानः (*īśānah*) must refer back to तनूनाम् (*tanūnām*). Sayana’s “ward off the blow, for thou canst”, is a pointless superfluous, one of those ideas which seem right and ingenious to the scholar, but would never suggest itself to the poet; least of all to a master of style like Madhuchchhandas.

THE SEARCH OF THE UPANISHADIC RISHIS

The Rishis of the Upanishads . sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge by meditation and spiritual experience and they used the text of the ancient mantras as a prop or an authority for their own intuitions and perceptions, or else the Vedic Word was a seed of thought and vision by which they recovered old truths in new forms. What they found, they expressed in other terms more intelligible to the age in which they lived. In a certain sense their handling of the texts was not disinterested, it was not governed by the scholar’s scrupulous desire to arrive at the exact intention of the words and the precise thought of the sentences in their actual framing. They were seekers of a higher than verbal truth and used words merely as suggestions for the illumination towards which they were striving. They knew not or they neglected the etymological sense and employed often a method of symbolic interpretation of component sounds in which it is very difficult to follow them. For this reason, while the Upanishads are invaluable for the light they shed on the principal ideas and on the psychological system of the ancient Rishis, they help us as little as the Brahmanas in determining the accurate sense of the texts which they quote. Their real work was to found Vedanta rather than to interpret Veda.

(Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol 10, pp. 491-501, 12-13)

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

Mother,

I am not so sure of getting plantains If they are available, they will be the plantains You saw today, kept until tomorrow If they are not available, shall I return without them? And I might put a notice written on the slate in Aroumé: "No plantains in the Market."

It is difficult to put up such a notice if there are actually some plantains in the bazaar. It is only if truly there are none that you can say so.

22 July 1934

Mother,

Yesterday A took B's mother to Aroumé.

In the godown she asked C: "Are you married? Where is your husband? Have you got a child? How big is it?"

How imbecile!

A told C: "Do you understand what she says! May I tell you?" C replied. "I understand, no need of your speaking"

Mother, it would be better not to have visitors when we are at work, and nobody should be taken to Aroumé at the time of serving and eating They must arrange with me previously

Quite right

A notice can be put up to this effect, that Aroumé cannot be visited without a special authorisation of the Mother and previous arrangement with Dyuman as for the hour of the visit

With all love and blessings.

4 August 1934

Dear Mother,

D of the Washing Section asks me to help him. He says "The Mother has written to me to be very careful about the flies, that they may not gather, etc."

Yes—flies are *very dangerous*, just now more than ever

When the Washing Section is working it puts the inmates' vessels in water immediately, but when the inmates go for their food at late hours, their dishes remain in the open and flies gather on them

No dishes must be left in the open as an attraction for flies. If they cannot be washed at once, they must be dipped in a tub full of water—this *is very important*

It is better these days to wash every day with "chlorure de chaux" the floor of the kitchen, the serving room and the dining rooms. The serving tables too

8 August 1934

Beloved Mother,

All Love to You. May things be more quiet, more calm, and may You have a full rest

In the present condition of things at large, we must be satisfied. I suppose, with the inner rest which is always there, untouched by any exterior turmoil.

With love and blessings always.

17 August 1934

Mother,

The beauty of the seasonal vegetables [the disciple lists the ingredients of two pumpkin dishes] The things are fresh and good and cheap

It is all right provided there will not be pumpkin at each meal

23 August 1934

Dear Mother,

F read the note of G for the white pepper. She told me "Why buy a bottle! Bring the white pepper, I shall grind it as fine as a bottle of Morton pepper ground in London. It will be quite fresh for the Mother."

If it is truly not too much work, certainly I like better to have it prepared at home

30 August 1934

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SRI AUROBINDO'S SPIRITUAL SYSTEM AND THE MOTHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO IT

I

(a)

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER followed from the beginning the same Yogic process of integral development towards an identical goal of spiritual manifestation. But they followed it according to their own psychological and cultural circumstances, with some variations of initial stress and route. Moreover, neither the vision nor the spiritual practice was complete from the start. They grew with the years, and from time to time fresh shades were added, fresh vistas opened.

Even though Sri Aurobindo was an Avatar of what he termed the Supermind, he manifested as a representative of evolutionary humanity and it is but natural that he should undergo the travail of evolution and trace its steps for us by a gradual attainment and realisation of his own origin. Thus alone could he be a pioneer and model for us. And the mode of self-revelation chosen for his Avatarhood explains the progression of meaning we find in his use of one of the key-words of his Integral Yoga—“Supermind”.

In the days of his monthly periodical *Arya* (1914-1921) he took all the ranges of spiritual dynamism above the mind as different statuses of the Supermind, the Supramental being a continuous climb “overhead” from light to greater and more dynamic light of Perfection. The terms “super” and “supra” were used in the literal connotation of “above”—except that they would not refer to the static Ineffable, the silent “quality-less” Brahman, the sheer Nirvana, the utter Unmanifest, which also is beyond the level of mentality. They would apply to it only when it fell under the broad category of “Superconscious” or was restrictively labelled as “Supracosmic”.

One quotation should suffice to show the general comprehensive sense of the *Arya*'s Supermind: “The highest organised centre of our embodied being and of its action in the body is the supreme mental centre figured by the Yogic symbol of the thousand-petalled lotus, *sahasradala*, and it is at its top and summit that there is the direct communication with the supramental levels”¹.

Compare this statement with the various references made nearly twenty years later to the *chakra* concerned:

(1) “. . . the thousand-petalled lotus—*sahasradala*—above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at the highest opens to the

¹ *On Yoga I: The Synthesis of Yoga* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1955), p. 919. This book was partially revised by Sri Aurobindo at a fairly later period than 1914-1921. Only the unrevised portions remaining would illustrate our point.

intuition through which or else by an overflowing directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact”¹

(2) “... the thousand-petalled lotus above the head . commanding the higher thinking mind and the illumined mind and opening upwards to the intuition and overmind.”²

(3) “. the thousand-petalled lotus. where are centralised the thinking mind and higher intelligence communicating with the greater mind planes (illumined mind, intuition, overmind) above”³

(4) “. the *sahasradala* which centralises spiritual mind, higher mind, intuitive mind and acts as a receiving station for the intuition proper and overmind .”⁴

(5) “. the *sahasradala padma* through which the higher intuition, illumined mind and overmind all pass their rays”⁵

It is overwhelmingly borne in on us that, when a number of overhead planes come to be distinguished among themselves and from the Supermind, the Supermind is the one plane conspicuously absent in relation to what the *sahasradala* communicates with and receives from. The levels other than the Supermind are called by particular names and never labelled in general as “supramental”. On the contrary, as our third extract proves, they are spoken of as “the greater mind planes”; so, in contrast to the occasions when the *sahasradala* is mentioned in the *Arya*-days, now the label “supramental” would be a sheer misnomer for them and could never be applied either to “the illumined mind”, “the intuition proper” or even “the overmind”

Perhaps it will be argued “In the *Arya*-days the overhead planes below the intuition must have fallen outside the Supermind, for, what is said in the old definition—namely, that the thousand-petalled lotus has the Supramental directly communicating with it ‘at its top and summit’—is paralleled by what the first of the new definitions says—namely, that the *sahasradala* ‘at the highest opens to the intuition’. In other words, the ‘mind’ of the *Arya*-days can be taken to have included from among the later-demarcated planes not only the Higher Mind but also the Illumined Mind. The Supermind started beyond them—at the plane of the intuition”

This argument is rather insecure. The remaining new definitions do not appear to bear out its conclusion. Thus the third shows the thousand-petalled lotus as the centralising *chakra*—that is, the centre—for “the thinking mind and higher intelligence”, and regards it as “communicating with .the illumined mind, intuition, overmind”. Here the last three planes and not alone the Intuition and Overmind lie beyond the whole *sahasradala*—“top and summit” as well as the rest

Even if we accept that only the Intuition and Overmind and none of the lower overhead planes were classed as supramental, we still have the *Arya* at very substantial

1 *On Yoga II*, Tome One (1958), p 369

2 *Ibid* , p 370

3 *Ibid* , p 371

4 *Ibid* , p 375

5 *Ibid* , p 376

variance with later times. In fact, the variance would fundamentally remain substantial so long as the Overmind whose derivatives are all the other planes overhead would be considered supramental instead of being, as later, trenchantly divided from the Supermind.

The most natural interpretation, however, would be the one we have offered, for on 16 June 1923—two and a half years after the *Arya's* cessation—a letter of Sri Aurobindo's¹ comments thus on some experiences of a sadhak

“The region of glory felt in the crown of the head is simply the touch or reflection of the supramental sunlight on the higher part of the mind. The whole mind and being must open to this light and it must descend and fill the whole system. The lightning and the electric currents are the (*vaidyuta*) Agni force of the supramental sun touching and trying to pour into the body.”

The *sahasradala* is again in the picture and there is no hesitation to consider the overhead light in contact with it and passing through it as supramental. In absolute contrast with this wide spectrum of the Supermind and clinching our interpretation is a letter written on 24 October 1934. Quite frankly and explicitly it puts the early situation in regard to general appraisal and nomenclature. It remarks on a person's experience² “What he probably means by the supramental is the Above Mind—what I now call Illumined Mind—Intuition—Overmind. I used to make that confusion myself.”

We have said “general appraisal and nomenclature” because there is no uncertainty about Sri Aurobindo's knowledge in a broad manner, when he was writing the *Arya*, of the whole Above-Mind range, including, as a letter³ of 13 April 1942 concerning the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the *Arya*, makes clear, “the highest Supermind or Divine gnosis. quite above” all the levels he then classified as also supramental.

During the *Arya's* seven years Sri Aurobindo's “idea” was “the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy” for “the new age” of a “humanity” viewed as “moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race.” While enunciating this aim in an editorial in his periodical's fourth year he takes us into his confidence as follows: “The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt could be based, were already present to us, otherwise we should have had no right to make the endeavour at all, but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found.”⁴ Evidently, the entire Above-Mind ascent had been achieved—but Sri Aurobindo had not marked a radical difference between what he afterwards named the gradations of the Cosmic Knowledge, having the Overmind at their top, and a level beyond it, hitherto unexpressed on earth, which alone, properly speaking, was the Supermind.

1 *Champaklal's Treasures* (1976), pp 189-90

2 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953), p 322

3 *Ibid.*, p 335

4 *The Hour of God*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), Vol 17, p 399

He has declared.¹ “When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms . . .” That means writing confidently from the peak of possible spiritual expression. Again, in the letter about the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* he says apropos of a field of psychological change covered by the term “Supermind” everywhere “At the time the name ‘overmind’ had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in those chapters is the action of the Supermind when it descends into the overmind plane and takes up the overmind workings and transforms them . . .”

Sri Aurobindo remembered correctly that “overmind” as a distinguishing name had not been found by him, but in one place in the *Arya*² he does use the term as a synonym for “Supermind”, as is plain from a reference elsewhere³ in the same series of essays on *The Future Poetry*. He has the phrase “ . . . nearer to the direct vision and word of the Overmind from which all creative inspiration comes”, as well as the sentence: “The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity . . .” So it would be incorrect to say that the *Arya* is quite devoid of the appellation “Overmind”. But the usage recalls, though in a different psychological context, the Overmind-Supermind equivalence in Sri Aurobindo’s first employment of the two terms in very early days previous to his arrival in Pondicherry.⁴

He was translating the Gita during his Baroda period. Verses 49-50 of Chapter 2 ran “For far lower is action than the Yoga of the Supermind, in the Supermind seek thy refuge, for this is a mean and pitiful thing that a man should work for success and renown. The man whose Supermind is in Yoga casteth from him even in this world both righteousness and sin . . .” Verse 63 of the same Chapter is rendered “. . . And when memory faileth, the Overmind is destroyed and by the ruin of the Overmind the soul goeth to its perdition.” Then there is verse 42 in Chapter 3: “High, say the wise, [are] the senses but the heart is higher than they, and the Overmind is higher than the heart, he who is higher than the Overmind, that is He.” As is evident from his later *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo means in all these instances the higher intelligence or superior mind in man, the Buddhī or intellect, what he also called “the intelligent will”. Here is no going beyond the mental plane.

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN
(K D SETHNA)

1 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, p. 151

2 The chapter “The Ideal Spirit of Poetry” in the issue of 15 August 1919. The context is on p. 291 in the later publication, *The Future Poetry*, (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953)

3 *The Future Poetry*, p. 392, the chapter “The Word and the Spirit”

4 *Mother India*, November 24, 1975, p. 883 “Sri Aurobindo’s First Use of the Terms ‘Supermind’ and ‘Overmind’”

HOW OLD IS THE SAPTA CHATUSHTAYA?

As old as Homo Rishi, we may suppose—that is, man not yet mentalised as we are today, man still able to see the psychological nature of things, of animals and plants, of fruits and stars, of forms and numbers and their combinations, and the relation of everything with everything else. Traces of this consciousness have come down to us from ancient Egypt.

The moon, whose gentle radiance appears only at night, is a presence that has fascinated human beings from the earliest times. Today we know that without her existence the climate here on earth would be chaotic; the moon keeps it relatively regular by stabilising the range within which earth's "angle of obliquity" can oscillate, maintaining our equator always at roughly 23° 27' to the plane of earth's orbit around the sun. Without this mediating effect, life as we know it could probably never have appeared on earth.

This is what recent scientific research tells us. But for the first human beings, who adored her as the luminary of their darkness, and whose aspiration turned spontaneously towards her, what was the moon?

It seems that among many other aspects of the moon which struck the human intelligence—such as its connection with the tides—it served for the measurement of time. Alexander Marshack, a researcher in Paleolithic cognition,² has studied marks on Cro-Magnon skeletons that are about 28,000 years old and interpreted them as a form of notation for periods of time. A bone called the Blanchard Plaque "contains sixty-nine small incisions of a circular or crescentic form, arranged in a serpentine pattern. The serpentine turns all occur at major changes of the phases of the moon, with full moons at the left, new and crescent phases at the right, and half-moons in the midlines." Other plates that are similar in concept but more complex have been found, dating from up to the end of the Ice Age, 10,000 years ago.

It took longer for man to learn to measure time with the help of the sun. In the case of Methuselah, who according to the Bible lived 969 years, what are referred to as "years" are simply full cycles of the moon. If we divide 969 by 13 (since 13 moon-cycles are approximately equivalent to one solar year), we find that Methuselah died aged 75 (Though we regret the loss of the legend!)

Let us now take a very brief look at what the moon represented psychologically in ancient Egypt. It was considered as Thoth, the teacher. His yoga consisted of a process of identification with each of his 28 archetypes in succession—each corresponding to a phase of the moon, and grouped four by four in seven sets. We start with the full moon, the One, ontologically entering step by step the course of its manifestation, and once we have reached the middle we have to climb back, through other archetypes, step by step to the One. But something precious has been gained in the process, as is suggested by the last symbol of the One being different from the first. This is the path proposed by the moon, by Thoth, expressed in hieroglyphs in the Royal Cubit, the Egyptian Sapta Chatushtaya.

We may ask how and why these particular 28 archetypes were chosen from amongst the several hundred ones in existence. Sri Aurobindo speaks of a related situation which arose in Vedic India, probably at the same period of human prehistory, when the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was to be protected by concealment. The text of the Vedas in our possession today, the Samhita, is a compilation made to preserve it from the destructive trend of the approaching Iron Age. This can be considered "the last testament of the Ages of Intuition, the luminous Dawns of the Forefathers, to their descendants.. .". The great seers and sages of ancient Egypt, sensing the same danger, selected 28 signs from their garden of symbols and arranged them in a significant order. In this way they created a secret code capable of transmitting the essence of the ancient psychological culture, covering in a compressed form the full range of experimental psychology, and constituting the core pattern of the teaching of Thoth. This minimum indispensable knowledge would ensure that, generation after generation, the few individuals capable of it could know themselves and grow into their completeness and fullness—aided only by this magic wand, the Royal Cubit. The cubit was also used as a unit of measurement for building temples and pyramids. But its psychological message remained hidden from the profane—as did the secret of the Vedas until the coming of Sri Aurobindo, whose teaching made it possible to decipher them.

The Royal Cubit offers us $7 \times 4 = 28$ archetypes, 28 being, as we said, the number of the phases of the moon. But the constellations of the northern sky also play an important role in the figuration. The ancient Egyptians had an acute sense of orientation in space, which they also applied to the inner world, which for them, as the papyrus of Khonsu-Renep shows, had six main directions. They knew in which direction they should rise to meet the inner powers they called Isis, or Nephtys, or Ptah, etc. The cloudless skies of Egypt made the stars appear close to them. And they were particularly fascinated by what they called "the imperishable stars"—the circumpolar stars that are visible the whole year round. Among these are the constellations of the Great Bear and the Small Bear, as well as the Pole Star indicating the North, which for them represented the direction (straight up) in which to rise in order to reach the highest possible state of consciousness, that of ATUM, the All, the One, the Alone from the great beginnings. They were deeply impressed with the recurring 28 phases of the moon, and with the royal figures of the Great Bear and the Small Bear, each of which is made up of seven stars, and includes a body or chariot of four stars.

Further south, the brightest constellation is Orion, which the Egyptians called Sahu. Rising from the Orient, the East, with such component stars as Rigel and Betelgeuse, it is very impressive. The Egyptians used a single hieroglyph for writing "East" and "resurrection" or "assumption". So for them Orion was a symbol of assumption. When we advance in its direction, it is said, it advances towards us and extends its hand to us. At the most ancient place of pilgrimage in Europe, Santiago de Compostela ("compostela" meaning a togetherness of stars), people would go to see Orion rising and get a glimpse and a promise of their own immortality. It appears with 4

stars as the 4 points of a quadrilateral, and 3 stars in a line across the centre. So, as in the Great and Small Bears, the numbers 4 and 7 are evidently displayed. This constellation was represented by the Egyptians not in the way we see it with ordinary eyes, but with the stars in the greatest possible order—in a straight line—its seven stars perfectly united in a divine vision.

Looking back to the northern sky, we find the four sons of Horus, who played a major role in Egyptian psychology. Their stars appear just behind the constellation of the Great Bear, says the Egyptian text written in Shrine IV of Tut-Ankh-Amon. They are represented in the Royal Cubit as the four successive phases of the moon preceding Thoth, the teacher, by the hieroglyphs of their names, revealing succinctly but masterfully the essence of a complete path of yoga that is psychologically related to the ones known in India as Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.⁵

So the ancient Egyptians must have found it natural to divide the Royal Cubit into seven tetrads, which far from being arbitrary are in fact cosmic. In a sense this is a marriage of the moon (28) and the stars (7 and 4).

A significant characteristic of the Egyptian Sapta Chatushtaya is that its precisely formulated 28 movements of consciousness appear unchanged in all the existing representations of the Royal Cubit throughout the whole history of ancient Egypt.

Vedic India certainly had a Sapta Chatushtaya, as we know from the Sanskrit name which has come down to us, but its psychological elements remain unknown so far. Sri Aurobindo's Sapta Chatushtaya is entirely his own creation. He made use of this immemorial fundamental structure of our universe to display clearly and give its proper place and function to each of the psychological principles, grouped in fours on seven levels of being, which at that period constituted his own yogic programme. He not only practised these individually for years, as mentioned in his *Record of Yoga*, but also started to interweave them like a carpet. And finally he combined them all in all possible manners, so establishing a unique psychological platform from which to project himself into new dimensions of being.⁶

YVONNE ARTAUD and MEDHANANDA

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ON READING SRI AUROBINDO

AN EXPERIENCE FROM A FRIEND IN LIETUVA

Dear Nirod-da,

The New Year has already come to us In three years the 2000th will begin. It is interesting to wonder what it will bring Any changes in the world?

At present I am absorbed in reading *Essays Divine and Human* I bow to Sri Aurobindo every time I take the book into my hands What an extraordinary Divine Grace has led me to Him, to have such a special possibility to follow the thoughts of the Divine Man! Just believe it—I can simply sit quiet in the midst of this mental, vital and physical ocean and read all this? Isn't that a miracle? Every statement is like a ray of light, a diamond knife cutting to pieces ignorance in my being There is no question to which I cannot get the answer! Sometimes I can't read for a long time—the inner calm usually ascends from inside (earlier it was almost only from above), the one or another thought puts me into a kind of half-conscious dream It looks like the words go deep inside and mental activity stops One thing amazes me a good deal. When I usually read books on various objects like philosophy, psychology or religion I can feel the personality of the writer, his peculiar attitude, the style of writing, originality of thinking and I take the writer's position Usually it is very interesting, but the reality which glows through the lines is very rarely high or deep-touching and always fragmentary When I read Sri Aurobindo I have a strong sense of the fundamental wholeness in everything besides the brilliant logic and clarity I take Sri Aurobindo's word as it is—as a message, revelation, supreme Knowledge and Force at the same time—the rain of Bliss from the height, I believe, we cannot even touch yet, because, as far as I know, it has never manifested here before in such an all-embracing way Om Sri Aurobindo Mira

I am studying your *Fifty Poems* also It is a wonderful school of poetry regarding things from a new point of view I can't remember if I did tell you about the conference which took place in November at the Academy of Music and Art A report will be published by the Institute of Philosophy It is rather a new wind in the Lithuanian cultural atmosphere Earlier it wasn't possible to propose such a new thinking It would be a great pleasure and responsibility for me to work in that field, because it requires a lot of intellectual self-education, and I find it the sphere I really love. Only I must become worthy of it! I'll see if the Institute of Philosophy will give me the opportunity

Dear Nirod-da, I hope you are well Please, take my admiration and love

Your
DAIVA

P.S. I think it is not so bad to give my expression of Sri Aurobindo's writings I've written it because I felt it and I am happy about it Anyway, if it is not correct, please excuse me

THE WAGER OF AMBROSIA

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

II. THE DEBT WE OWE TO VYASA

JNANESHWAR likens the Gita to a rain-bearing cloud. No doubt it is the abundant sea that, from its gleaming contents, supplies water to the nimbus, but it is the cloud, and not the sea, which pours beneficences on creature-kind. In that sense it proves more gainworthy than the source from which it comes. The formless incomprehensible Brahman is All-Knowledge and may be all right, but it is not accessible to the understanding and cannot be seized by expression, nor does it in any immediate way participate in our affairs. Of what direct use is it then for us? Yet it is the same All-Knowledge that the Gita brings to us in a great plentiful measure. The blank featureless Absolute wears the body of verses and to vision gives a recognisably surer and sharper form. In its consciousness-force is the transmuting glow of its own unknown and unknowable divinity. The Impersonal assumes personality and as a ‘‘preceptor, father, mother, friend, master, guide or lover’’ establishes an approachable relationship with the aspirant to fulfil his thousandfold longing. The Gita’s advice to abandon all rules of conduct and remain in the oneness of the supreme Person then becomes dynamically meaningful. But this dynamism is not a one-way dynamism. Indeed, the supreme Person lets himself loose in the rush of a creative delight, the one wondrous way of which could be to breathe through the Truth-Word’s assertive luminosity. That is what the Gita is. Vyasa received it and put it in a metrical form of the Anushtubha. This truly is a marvellous gift to sorrowing mankind who should always be grateful to him. Our best way of being thankful to him would be to practise what he urges us to do.

About the greatness of this work Jnaneshwar gives a very glowing account in a number of places. Thus, at the beginning of the eighteenth chapter, he describes the Gita-Palace or the Gita-Temple as follows. Imagine a mountain of precious stones and jewels, imagine somewhere there a quarrymaster busy with the excavation work, imagine also a wide flat land where an imposing temple is built using the unlimited supply of this construction material. From the quarried stones of life is raised a fortification around the edifice of the Mahabharata. The architectural minutiae, and the magnificence, are planned by the great Seer and the Upanishads are the mine of that imagination and the Vedas its mountain of gems. The dialogue between the Lord and the chosen Disciple provides the rocky blocks which are put one above another in a pile of knowledge reaching heaven. This Gita-Palace of Vishnu, *Gitā-Vaishnava-Prāsād*, is the exceptional miracle that has come into existence through the genius of Vyasa. Some chant its glory while circumambulating it, some lean against the walls inside the temple and hear its recitations, some others, with a copper pipe and a betel leaf in their hand as their humble offering, enter into the *sanctum sanctorum* of its meaning. There, by the Understanding of the Self, they unite themselves with Srihari. Thus it proves to be a

Temple of Salvation, *Moksha Prāsād*, for those who come to it. A philanthropist does not make a distinction between the high and the low, child or grown-up, rich or poor, when he is entertaining people at a banquet and, in the same manner, the Gita offers to all such an abundant and generous feast of benediction. Be it therefore reciting and chanting, or listening, or pondering over its sense, the Gita leads every one on the path of liberation.

This is the excellence which the verses of Vyasa bring to us. In it the sublimity of poetry is as natural as the beauty of a flower or the sweetness of sugar. The radiance that is everywhere gathers itself into a gleaming marvel and becomes the sun; this sun then stands at the centre of creation to give light to it and to sustain it with nourishing energy. The Lord of the Universe is now amidst us as the Word of the Gita. She is his puissant arm to establish his will in life. In the phrase of Jnaneshwar she is *Mantra-pratipādyā Bhagawati*, the Goddess Parvati expounding and firming up the might of the Supreme in a delightful revelatory manifestation.

The Gita appears in the Book of Bhishma, Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata, and begins with a description of the battle-scene. Two formidable armies are standing face to face and are poised to engage themselves in the War of Destruction of the World. Dhritarashtra's hundred sons with the Axis Commanders are proud of their vast oceanic prowess and harbour no doubt of victory. The Pandavas on the other side, with a relatively smaller army, have the support of the virtuous Allies, with Krishna as the wise counsellor as well as the charioteer of Arjuna. War-conches are blown and the call has come. But, at the precise moment, sags the spirit of the Hero. This of course cannot be allowed to determine the fate of the nations and the divine Charioteer intervenes and takes the reins in his hand, he makes the human Warrior fight the battle of life. The un-Aryan attitude is an infirmity and the chosen Winner of the Trophy has to throw it away; by the acceptance of the highest Will he has to rise in thought and feeling and action, in conformity with his nature, *swabhāva*, and wield the defeatless weapon. Though in the immediate context the Gita is an exhortation and is meant to bring back the fighter on the path from which he has deviated in a moment of weakness, the purpose is to establish the Law of Righteousness in the dynamism of a thousand workings. The divine Teacher is on the battlefield, in the full splendour of Avatara divinity, and has taken control of the world and of all the occult forces that have precipitated here now. He has come to exterminate evil and to uphold the supreme Dharma. "Though unborn," to paraphrase Jnaneshwar, "I take birth by the process of Prakṛiti-Yoga. In the least affected by it is the indivisibility of my consciousness, my imperishable and immutable nature. My coming and my going are but the reflections of Maya and, though active in works, my freedom remains uncircumscribed. Imaged I cannot be, but by the potency of my Prakṛiti I take form for special purposes. Then I remove the darkness of ignorance and demolish the foundations of falsehood and tear to pieces the formats of retrograde and sombre powers. By supporting the actions of good, noble and virtuous souls I hoist the flag of happy victory. I destroy the crookedness-mongers and the demon-hosts and I protect the holy and the saintly. The soot of impiety

and non-reason and faithlessness accumulated over ages I cleanse and I keep the lamp trim and make it burn with a steady and bright flame This then becomes a joyous desirable festival of light for the Yogis The world gets filled with truthful bliss, *sat-sukha*; everywhere people follow in the conduct of righteousness; devotees remain in the nobility and fullness of graceful calm Howsoever huge be the mountain-heap of sins, it gets dissolved with my birth of incarnation For this work from age to age I come and I uphold the order of the worlds Those who live to serve me, or those who take pleasure in the knowledge of the Self, or those who are verily the dazzling mass of spiritual austerities, shining in their tapas, the ones who by their holiness give holiness to the holy and sacred places—they indeed dwell in me and come to me, become one with me, *madbhāvam-āgatah* ”

Such is the assurance of the Avataric divinity and it has come down to us by the most well-disposed and kindly act of Vyasa. He wrote it out in splendid poetry and fixed it permanently for us How we can be sufficiently faithful to it in the conduct of our daily transactions should be the thing of concern for us Sri Krishna enfolds Arjuna in his arms and, without breaking their two-ness, makes him one like himself, *dwaita na moditā kélé āpanā aisé*, says Jnaneshwar This is a spiritual possibility opened out to man and man should avail himself of it for his own well-being.

Sanjaya, the war reporter, is giving his account to the blind king Dhritarashtra in his palace He could see what was happening on the battlefield and hear the exact words spoken by Vasudeva to the great-souled Partha Sanjaya owes to Vyasa the exceptional boon of subtle sight and hearing In his exultation he says so and asserts further that wherever the supreme Master of Yoga and the Wielder of the mighty Bow are, surely Fortune and Victory and the luminous executive Power in full majesty and the Right in her steadfastness are there The whole experience for him of listening to the Gita was that of the Embrace of the Eternal, *brahmatvāchi miṭhi* in the language of the Marathi Adī Kavi The gripping felicity of Jnaneshwar’s poem too has that bright and lucid astounding quality which is as fresh as when it was composed seven hundred years ago. That indeed is the authentic mark of its overhead-spiritual character

(To be continued)

R Y DESHPANDE

NOTHING

‘NOTHING IS BUT WHAT IS NOT’—SHAKESPEARE’S IDEA OF NOTHING IN *MACBETH*, *HAMLET* AND *KING LEAR*

THERE IS nothing so long as the mind does not mind. It is only thinking which makes everything. But when one really minds, ‘what is not’ becomes everything. Shakespeare has superbly made a dramatic use of ‘nothing’, perhaps most overtly among all his plays in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

What for *Macbeth* becomes everything in life ultimately turns out to be nothing. While conscience makes Hamlet a coward (even granting that there is great action in his *not-acting*), it completely demolishes *Macbeth* in outward action, even though he is not unresponsive to the justification of his end. The spectre of ‘even-handed justice’¹ haunts his mind continually. He enters the world of evil, has the acrid taste of it, drinks, nay, immerses himself through and through in its poisonous potion, and feels the corrosive element in his body, mind, and spirit. Shakespeare shows with marvellous adroitness and deep percipience the workings of ‘what is not’ upon the minds of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. But with a difference. *Macbeth* plunges himself into the world of action, and grimly realizes,

I am in blood
Steep’d in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o’er.²

He clasps convulsively what is most nauseating for him after the murder of Duncan, which becomes of tremendous import and significance. For, *Macbeth* did kill many a man in the battlefield. It was not just the slaughter of another man with the name of Duncan for *Macbeth* now. It was the murder of one innocent, loving, kinsman-king which stung him so deep that it finally rent his whole being in twain, the good and the evil, the pure and the impure, as Hamlet asked his mother to embrace the pure part of her heart.³ Actually, in *Macbeth* the tragedy of the protagonist starts with the thought of murder, passes through the intermediary stages of the execution and consequence of the murders of Duncan, Banquo and the whole family of Macduff, Macduff excepting, and then comes to a halt with the death of *Macbeth* at the hands of Macduff. In *Hamlet*, of course, the execution of murder pales somewhat before the harrowing, agonised, spiritual doldrums that the hero undergoes. While the world seems for Hamlet weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, a place which is possessed by things rank and gross, even at the beginning of the play,—it appears to be full of chequered garments and laurels for *Macbeth*, which are to be worn in their newest gloss, not to be cast aside so soon. In fact, *Macbeth*, in donning the robes of honour, fame and glory, casts off the ‘eternal jewel’⁴ for ever. Hamlet, for that matter, prefers from the beginning to be a suffering pilgrim in the hunt of nobility and goodness and grace, to feel an abomination for the

kind of deed (or misdeed, murder?) which has been committed by his own uncle. So Hamlet recoils even as he gets the golden opportunity of killing his uncle who is already praying to heaven for mercy, whose bosom is already as black as death, who 'is fit and season'd for his passage'⁵ It is the 'compunctious visitings of nature'⁶ which fill Macbeth's world with the 'dunest smoke of hell'⁷ But it is a world created by Macbeth himself, a world the dark blanket of which does not allow heaven to peep through to cry, 'Hold, hold!'⁸ Hamlet finds his world, not created by him, of course, absolutely 'out of joint',⁹—a world where he finds himself ill at ease and which he was born to set right. Macbeth's is a world of action in the world of action, Hamlet's is a world of thought in the world of action. In both, of course, the mind suffers 'the nature of an insurrection'¹⁰ But there is a difference in the 'genius' and the 'mortal instruments'¹¹ in them both. The 'genius' it is which suffers untold qualms of conscience in both Macbeth and Hamlet. But the 'mortal instruments' are applied by Macbeth, while they are held in check by Hamlet. Macbeth, it is true, abhorred the deed of the murder of Duncan from the core of his being. But he fell a victim to outward allurements and provocations,—the prognostications of the witches and the ghastly provocations of his wife, Lady Macbeth. When at all he was settled, and bent up all his corporeal agents to the 'terrible feat'¹² of murder of the old king, he had to invoke the stars to hide their fires so as to shroud his black and deep desires, as he was fully conscious of the fact that the eye would definitely wink at the hand after the deed would be done. He appears before his wife with the blood-stained dagger in his hand and says, 'I have done the deed.'¹³ When chastised by her to go and get some water to wash the filthy witness from his hand, he woefully cries out in agony and despair,—

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.¹⁴

Shakespeare exhibits marvellously what terrible havoc the 'mortal instruments' have played upon the mind of Macbeth. 'What is not' has become very much a reality for Macbeth to grapple with. Before the murder of Duncan it was the mind which controlled the body and its corporeal agent, after the murder it is the body which is driving the mind to really mind what is to be minded—the loss of something very vital, not just 'full of sound and fury'¹⁵ which signifies nothing, but that which signifies everything for man. Macbeth, in paying the lease of life to time and mortal custom, actually enters the portal of heaven in realizing for himself illuminatingly the gruesomeness and futility of the crimes which he had committed. The play began with nothing which was forced into being everything which, in turn, was brought to nothing. So the wheel came full circle. Paradoxically enough, in *King Lear* Lear remonstrates with Cordelia at the outset of the play that 'nothing will come of nothing'.¹⁶ In *Macbeth* 'nothing' generates everything for Macbeth and engulfs him. In *Hamlet* 'nothing' it is,

apparently, which christens Hamlet, sanctifies his whole being and leaves him unprofaned in the realm of conscience. It is not by shuffling off this mortal coil, but by suffering and sustaining an internal agony in not being able to cope with the disjointed world, that the world of nothing is lit up with spiritual gnosis. Hamlet considered King Claudius to be a thing 'of nothing',¹⁷ that is to say, of no value, yet it was this obnoxious presence of the murderous King which wracked him into despair and wrung his heart. He had said to Polonius:

Ay, sir, to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.¹⁸

The world of dishonesty represented by King Claudius ill-affords such an honest being as Hamlet is to dwell in it. But King Claudius grovels as a creature, is dwarfed by the magnanimity and obdurate idealism of Hamlet. Hamlet says to the King point-blank that he, that is, the King himself, will have to progress through the guts of a beggar, that is to say, the King and the beggar will both be reduced to nothing, will both be eaten up by the worm.¹⁹ So the King is nothing really when compared with Hamlet's stature of nobleness and grace. Hamlet grappled with this thing 'of nothing' (the King himself) in his own way of idealistic dealing.

'Nothing' pervades *King Lear* even more sardonically than *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Lear was made to believe, and he really believed, that he was everything. But he found ultimately that it was a lie, that he was not 'ague-proof'.²⁰ So obnoxious did the world seem to him that, when implored by Gloucester to allow him to kiss his regal hand, he told him

Let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality.²¹

Gloucester also gets wind of the world wearing out to nothing with the fall of Lear, a 'ruin'd piece of Nature'.²² As Lear urges Cordelia to heave her heart into her mouth, his whole world which is replete with regal splendour and appurtenances begins to tumble. He gives his All to Goneril and Regan, saves none for himself, gives away all other titles than that of the fool, as the Fool chastises him.

All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.²³

The Fool, in fact, helps Lear see his downfall and woefully realise it. Lear befools himself, gets the price, realises that 'nothing can be made out of nothing'.²⁴ But in realising it he becomes 'an O without a figure'.²⁵ The Fool says to him "I am a Fool, thou art nothing."²⁶ Contrarily, depleted of all humanity, Lear is redeemed and becomes replete with divinity as from 'everything' via nothing he passes on to the 'thing' itself. He shakes off the lendings as he is now an 'unaccommodated man'.²⁷ Sophistication of the slightest kind is gall and wormwood to him. He 'unbuttons'.²⁸

himself into the world of Nothing which he had so vociferously despised at the outset of the play. He now feels that it was his merciless flesh which had begotten those ungrateful offspring. This feeling corrodes his whole being.

Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.²⁹

'Nothing' becomes now an anodyne for the tormented and demented soul of Lear. And with the becoming of the thing itself, he realises "None does offend, none, I say, none."³⁰

Shakespeare always makes his tragic protagonists hold on to life's accoutrements and then strips them of all the trappings. They wallow in the trappings and then rend their whole being with a terrible internal conflict until they realize the utter futility and meaninglessness of the appendages which they so lovingly embraced. The 'insubstantial pageant'³¹ of life certainly fades away and not a whit is left behind. Life transpires into a dream on the flotsam and jetsam of reality. And this dream sometimes passes off into nothing. This 'nothing' again assumes gigantic proportion to engulf the tragic protagonists, until they realize its inanity. Thus is the wheel allowed to come full circle, within the framework of which the concentration of tragic intensity is kept agog and, at the minute, witness of this tragic spectacle, "the elements of our being fall, for the moment at any rate, into an ordered and beautiful pattern, as the iron filings arrange themselves under the influence of the magnet," as Aldous Huxley has beautifully stated in his famous essay, *Tragedy and the Whole Truth*.³² The idea of nothing, therefore, becomes dramatically significant inasmuch as it happily synchronizes our innermost cravings for what Arnold terms a 'harmonious acquiescence of mind'³³ in the midst of all discordances of life. Shakespeare presents an irised view of nothing in these tragedies, keeping his eyes fixed on the objectivity of the world and yet transcending and dissolving this objectivity into a sheer subjective, lone view in which man's 'glassy essence'³⁴ is laid bare. The more the tragic protagonist draws himself away from nothing and hugs the world of everything, the more is he imperceptibly or perceptibly driven towards nothing.

Shakespeare masterminded this paradox of nothing and went on to dramatize it. A paradox it is, no doubt, but it is a paradox which makes our hearts pregnant with pity and minds redolent of sapient speculations.

PRANABANANDA BANDYOPADHYAY

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THE EMERGENCE OF BIG SCIENCE

1. Early Beginnings

It is justifiably said that the present age is dominated by science. The technological developments that have directly flowed from it have brought about a radical change in our lifestyle. Whether it be a modern university centre, a hospital, a petrochemical complex, a pharmaceutical institution, a textile industry or a new management system, we see in it something altogether different that was never there in earlier civilizations. Supercomputers, landing of Man on the Moon, giant particle accelerators for the investigation and study of the elementary constituents of matter, understanding of genes, researches pertaining to the chemical nature of life are but a few outstanding examples. Just a palm-size computer disc now houses a whole library of books. The synthesis of tunes from professionalized solo instruments to produce novel forms of music is a fine aesthetic possibility that is emerging today, by this technique an entirely new dimension can be provided, for instance, to the Ninth Symphony. The modern generation takes all these artistic, commercial, aesthetic achievements for granted, without realizing how Big Science has brought about the surprising change. To arrive at this stage not only sustained effort but also arduous struggle over centuries had to be put in.

If we quickly look at the periods of intense intellectual activity in the past, starting from the time of the Greeks, we notice that science has seen several ups and downs in its evolution. All-time giants like Pythagoras, Democritus, Aristotle contributed in a vast measure to the speculative philosophy of science based on pure reason, this was considered by them to be the sole means in search of truth. In the Middle Ages Christianity took control of the working of the society and imposed its creeds on the thought of man, its belief in revelation and dogma posed a great threat to the liberal and free logical method of science. Then, of course, there were the demands of despotic rulers to develop powerful weaponry to channelise science for utilitarian purposes. In this suffocating atmosphere it was not an easy task to make a scientific beginning. Pioneers of science had to fight their way through and introduce a new methodology of studying the physical world; they had to first break down the contemporary barriers. This in turn, naturally, meant a highly individualistic spirit of investigation and pursuit, only men of exceptional calibre and determination could stand against the hostilities of their time. In contrast to this, today, we take science like a bird in the air on its wings, in fact it has acquired a great dignity in our reckoning. Every activity, every second of our existence, every mode of our thinking, is now so dependent on science and technology that, if these ceased, the entire mechanism of the present-day civilization would quickly come to a grinding halt. No-science could mean a disastrous situation.

Thus, for the human race to exist, science has now become its life-force. In the process, the human intellect also has made unparalleled progress. In contrast to the stone-age brain, which was only concerned with the body's survival, we are thinking to

send, in the coming century, Man to Mars. It will be interesting as well as rewarding to study how this enormous development in doing science has at all taken place.

Among the ancient Greeks we discern the early scientific beginnings in the approach of Hesiod and Euclid. In astronomy planetary movements were observed and explanations offered to correlate them. However, we still do not see anywhere the notion of controlled experimentation and observation characteristic of our science.

It is to Galileo that we owe the debt for initiating such a procedure. The remarkable success of such a procedure of experimentation and observation bears ample witness to its sound methodology. This marks the initiation of New Science, well epitomized by the publication of Galileo's *Scienza Nuova*. The fruitful method was picked up by Newton and given a sound basis in the form of empirical rationalism. The rapid progress made by physics adopting this approach has struck people with wonder, it even changed the very nature of individual and collective thinking.

The success of this method could perhaps be appreciated better by seeing some of the discoveries recently made. Take, for instance, radioactivity. When Rutherford picked it up for investigation at the beginning of this century, he first established the properties of the alpha particle. Discovery of the atomic nucleus and artificial transmutation of one element into another then followed in quick succession. We have here another *Scienza Nuova* opening out the path of physics to enter into the domains of the microscopic universe.

While thus was made an entry into the microscopic world, the scale of experimentation still remained restricted to the table-tops—these were still classroom experiments. In contrast to the directness and simplicity of these experiments, we get awe-struck by the gigantic sizes of apparatus designed and built in later years. It looks that the fundamental issue of whether universal space is filled with ether needs to be settled by an apparatus only of the Michelson-and-Morley kind. Imagine the equipment they had assembled! It “consisted of a stone slab about 5 feet square and 14 inches thick on which were mounted the optical apparatus. To make sure that the axis of rotation of the stone was rigorously horizontal and to prevent any errors due to vibrations, stresses and strains, they had the stone floated in liquid mercury. The mercury was poured into an annular, cast-iron trough about 0.6 inches thick, on the mercury floated a doughnut-shaped piece of wood; and the stone rested on the wood. A pivot in the centre made the float concentric with the trough which was of such dimensions that it left a clearance of less than half an inch around the float. The cast-iron trough rested on a bed of cement on a low brick pier built in the form of a hollow octagon. They dug down to bedrock to set the supporting column of the interferometer—it could not be safely anchored in soil.”

The principle on the basis of which they carried out the experiment is quite simple. They split a beam of light, coming from the same source, in two mutually perpendicular directions. These two beams, having travelled equal distances were reflected back to a common point where the difference in the times of their arrival was measured.

If we assume that universal space is filled with ether, then there will be an ether

drift due to the motion of the earth while travelling through it. The speed of light should therefore get affected by it, in the manner the speed of a row-boat gets affected by the flowing stream. Michelson and Morley set up their apparatus in such a way that one arm of the interferometer was along the direction of the earth's motion and the other at right angles to it. In the presence of the drift the two beams of light would arrive with a finite time difference which can be measured in terms of the shifting of their interference pattern. If Δt is this time difference, then it is given by the expression $\Delta t = Lv^2/c^3$, where L is the length travelled by each light beam, v the drift velocity which is equal to the orbital velocity of the earth, and c the velocity of light. With $v = 3 \times 10^4$ m/s, $c = 3 \times 10^8$ m/s, and $L = 100$ m, $\Delta t = 3 \times 10^{-15}$ sec. This corresponds to well over a shift of one fringe of Sodium yellow line. But Michelson and Morley did not observe any shifting of fringes, indicating that there is no time difference between the arrival of the two beams,—or that there is no ether drift in case it is to be asserted that the ether does exist. This is one of the most profound negative results of the experimental physics which, in a very decisive way, determined its future course of development. The far-reaching conclusion needed a mighty apparatus indeed! This may be considered as the beginning of Big Science itself.

(To be continued)

ANIRBAN DEB

BY DROPS

By golden drops the ceaseless nectar rains
 In the emptiness of spirit-repose.
 A twilight is changed to a ravishing dawn
 And the sun of another birth awakes; a seed
 Of another boundless resplendent light
 Is cast in the womb of passionless universe.
 Voiceless, immune the heart drew near to the unknown
 And earth revelled in the vastness of her day

20 6 1961

ROMEN

(From the late poet's unpublished diaries)

O AURA!

O AURA! mystical and dazzling white
Like tamed lightning around the Mother's Form!
Fiery, yet cool, softly-suffused, yet bright,—
Chill glow of the Eternal, changed to warm
Human-enchancing glory in our sight!
In Thee all suffering and stain and storm
Dissolves to rich quintessences of Hush
And Happiness within the golden blush
Fringing Thy stainless brilliance! I have known
Nothing before so tranquil and alone,
So chaste and cleansing, so serene-enclosed,
So polished in Nothingness, so deep-reposed
In Holy Prowess, such clean-edged control
Of universes which will not allow
Entries of sullied gaze, O Light! as Thou!
O visible outflowering of Oversoul!
Would that I were a floating atom now
Caught in Thy fringe, O blinding Aureole!
That I might break to Vision and behold
The inner meaning of Thy silver-gold
Enchantment clear-emparadising space!
Aura! I see Thy sacred Outline trace
The map of unborn worlds, the deeply dumb
Cry-runnings of creations yet to come!
O bordered Miracle of perfect Rest!
Indelibly, tonight, Thou art impressed
Upon my life as though Thou wert a Seal
Upon its darkness With my being I feel
The safety in Thy width of quiet glow.
Each thought in me moves on Thy blossomed flow
Round the Beloved, like a pearlèd boat
Once and for all, eternally a-float
Without the weary stroking of an oar
To bear it towards the limit of a shore
Rich Light! Sweet Mother's Shadow! Golden Rose
Streamed to petallic lustre round Her tread!
Who can define Thy Fountain-Source! Who knows
From what strange Heights Thy kindled Peace is shed
Into the glooms of eyes that cannot see?
O steady, yet dissolving Mystery

That seems to pass and yet shall never pass!
 How can we glimpse Thee through such imperfection?
 Or art Thou, but the many-millionth reflection
 Of Thy [own] self shot from some mirrored glass
 Held in eternity? And yet to reach
 Even to Thee, glorious beyond all speech,
 Were delicate and unmistakable sign
 That we are chosen children of Thy Love DIVINE

30th September 1933

8-20, Night

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

Harin Mother's Aura was *terribly distinct* this evening Please tell me if this is successful—what is its distinct feature of success?

Sri Aurobindo: That is very fine—extremely beautiful. It renders with great force the nature and power of the Aura

(N B —'but' in the sixth line from the bottom is in Sri Aurobindo's hand)

THAT ONE MORNING

THAT one morning
 Who came to me
 Flashing a surprise—

Wearing a vernal garland
 The cuckoo—flute in hand,
 On slippers made of pollen
 Who entered—
 The sacred precincts of my heart?

Weaving lovely colour-patterns
 With gentle finger-rays,
 Who is it bathing me
 In her sunny bliss of love?

15 January 1935

SUNDARAM

(Translated from the original in Gujarati, *Vasudha*, p 5, by Dhanavanti)

FIRST FLASH

DARKNESS was folding wings
When the first flash of light
Ruptured the eastern horizon
And an ancient yet ever-young god
Surfaced smiling as fresh
As the dew-bathed *seuli** scattered
On the floor of green grasses
I visualised a sinless cosmos
Which remained an enigma
To the vainglorious humanhood
Scratching and smiting
On the doors of the Unknown,
Only to realise the insignificance
Of being here,
In an incomprehensible universe

PRONAB KUMAR MAJUMDER

* *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*, a fragrant white star-shaped salverform flower with orange corolla tube

WHOSE

WHOSE call is heard
Upon my life
That I cannot
Rest content?
A look is certainly laid
Upon my love
And captures me
By a sweet intoxicant.
An invisible hand
Shapes all events,
Good and bad
In my fragile history.

O whose call,
Whose look
And whose hand
Are there
To carry me safe
Through uneven days
And land me
In an unknown felicity?

ASHALATA DASH

DAYBREAK

THE nightingale sings her delicate song
in the trees, greeting the dawn with laments
for Itys, Itys much-lamented; and shepherds
of the flocks who wander on the mountains
start playing their pipes, the pairs of gold-maned colts
awaken to their pasture, already
the beast-killing hunters are striding to their work,
and at the Ocean's sources the honey-voiced swan
is singing The boats are setting out, moved
by the oars and by fair gusts of wind, white sails
are hoisted .

EURIPIDES

(*The Penguin Book of Greek Verse*, edited by Constantine A. Trypanis)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

ACCORDING to Sri Aurobindo, the moment we enter into the Vedas we are confronted with a medley of confusions. Spirituality, philosophical ideas, mystic words, magic sentences, colourful phrases, physical images are scattered all around. Expressions of what appears to us as spiritual truths are housed there side by side with ceremonial, natural, historical, geographical, social ideas. Now the question may arise as to which ideas are fundamental and which secondary. What is the main trunk and what are the branches?

Many centuries after the Vedic age, Western scholars and their modern Indian counterparts tackled the Veda by making full use of Sayana, but arriving at somewhat different conclusions.

In this new light the Vedic hymnology has come to be interpreted as part superstition, part poetry, part allegory of Nature with an important astronomical element. The rest is the formulas and practices of a sacrificial spiritualism charged with a primitive consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo interpreted the ancient scripture differently. He wrote “The European scholars took up the ritualistic tradition, but for the rest they dropped Sayana overhead and went on to make their own etymological explanation of the words, or build up their own conjectural meanings of the Vedic verses and gave a new presentation often arbitrary and imaginative. What they sought for in the Veda was the early history of India, its society, institutions, customs, a civilisation-picture of the times. They invented the theory based on the difference of languages of an Aryan from the north, an invasion of a Dravidian India of which the Indians themselves had no memory or tradition of which there is no record in their epic or classical literature. The Vedic religion was in this account only worship of Nature-Gods full of solar myths and consecrated by sacrifices and a sacrificial liturgy primitive enough in its ideas and contents and it is these barbaric prayers that are much vaunted, haloed and apotheosized Veda.”

Sri Aurobindo says. “It is when we come to interpretation of the Veda and seek help from ancient Indian scholarship that we feel compelled to make the largest reserves. For even in the earlier days of classical erudition the ritualistic view of the Veda was already dominant, the original sense of the words, the lines, the allusions, the clue to the structure of the thought had been long lost or obscured, nor was there in the erudite that intuition or that spiritual experience which might have partly recovered the lost secret. In such a field mere learning, especially when it is accompanied by an ingenious scholastic mind, is as often a snare as a guide.

“In Yaska’s lexicon, our most important help, we have to distinguish between two elements of very disparate value. When Yaska gives as a lexicographer the various meanings of Vedic words, his authority is great and the help he gives is of the first

importance. It does not appear that he possessed all the ancient significances, for many had been obliterated by Time and Change and in the absence of a scientific Philology could not be restored. But much also had been preserved by tradition. Wherever Yaska preserves this tradition and does not use a grammarian's ingenuity, the meanings he assigns to words, although not always applicable to the text to which he refers them, can yet be confirmed as possible senses by a sound Philology. But Yaska the etymologist does not rank with Yaska the lexicographer. Scientific grammar was first developed by Indian learning, but the beginnings of sound Philology we owe to modern research. Nothing can be more fanciful and lawless than the methods of mere ingenuity used by the old etymologists down even to the nineteenth century, whether in Europe or India. And when Yaska follows these methods, we are obliged to part company with him entirely. Nor in his interpretation of particular texts is he more convincing than the later erudition of Sayana.

“The commentary of Sayana closes the period of original and living scholastic work on the Veda which Yaska's Nirukta among other important authorities may be said to open. The lexicon was compiled in the earlier vigour of the Indian mind when it was assembling its prehistoric gains as the materials of a fresh outburst of originality; the commentary is almost the last great work of the kind left to us by the classical tradition in its final refuge and centre in Southern India before the old culture was dislocated and broken into regional fragments by the shock of the Mahomedan conquest. Since then we have had jets of strong and original effort, scattered attempts at new birth and novel combination, but work of quite this general, massive and monumental character has hardly been possible.

“The commanding merits of this great legacy of the past are obvious. Composed by Sayana with the aid of the most learned scholars of his time, it is a work representing an enormous labour of erudition, more perhaps than could have been commanded at that time by a single brain. Yet it bears the stamp of the co-ordinating mind. It is consistent in the mass in spite of its many inconsistencies of detail, largely planned, yet most simply, composed in a style lucid, terse and possessed of an almost literary grace one would have thought impossible in the traditional form of the Indian commentary. Nowhere is there any display of pedantry, the struggle with the difficulties of the text is skilfully veiled and there is an air of clear acuteness and of assured, yet unassuming authority which imposes even on the dissident. The first Vedic scholars in Europe admired especially the rationality of Sayana's interpretations.

“Yet, even for the external sense of the Veda, it is not possible to follow either Sayana's method or his results without the largest reservation. It is not only that he admits in his method licenses of language and construction which are unnecessary and sometimes incredible, nor that he arrives at his results, often, by a surprising inconsistency in his interpretation of common Vedic terms and even of fixed Vedic formulae. These are defects of detail, unavoidable perhaps in the state of the materials with which he had to deal. But it is the central defect of Sayana's system that he is obsessed always by the ritualistic formula and seeks continually to force the sense of

the Veda into that narrow mould. So he loses many clues of the greatest suggestiveness and importance for the external sense of the ancient Scripture,—a problem quite as interesting as its internal sense. The outcome is a representation of the Rishis, their thoughts, their culture, their aspirations, so narrow and poverty-stricken that, if accepted, it renders the ancient reverence for the Veda, its sacred authority, its divine reputation quite incomprehensible to the reason or only explicable as a blind and unquestioning tradition of faith starting from an original error.

“There are indeed other aspects and elements in the commentary, but they are subordinate or subservient to the main idea. Sayana and his helpers had to work upon a great mass of often conflicting speculation and tradition which still survived from the past. To some of its elements they had to give a formal adhesion, to others they felt bound to grant minor concessions. It is possible that to Sayana’s skill in evolving out of previous uncertainty or even confusion an interpretation which had firm shape and consistence, is due the great and long-unquestioned authority of his work.

“The first element with which Sayana had to deal, the most interesting to us, was the remnant of the old spiritual, philosophic or psychological interpretations of the Shruti which were the true foundation of its sanctity. So far as these had entered into the current or orthodox* conception, Sayana admits them, but they form an exceptional element in his work, insignificant in bulk and in importance. Occasionally he gives a passing mention or concession to less current psychological renderings. He mentions, for instance, but not to admit it, an old interpretation of Vritra as the Coverer who holds back from man the objects of his desire and his aspirations. For Sayana Vritra is either simply the enemy or the physical cloud-demon who holds back the waters and has to be pierced by the Rain-giver.

“A second element is the mythological, or, as it might almost be called, the Puranic,—myths and stories of the gods given in their outward form without that deeper sense and symbolic fact which is the justifying truth of all Purana.**

“A third element is the legendary and historic, the stories of old kings and Rishis, given in the Brahmanas or by later tradition in explanation of the obscure allusions of the Veda. Sayana’s dealings with this element are marked by some hesitation. Often he accepts them as the right interpretation of the hymns, sometimes he gives an alternative sense with which he has evidently more intellectual sympathy, but wavers between the two authorities.’’²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References and Notes

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2 *Sri Aurobindo, SABCL* Vol. 10, pp. 16-19

* I use the word loosely. The terms orthodox and heterodox in the European or sectarian sense have no true application to India where opinion has always been free. (Note by Sri Aurobindo)

** There is reason to suppose that Purana (legend and apologue) and Itihasa (historical tradition) were parts of Vedic culture long before the present forms of the Puranas and historical Epics were evolved. (Note by Sri Aurobindo)

ABOUT WOMAN

(Translated by Satadal from the Bengali of Nolini Kanta Gupta)

10. WOMAN AND WEALTH

(Continued from the issue of December 1995)

THERE are many riches which are in reality forces of knowledge; but they have been either ignored or feared for ever by humanity, because forces of ignorance have usurped them. Sita is the crowning jewel among chaste women—but once touched by a Rakshasa, and compelled to live in the abode of a Rakshasa be it for a day, she can't escape even after passing the test of fire. She becomes untouchable for ever! This is the judgement of human ignorance!

Sita is the symbol of the whole of womankind. The human drama in the world is a more tragic Ramayana. How is the woman regarded in general? To a spiritual seeker she is the embodiment of the forces of ignorance; even a householder at times is heard to make similar accusations—such as, *pathe nārī vivarjita* (“Woman should be abandoned on the way”). One cannot totally disagree that women in a sense are a hindrance and a danger from the spiritual as well as from the material point of view. Countless wars between countries were caused by women, as also the many social disorders of the past and the present. It is not difficult to prove that in personal life too woman can play havoc. Judging from all these aspects, the French have come to the conclusion that, in the event of any disorder anywhere, there must necessarily be the hand of a woman—*cherchez la femme*, and the fate of each man is controlled by a spell-binding woman—*la femme fatale*—and once trapped by her there is no escape from hell. There is no need whatsoever to dwell upon the influence of woman on spiritual aspirants. From Buddha to Ramakrishna all were equally afraid of woman. When gods like Varuna and Mitra and a sage like Viswamitra could not escape her, then it is better not to talk about ordinary aspirants like you and me.

But we are blind—the vice is not woman's, there is no vice anywhere in woman's own nature and dharma, in her own reality. The vice has come from outside. Someone else has come to impose upon woman this burden of evil. The secret is this. The force held by woman, of which she is the symbol, has been possessed by asuras and demons. That is why the force of woman has become ominous instead of being positive. The force of woman means the force of Nature, that is to say, the force which is trying to manifest in earthly forms, awake in the rhythm of life and whose aim is fulfilment and prosperity here on earth. One must get the help of this Nature, this force of woman if one wants to blossom in life and establish one's kingdom upon earth. The gods failed, and it is the asuras and demons who have come to possess this *ādyāśakti* (primal force). Who are these asuras and demons? The forces which want unrefined and lowly enjoyment, strength, riches, who are guided by egotism and ignorance, who are—

*kāmāmāsritya duṣpūram dambhamānamadānvitāh
mohād grhītvāsadgrāhān pravartante asucivratāh XVI 10*

(Giving themselves up to insatiable lust, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding evil ideas through delusion, they act with impure resolve —The Gita)

In the den of these titans Mahashakti is now a slave; our mother is at the service of the titans That is why we see the demons victorious all over the world—the gods do not even have enough time to flee and save themselves. Those who are godlike in their thoughts and feelings, those who want divine riches have no place in this world. That is why they have always wanted happiness, peace and unmixed good away from the earth; they always wanted to go beyond life to another sort of world. The heart of the earth they left in the hold of the lord of the earth—‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s ’ That is why it is said that howsoever the virtuous may be tormented and distressed in this world, their grievances will be amply compensated in the other world, the reward of dharma is in heaven.

But why did this primal force, the force of woman come to be possessed by the demons? How? And when? The day the creation came into being, that is to say when the existence-consciousness-bliss of Brahman came to be prisoned in the physical cells, the day Primal-Nature descended in the form of matter, the day the Mother of Consciousness became the earthly mother—in order to get herself embodied and awakened in matter on earth—from then on the earth has come to be under the grip of demons and titans. Descending into the gross division of the physical, Mahashakti has withdrawn her true consciousness, her light of knowledge, her being cut up into atoms and molecules of matter, she has scattered herself in the heavens. The very appearance of ignorance in the consciousness of Mother Aditi entails the birth of the sons of Diti. And from that very day woman also has become a thing of enjoyment, an embodiment of blind lust and desire in the human society—the lust that is the cause of all these creations ancient and primal—*kāmastadagre* (before it was lust)

But there is also an effort within the stream of creation to put together the scattered parts of the Mother’s body self-oblivious under the grip of the demons; and to reanimate and consciously awaken her. The effort to deliver the Mahashakti and consciously establish her in the very physical is known as evolution; the ascending movement, the march of Rudra or Shiva. Whenever and wherever our Mother got herself freed to a certain degree from the clutches of the demons and titans and returned to her abode of Shiva, to that extent truth and good and light and bliss and immortality made their appearance on Earth for a moment. Among humans, the woman who was fortunate enough to hold and reflect a bit of that unshackled reality of the Mother, has come to stand by the gods as embodied beauty and good

We the males, children born of mother, are bound to imbibe the mother’s dharma. No wonder then that the children born out of sex are full of lust and asuric in nature! That is why we need tapasya—to free our Mother in captivity, bring her home and

establish her among her own people. We are to open our eyes and see how in the play of the world the Mother of the worlds has become an instrument in the hands of the demons and as a result in the human society how woman—a part and parcel or an image of hers—has turned into Alakshmi. Our task will be to demolish the demons and free the mother, the force of woman—to bring Satī at the feet of her lord Shiva, to place the force of woman at the service of the gods. The whole sadhana, the highest fulfilment in the life of woman, of the woman-race is here.

The demons and titans who have turned women into things for satiating lust will naturally want to keep them as such for ever—because this is to their interest; the most effective means to maintain and extend their sway upon earth. Men have so long listened to the mantra of these asuric forces—so on one side the worldly man trifled with the woman while keeping her in close company, on the other the sannyasi heaved a sigh of relief by shedding her off completely. That is why woman was never emancipated—she did never find out her own true dharma as a woman, man too did not achieve his fulfilment as a social being.

Along with the force of woman, the demons and titans have caught another force in their grip, and with its help have tightened their stranglehold on earth—that force is wealth. The sons of the gods have come to look upon wealth also as a thing to be dreaded or trifled with like woman. In the East we say, *arthamanartham bhavāya nityam* (“Always consider wealth as an evil”), in the West, the Christians say, “Even a camel can pass through the eye of a needle, but the rich can never enter the path of heaven.” But, like woman, wealth also has no natural vice of its own. Willingly or unwillingly, the forces of the gods have distanced themselves from wealth saying, *kaupīnavantah khalu bhāgyavantah* (“Fortunate are those who have only the loin-cloths to cover their bodies”) That is why the force of wealth also, like that of woman, has gone into the hands of evil; that is why its misuse has acquired evil name. Otherwise all wealth is the riches of the goddess Lakshmi. The demons have forcibly stripped goddess Lakshmi of her riches and furnished the demon-queen with the same. We who are in reality the sons of Lakshmi, did not notice it, or even after seeing did not try to remedy it. Therefore let this be our firm resolve that we shall free the force of wealth from the clutches of the asuras to give it back to the gods, we shall fill the store of Lakshmi with the wealth freed from the grip of Alakshmi.

If the gods want to descend upon Earth, if matter has to embody spiritual light, if society has to become the abode of men of knowledge, of sadhaks, of realised souls, then the force of woman and that of wealth must be freed from the clutches of the demons. When woman and wealth wipe out the scars of the asuras and appear in a new form with the crown of light, then only shall we know that heaven has descended upon Earth, the aspiration and prevision of those who dreamt of *dharmarājya*, of the golden era, in all countries throughout the ages, are going to be fulfilled at last.

ADWAITA: A DUTCH VEDANTIC POET

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

All This is Brahman

NOT only is the human soul a spark of Brahman, everything in the world is Its becoming This truth is expressed in the famous formula

sarvam khalvidam brahma (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3 14 1)

All this is indeed Brahman.

Adwaita's experience is in perfect accord with this. The absolute Reality is One, *ekam sat* (*Rig Veda* 1 164 46), but it has become "all this," all that is in nature

Brahman, says Adwaita like the Vedantins, is the foundation of the world (wereldgrond) and everything appears on this vast substratum

On Brahman, world's foundation, appear all things,
An open-work pattern of playfulness through the
Interstices rolls unhindered radiant eternity

In another sonnet Brahman, as the foundation of all things, is called an amphitheatre in which the world is unfolded in its gravity and in its playfulness First, he describes the passion-play—the setting of the sun who is the ruler of sky, land and water

Then in front of some silver stars, his hater
Made him go down on the bloody mountains;
And white with grief and veneration the moon stood;
And the thunder-organ played the Stabat Mater

This is only one aspect of the world-play Adwaita's heart seems to be drawn by the other aspect, what he calls "scherts," playfulness, frolic, full of gaiety and lightness.

. beneath the immense circus-dome
Ballet of young worlds, clothed
In gossamer, twisting in a spiral, diaphanous and supple,
Orion, buttressing athlete with thighs apart, held
The Milky Way, the grandiose hoop, firmly
For the leap of the clown, the white-fanned comet

The world is, for Adwaita, certainly not an illusion, as the Illusionist School (*māyā-*

vāda) of Vedanta would have us believe. Everything that appears on the substratum of Brahman is Brahman himself. It is Brahman that pervades everything. The Íśa Upanisad says

īśā vāsyamidam sarvam yat kimca jagatyām jagat (Isha Upanisad 1)

Whatever moves in this moving world is for the habitation of the Lord.

It is in the Self, *ātman-brahman*, that everything exists

He in whom the sky, the earth and the atmosphere, along with the mind and the life-breaths, are woven, knows that unique One to be the Self. (*Munḍaka Upanisad 2.2.5*)

And Adwaita too experiences the all-pervasiveness of God. He writes

Everywhere I see the one and the same God-touch

It is the same Spirit that is in everything, that has become everything. “There is nothing,” says the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad*, “that is not covered by him, nothing that is not pervaded by him” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 2.5.18*). And it is further said that He took all the various forms, *rūpam rūpam praturūpo babhūva* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 2.5.19*)

Everything is Brahman, therefore nothing is insignificant, through everything rolls eternity. Brahman is, we have seen, *anoranīyān*, smaller than the small, *mahato mahīyān*, bigger than the big. Even the micro-organisms are expressions of the same basic Reality. Even the diatom, for which “a drop of water is the ocean, a speck of floating dust the continent”, is a

Little living thing, my kindred soul in Brahman.

And he knows that a unique being burns in everything

Like one fire, one law, one divine Idea
Burns in Aldebaran and in the cinder

Even a dog, a creature that dèr Mouw does not like at all, is Brahman

It pisses against everything
A wretch, a withered proletariat ..
And even such a stinking piss-beast is Brahman

All this is Brahman and I am Brahman Therefore I am all this

yo evam vedāham brahmāsmīti sa idam sarvam bhavati (Bṛhadāranyaka Upanisad 1 4.10)

He who knows thus “I am Brahman” becomes all this.

Therefore Advaita finds himself united with all beings, present and past He declares

Nothing animal, nothing human, yes,—for I know Brahman
As the world-conceiving One and I am Brahman—
To me, Its Self-awareness, nothing divine is foreign

This reminds us of the famous saying of Terentius *Homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto* (“I am a man nothing human do I consider alien to me”) Advaita’s experience, however, is not limited to humanism, it is world-embracing. Animals, men, gods, nothing is foreign to his Brahmic vision; he is not ashamed of his identity with all that is in nature, even with things and animals, and with men who are considered to be inferior, bad, wild, unevolved.

Undivine is he who would see me ashamed,
Because I, Advaita, feel that I am the inheritor
Of the Saurian rut and the cruel troglodyte

From the above we see that “all this” and “I” are the becoming of Brahman such is the Vedantic cosmogony Advaita rejects the Christian idea of “creation” In a satirical sonnet he derides the notion that attributes the creation of the world to the wisdom of God who has made everything for the benefit and happiness of man

God’s wise love has created the world:
Mid-spring, just when the apple-trees are in bloom

In Genesis it is said that after God created the first human couple he told them “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.” (1.29) He also gives to animals “every green herb for meat”

Advaita in the same poem continues

He made grass grow mild-green
For the cattle, for us peas and turnips,
He made the pig for bacon and ham, sheep for wool,
For butter, cheese, milk, leather, meat and bones the cows

This sort of naive religious teleology, à la Bernardin de Saint-Pierre,⁷ has no place

in Vedanta “In the beginning,” says a Vedic hymn, “was the golden germ.” (*Rig Veda* 10.121 1) And Adwaita writes

In the beginning was Brahman’s idea.

Hiranyagarbha, the golden germ, is indeed the idea-seed from which all is born. The world is a becoming, *sambhūti*, of the Supreme. Why did the Supreme become this world in which we find the co-existence of all opposites?

It is to put forth its joy, *ānanda*, in manifold expressions. We have spoken earlier of *vijñāna*, the luminous knowledge above the mind. For the Upanishadic sages there is joy above the luminous knowledge. That is the highest expression of the Spirit in the manifestation. Brahman is joy and indeed “these creatures are born from joy” (*Taittirīya Upanisad* 3.6.1). Beauty is the form joy takes in Nature. For real beauty of a thing is not its outward form or appearance, but its capacity to evoke the sense of joy in our heart. In Indian poetics, *rasa*, the joyous essence, is the basis of aesthetic experience. This *rasa* is the joy of Brahman in the worldly existence, and it is present in everything. Therefore everything is essentially beautiful, if we have the eyes to see. Adwaita sees and shows us this essential beauty, this *rasa*, in things. About the earth he says:

No, never have you suspected
How wonderful she is from my height. Look.

Yes, the earth is wonderful, for everything here is the blissful form of Brahman. And Adwaita can say that he can feel the same adoration flame up in him.

For the sun, Bach, Kant and her callous hands.

The callous hands of an old woman are not particularly beautiful but Adwaita sees in them the same divine glory that he sees in the sun, in Bach and in Kant.

If we grasp the theory of poetic *rasa* we shall understand that the world is a work of art and that Brahman is the Artist. Adwaita says:

Yes, Brahman is the Artist:
He, Shakespeare’s example, places right next to one another
The highly sublime and the low-comical.

Thus all things, all opposites too, are Brahman, the supreme Artist. Here a question might arise: Is there no sense of value in the world? Are there no rules of conduct? What about evil in nature? Are good and evil notions devoid of value?

Some Western writers, although good scholars, have misinterpreted, either because of a lack of understanding or because of some inherent religious and moral bias, the Vedantic vision as having no moral component, or even as something

dangerous for the ethical society.⁸ Here we shall not enter into a philosophical or theological discussion of the problem of good and evil, we shall see how Advaita gives form to the true Vedantic vision of morality. Suffice it to say that the Upanishadic sages declare in unambiguous terms that the seekers, whose faults, *dosa*, imperfections of nature, are not worn out, cannot know Brahman. And the imperfections can be overcome by living in truth, making a sincere effort, pursuing right knowledge and by the constant control of our lower desires (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.5).

The knower of Brahman, it is said, attains the Highest *brahmavid āpnoti param* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1). The Highest is that in which there is the highest truth and highest delight. One who has arrived at that is above all that is relative. And if he works in the world his acts can only be the expression of that Highest.

However, the notion of good and evil has a practical reference to the life and action of the seeker who has not attained the Highest. When the knowledge is still “metaphysical” and not a spiritual realisation of identity, there is the possibility of misinterpreting the true sense of transcendence. Because for a knower of Brahman both good and evil are relative, both are expressions of the Absolute, it does not mean that he has to do evil in order to know Brahman fully. Advaita writes in a poem

O Brahman who do everything
out of eternal abundance
of human evil and good,
forgive mercifully,
that I, limited and small,
spark of the radiance of your glory,
only wish to be good
and not an evil-doer

I think that there is a certain playful self-mockery in these lines. Evil and good, like truth and falsehood, beauty and ugliness, are categories of the phenomenal world, in which Brahman has hidden Himself to the outward eye. The *brahmavid* has, even in the worldly evil, the vision of Brahman’s goodness, likewise in things that are ugly he sees the divine beauty and experiences the divine delight. He does not judge the criminal from the ordinary point of view. Even in the criminal he sees the Divine although the soul of the criminal is enveloped in darkness.

In this context sin has a very different meaning from that in Christianity. Advaita says

I don’t need any God to forgive my sins.

In the context of the poem we see that he has in mind the Christian God whom he is ready to forgive his “treacherous net of good and evil”

Sin, *pāpa*, in ancient Indian thought, is that which leads man away from the straight road of truth, *ṛtasya panthāh*. Why does one leave the straight path of truth?

Because of ignorance Ignorance is the forgetting of one's oneness with the Divine Evil is then the ignorant force that makes one go astray Brahman can be known in different ways If one knows It only in Its transcendence, only in the equation, *ātman is brahman*, then the world ceases to exist as real But if one wants to know It also in Its manifestation then the world and all its opposites become meaningful In that case, endowed with the vision of Brahman, one can see the world in its manifold expression And in fact to see the world as Brahman, in the lowest as in the highest, one has to free oneself from all preconceived notions The world with all its dualities is Brahman. One who sees only the above does not know the entire Brahmīc manifestation In fact the notions of above and below, like all other opposites, disappear in Brahman Adwaita writes

There was no above, there was no below

The ancient seers too declare that all that spreads out below and above, *adhaścordham ca prasrtam*, is Brahman (*Mundaka Upaniṣad* 2 2 12)

In a somewhat paradoxical manner Adwaita says

Only he knows the heights, who has gazed at the abyss

And he knows that Mephistopheles is only "the other side of Brahman."

But it is not at all easy for the earthly being to act as the instrument of the Divine that is beyond good and evil, to act as Arjuna was asked to do by his divine friend and master Therefore the human mind often chooses the path of quietism, of non-action When there is no action there can be neither good nor evil So it would seem that to solve the problem of evil, to be free from sin, the easiest way is to abandon all action "Only he is sinless," says Adwaita, "who leaves both (good and evil)"

But Adwaita does not adhere to the quietistic idea of Vedānta that teaches us to see the world as an illusion, not as a becoming of Brahman, and to withdraw through knowledge to the unconditioned state of the Absolute

(*To be concluded*)

RANAJIT SARKAR

References

7 The 18th-century French writer Bernardin de Saint-Pierre says that Providence has created everything in Nature with a view to the happiness of mankind even the melon has been marked in portions so that it can be divided easily

8 R E Hume in the introduction to *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* writes that the possession of the knowledge of Brahman, which by the way Hume mistakes for some metaphysical knowledge, permits man "unblushingly to continue in 'what seems to be much evil' with perfect impunity" Radhakrishnan (see *Indian Philosophy* Vol I pp 228 ff) and others have shown the absurdity of such remarks

LEIBNIZ

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

7 We now come to the metaphysical proofs of God's existence. This is a very important aspect of Leibniz's philosophy. These proofs have a long history, starting from Aristotle or even Plato. We shall, however, concentrate on Leibniz.

Leaving aside the argument from special events and experiences, Leibniz reflected on all the four main types of arguments for the existence of God. These are

- i) the ontological argument,
- ii) the first cause and cosmological arguments,
- iii) the argument from eternal truths,
- iv) the argument from pre-established harmony or from design.

We shall consider these arguments one after another.

1) *The Ontological Argument*

This argument was first propounded by St. Anselm, a great theologian and archbishop of Canterbury (John Hick in his *Philosophy of Religion* has described the matter in great detail). St. Anselm defines God as 'that—than—which—nothing—greater—can—be—thought'. The argument rested on the observation that to exist in reality is a superior property than not to exist in reality. From this he came to the conclusion that 'that—than—which—nothing—greater—can—be—thought' must have the property of existing in reality, and hence God exists. The flaw in the argument is clear. The premise is acceptable enough. But that only proves that, 'that—than—which—nothing—greater—can—be—thought' must be thought to be existing in reality. It does not prove that 'that—than—which—nothing—greater—can—be—thought' exists in reality. We feel that the matter could be disposed of here. However, Leibniz did not fully reject the argument. He said that since the matter is concerned with the ultimate reality, which only is the sufficient reason for everything, the argument may be taken to be a proof for the existence of God, provided, of course, the notion does not entail any self-contradiction *i.e.*, is not logically impossible. Leibniz takes the trouble to show that the notion does not entail any self-contradiction and is thus logically possible, and concludes that God exists. We, however, fail to accept that possibility to exist is a proof of existence. It may be incidentally said that lack of proof for the existence of God does not either prove the non-existence of God, as claimed by the Sankhyas who said that God is invalidated due to lack of proof (*Īśvarāśiddhe pramānābhāvāt* [I/92]).

ii) *The First Cause and the Cosmological Arguments*

These were first propounded by Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) among his various other proofs. The first-cause argument is simple. Everything finite has a cause, and this cause in turn has a cause, and so on. The possibility of an infinite regress of causes is

excluded, it being made clear that cause does not here mean causation in time, but a deeper explanation. The infinite regress being thus excluded, there must be a first cause. This first cause is the uncaused cause of everything. We call it God. (The argument is the same as for Aristotle's unmoved mover of everything.)

The cosmological argument is a variant of the first cause argument and had also been considered by Thomas Aquinas. But in Leibniz it takes a better form. Leibniz argues that every particular thing in the World is contingent *i.e.*, it is logically possible for it not to exist. This statement is true about the whole universe also. There is nothing within the universe to show why it exists. But the fact is that things exist and everything must have a sufficient reason. Therefore the universe also must have a sufficient reason for its existence. This sufficient reason is God. There is, however, no compulsion for God to create the universe. It was a free choice out of goodness as imagined by Leibniz and by the Christian theologians. Or perhaps, we may add, out of a desire to have company of the many, as envisaged by the Indian Rishis (*tadaikṣata bahusyām* [*Chhāndogya Upanisad*, VI.2.3]).

11) *The Argument from Eternal Truths*

This argument appears to be Leibniz's own. The argument runs as follows. There are statements that are sometimes true and sometimes false, *e.g.*, the statement 'it is raining'. On the other hand, there are statements that are always true, *e.g.*, the statement 'two and two are four'. Statements that are always true are called 'eternal truths'. Leibniz argues that truths are part of the contents of mind, and that an eternal truth must be part of the contents of an eternal mind. Leibniz holds that the ultimate reason for contingent truths must be found in necessary truths. But a necessary truth is an eternal truth. Since contingent truths exist, their reasons must also exist, showing that at least one eternal truth must exist. Since, according to Leibniz, an eternal truth must be a part of the contents of an eternal mind, it follows that an eternal mind exists. This means that an eternal being exists. This eternal being is God.

The argument is open to the objection that a truth can hardly be said to exist in a mind that apprehends it. However, if eternal truths are accepted, there should not be much difficulty in accepting an eternal being, and that is God.

14) *The Argument from Pre-Established Harmony or from Design*

The matter came out in the very theory of monads. The argument is as follows. If we look at different clocks we shall see that they are marking the same time, though they are not causally connected with one another. The apparent interdependence is only a semblance of truth. Actually there exists a single outside cause that regulates them all. The same may be said with regard to the universe, as a whole. This single outside cause is God. The cause may be meditated upon as the single inside cause as well, regulating all things. Recall the line from Sri Aurobindo's *Parabrahman*—'The Self of things is not their outer view, / A Force within decides.' Philosophers, who do not otherwise deny the merit of the argument, raise the question as to how Leibniz's windowless

monads can receive directions from God to act in a certain definite manner. Well, if Leibniz were there to give a reply, he might have said that his monads are windowless, but not without ventilators, and it is through the ventilators that they receive directions from God above.

The argument given here is essentially the same as what is known as the argument from design or the teleological argument. This is because the harmony established by God is harmony with a teleological purpose and design.

8 One point may be mentioned here. Russell said that the Leibnizian theory, that no two monads can ever have any causal relation with each other, leads to difficulty in dynamics, where bodies seem to affect each other, especially in impact. But it may be mentioned that Leibniz himself said that there is a 'pre-established harmony' between the changes in one monad and those in another, and this gives the semblance of interaction between monads. To our mind it seems that the question may be raised about the way in which the 'pre-established harmony' works. (We have, in fact, raised the question and stated our viewpoint in Sec. 5.) Otherwise no special difficulty seems to arise in interpreting dynamics. We intend to posit that from the purely scientific standpoint there is good reason to hold that monads do not interact with each other. Monads being fundamental particles (after Leibniz granted them point-existences) no monad can undergo any internal change. In fact, when the question is of monads, we have to agree that any change is only a change in position. Even for any composite object or any synergetic unit, any change, physical, chemical or whatever, is accountable in terms of change in position of things that do not otherwise change. Viewed in this way, we may see that no difficulty can arise in interpreting dynamics, and more so, in interpreting impact.

9 It is not possible for us to say all that we would like to say about Leibniz. Apart from all that has been said, he was a pioneer in mathematical logic, of which he perceived the importance when no one else did. He dreamt of a generalised mathematics which he called 'Characteristica Universalis', by means of which thinking would be replaced by calculation. This, of course, appears to us to be too optimistic a dream and not a possible one. We beg to state that, just as in mathematical logic any 'object language' will require a Meta-language as its support, so also, however much of thought may be relegated to the calculus, that in its turn will require an existing way of thinking as its ground support.

We conclude by reiterating what Bertrand Russell said about Leibniz—Leibniz is one of the supreme intellects of all time.

(Concluded)

ASHOK KUMAR RAY

THE INDIAN VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CHATURVARNA AND NATION-BUILDING

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

THE Indian vision of society is based on a clear intuition into the highest laws and aims of human life. The Indian sages perceived that the unity and mutual interdependence of life are the highest laws of life. Only those integrative and unifying values and modes of behaviour which are in harmony with and consciously expressive of these highest laws of life can lead to "the sustainable development" and the highest well-being of humanity. The Darwinian struggle for existence and survival of the fittest are not the highest laws of life. They are the laws deduced from observing the modes of behaviour of the biological and animal world of Nature, modes which are only instinctive and automatic responses to the sub-conscious unity of Nature but not consciously in harmony with and expressive of its highest laws. The laws of competitive "Market Economy" of Adam Smith and the "Class Struggle" of Karl Marx are the illegitimate extensions of the subconscious biological and zoological law of the jungle to the social and economic life of self-conscious human beings. Since man has evolved from this biological and animal life, his consciousness is still weighed down with a heavy load of the legacy of his evolutionary ancestors. And this legacy has to be exhausted and worked out before he can fulfil his higher destiny. So, in the initial stages of his evolutionary journey, when this biological and animal element overwhelmingly predominates over his hardly adult and weak self-conscious higher humanity and the still sleeping super-conscious divinity, he has to progress by following the laws of the jungle. But this can only be a temporary phase in his evolution and should not be made a permanent law of his life.

According to Indian philosophers, human beings begin their evolutionary journey from a primitive status of Tamas which in the collective life expresses itself as a state of immobile, fixed, uncreative and mechanical routine of custom and tradition of the tribal group and society. From this Tamas it moves towards the progressive, aggressive and creative dynamism of Rajas which in human society translates itself in the form of competitive individualism, or a society driven by the self-interest and desire of the aggressive vital ego in man. This is the purpose of the individualistic phase of human evolution in which evolutionary Nature pushes man from the status of Tamas to that of Rajas, lifting him from a level of biological existence to the higher level of an aggressive, dynamic, reasoning and achieving animal.

But, according to Indian philosophy, the society driven by the rajasic individualism of the vital ego is not the highest state of social development. Beyond Rajas is the quality of Sattwa which is a state of harmony illumined and guided by some intellectual, moral and aesthetic values and ideals. If Tamas is the characteristic quality of physical and biological matter, Rajas is the characteristic quality of the vital energy

or the desire soul in man, and Sattwa is the characteristic quality of the higher mental being in man. Beyond Sattwa is the flawless harmony of the spiritual self. But no community or society has attained even the state of Sattwic harmony.

So when the great spiritual thinkers all over the world constantly and repeatedly emphasised that human society has to be governed not by the disruptive values of the competitive and individualistic vital ego but by the unitive values of the higher self in man, like mutual self-giving, service, love and harmony, they were not indulging in pious and impractical sermons, they were talking sense, perhaps a super common sense beyond the "practical" common sense of the average vital mind which cannot see beyond its nose.

These Indian principles of social development apply not only to the society as a whole but to every section of the society. Take, for example, the economic system of the Vaishya. The best and the most healthy way to bring an all-round prosperity for a community or nation is to create an economic system which promotes and motivates all the sectors of the economy to work in unison for realising some common national economic goals. This is in fact one of the secrets of the economic "miracle" of modern Japan. As the authors of a popular book about the Harvard Business School point out

One unique illustration of an especially powerful business policy is provided by the nation of Japan, where due to the co-operative relationship between the private and public sectors, employees, management, suppliers, and even the government all share a clear understanding of the direction of a particular business and work towards common goals, it is almost as if the entire country—Japan Inc—has been molded into a consortium of well-run businesses with strong business policies designed to help compete effectively in world markets. Government and industrial leaders set the long-term direction, sectors fall into line with programs designed to accomplish Japan Inc's goal.¹

The basic principles of the ancient Indian social order are sound and very much valid even for the modern age. The stress of social order on inborn temperament and capacity in fitting the individual for an occupation, its emphasis on the education and training for character-building, its emphasis on values rather than on skills, its organic and holistic vision of human society, its predominant orientation towards the inner moral, psychological and spiritual evolution of the individual, its emphasis on duties and responsibilities and contributions to the common good of all are some of the positive and eternally valid principles. The modern society has overlooked these to its own disadvantage. They have to be brought back to rejuvenate our culture and to counterbalance its overemphasis on skill, and efficiency and rights and privileges. But the outer social forms taken by the spirit of Chaturvarnya in ancient India are no longer valid for the modern age and have to be discarded altogether or transformed to suit modern conditions.

One of the remnants of the ancient Indian tradition which has to be totally effaced

from the modern Indian mind is the caste-consciousness based on birth, family and heredity. The medieval custom of fixing the occupation based on birth and heredity no longer exists in modern India. But the spirit of caste-consciousness, manifesting itself through reservation, caste association forming ‘‘vote banks’’ etc., still exists in India as a considerable social and political force. But we must remember here that the spirit of casteism in whatever form it may linger is a retrograde force. This is a distortion which has crept into the Indian society and is not only out of tune with the progressive democratic tendencies of the modern age, but also goes against the very spirit and truth of the original conception of Chaturvarnya. As Sri Aurobindo points out

There is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material and thus lost most of its meaning. The spirit of caste arrogance, exclusiveness and superiority came to dominate it instead of the spirit of duty, and the change weakened the nation and helped to reduce us to our present condition. It is these perversions which we wish to see set right. The institution must transform itself so as to fulfil its essential and permanent object under the changed conditions of modern times.²

But from the point of view of Sri Aurobindo’s integral vision there is a defect even in this ancient Indian ideal of human and social development. It aimed at a typical perfection and a typical society which later degenerated into casteism. It seemed to ignore the other side of the truth of human personality that no human being or group is exclusively of a particular type. All the four soul-forces are present in every human being though one particular power may dominate and determine the uniqueness of the type.

The major limitation of the ancient Indian ideal of typical perfection is that it did not provide sufficient motivation and scope for a many-sided and integral development of the individual and society. While each individual and each section of the society are motivated to develop along their typical temperament and nature, they are either discouraged or denied freedom and opportunity to develop other qualities and potentialities which lie beyond the boundaries of their swadharma. For example, Shudras belonging to the working-class were virtually denied the freedom and opportunity to develop their thinking, leadership and organising capacities. Even the Shudra ideal of work and service is interpreted in a very narrow sense of servile obedience. This led to the suppression of the working class and the masses, which is one of the major causes of India’s decline.

In this context it must be pointed out that the Gita’s concept of swadharma and its injunction that ‘‘death in one’s own dharma is better than success in another’s dharma’’

is interpreted in a narrow way. This counsel only means that it is better for each one to take up an occupation which will give him the maximum opportunity to express his inborn qualities and capacities and grow in harmony with his temperamental inclinations. But this does not prevent him from developing other qualities or capacities belonging to other human types. Each human type needs the qualities and capacities of other types for its own perfection.

The Gita's counsel to follow one's own dharma still stands. For example, a Brahmana has to develop the Kshatriya qualities not by following the Kshatriya dharma, that is entering into the thick of politics and seeking power, but by manifesting the Kshatriya qualities of courage, the spirit of adventure and forceful self-expression in his own works of knowledge. Thus the nature of work and the path and the discipline and the predominant stress of development may still have to be according to the unique swadharma of each type. But for an integral perfection of the individual, he has to develop the fourfold soul-powers inherent in every human being and organise them in a unique harmony around his soul-centre, though the predominant quality and power of his swabhava and swadharma will determine the path of his evolution. So not a typical perfection based on typical lines, but a many-sided integral development and perfection of the individual and collectivity has to be the new ideal for the future. As Sri Aurobindo explains

We must remember that our aim of self-fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine within us, a complete evolution of the hidden divinity in the individual soul and the collective life. Otherwise we may simply come back to an old idea of individual and social living which had its greatness, but did not provide all the conditions of our perfection. That was the idea of a spiritualised typical society. It proceeded upon the supposition that each man has his own peculiar nature which is born from and reflects one element of the divine nature. The character of each individual, his ethical type, his training, his social occupation, his spiritual possibility must be formed or developed within the conditions of the particular element, the perfection he seeks in this life must be according to its law. The theory of ancient Indian culture—its practice, as is the way of human practice, did not always correspond to the theory—worked upon this supposition. A different division of the typical society is quite possible. But whatever the arrangement or division, the typical principle cannot be the foundation of an ideal human society.

The type is not the integral man, it is the fixing and emphasising of the generally prominent part of his active nature. But each man contains in himself the whole divine potentiality and therefore the Shudra cannot be rigidly confined within his Shudrahood, nor the Brahmin in his Brahminhood, but each contains within himself the potentialities and the need of perfection of his other elements of a divine manhood. But the law of the Satya age is the large development of the whole truth of our being in the realisation of a spontaneous and self-supported spiritual harmony. That can only be realised by the evolution, in the measure of

which our human capacity in its enlarging cycles becomes capable of it, of the spiritual ranges of our being and the unmasking of their inherent light and power, their knowledge and their divine capacities.³

This is the transformation which the ancient Indian ideal of Chaturvarnya has to undergo to become a part of the new system of ideals of the future

(Concluded)

M S SRINIVASAN

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POLITICAL VEDANTISM—ITS CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

(Continued from the issue of April 1997)

CHAPTER III (contd)

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION TO CREATE FREE INDIA

INCIDENTALLY we may recall here a memorable event which took place just after the news of Sri Aurobindo's arrest in connection with the *Bande Mataram* case on 16 August 1907 had spread all over the metropolis Rabindranath Tagore apprehending Sri Aurobindo's incarceration wrote and published his 'Homage to Aurobindo' (in Bengali) on 24 August 1907 when the trial was going on, in which he addressed Sri Aurobindo, 'O Voice incarnate free / of India's soul ' ' In these impressive and illuminating words Tagore evaluated the novel appearance of Sri Aurobindo in Indian politics, his voice giving the eternal message of light It was Sri Aurobindo and none else who had the courage to preach the noble teachings of the Vedanta in politics to ensure India's rebirth

On 23 September just five weeks after the publication of this unique tribute of Rabindranath Sri Aurobindo was acquitted of all charges in the *Bande Mataram* Case, for it could not be proved that he was the editor of the paper The paper had no declared editor. It would have been very difficult to attribute specific *Bande Mataram* editorials to Sri Aurobindo with reasonable certainty had it not been that a certain number of them, admittedly small, were later identified by Sri Aurobindo himself (See Bibliographical Note at the end of SABCL, Vol 1)

We have already noted that during the period of the Bengal Partition (1905) Sri Aurobindo had been feeling very intensely the need of permanently settling in Bengal to strongly organise the Nationalist Party and preach its philosophy of Nationalism He realised that there was a new awakening in the country, especially in Bengal A new school of thought had arisen—demanding a radical change in the political, economic and educational ideas and ideals.

He gave up the Baroda Service and joined the National College started at Calcutta under the newly formed National Council of Education (Bengal) and took up duty as its Principal

This movement of national education, as we have indicated earlier, owed its origin to the education-system which produced "discontented B A s", as also the new education policy introduced by Lord Curzon to manufacture loyal citizens There is no gainsaying the fact that the National Council of Education appeared as a living protest against the audacious speech given by Lord Curzon, and the movement of national

education was the people's reply to his official policy. As a result of the prosecution of school and college students it took definite shape and form. This apparent cause had its root elsewhere. The educationists of the province had felt that the officially controlled system could not yield the result that the nation needed the most.

Sri Aurobindo had his own ideas of what national education should be, how it should be organised in the best interests of the nation. According to him national education had to be imparted on national lines, under national control with a view to realising the destiny of the nation. There were two factors, both important and fundamental, that had prompted him to immediately accept the appointment as the Principal of the College and settle in Bengal. First to organise and guide the new party and secondly to bring up the youth under the advanced principles of modern pedagogy so that they might truly become the servitors of the nation. He knew that the foundation of national independence and national greatness must be laid on a strong and advanced system of education. But unfortunately after a short period he left the organisation of the College to the educationist Satish Mukherjee and plunged fully into politics.

As a matter of fact Sri Aurobindo himself expressed in the *Karmayogin* on 1 January 1910 his dissatisfaction with the way the educational policy was carried out in practice. He realised that things were carried on along the same old lines and the change was only on the surface. He also found no other members of the Council by his side. In his own words:

“National Education languishes because the active force has been withdrawn from it, it does not absolutely perish because a certain amount of Nationalist self-devotion has entrenched itself in this last stronghold and holds it against great odds and under the most discouraging circumstances

“Unless this movement is carried on, as it was undertaken, as part of a great movement of national resurgence, unless it is made, visibly to all, a nursery of patriotism and a mighty instrument of national culture, it cannot succeed.... It is amazing that men calling themselves educated and presuming to dabble with public movements should be blind to the fact that the success or failure of National Education is intimately bound up with and, indeed, entirely depends upon the fortunes of the great resurgence which gave it birth. They cannot ignore the service done by that enthusiasm, but they regard it merely as the ladder by which they climbed and are busy trying to kick it down. They are really shutting off the steam, yet expect the locomotive to go on.”¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo resigned his post in the National College when the *Bande Mataram* case was brought against him in order not to embarrass the college authority (He resumed it again on his acquittal. The final resignation came when he was arrested for the second time in connection with Alipore Conspiracy Case.) But the teachers and the students of the Bengal National College were not happy, they assembled in a meeting to record their deep regret at his resignation. On 23rd August 1907, a week after his arrest and subsequent release on bail, Sri Aurobindo gave advice to the students in his farewell address. The text of his address is reproduced below, for it seems to have a

deep relevance to the present-day socio-political situation when the bewildered educatees who are supposed to build New India are seen groping in the darkness of uncertainties

ADVICE TO NATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

“I have been told that you wish me to speak a few words of advice to you. But in these days I feel that young men can very often give better advice than we older people can give. Nor must you ask me to express the feelings which your actions, the way in which you have shown your affection towards me, have given rise to in my breast. It is impossible to express them. You all know that I have resigned my post. In the meeting you held yesterday I see that you expressed sympathy with me in what you call my present troubles. I don't know whether I should call them troubles at all, for the experience that I am going to undergo was long foreseen as inevitable in the discharge of the mission that I have taken up from my childhood, and I am approaching it without regret. What I want to be assured of is not so much that you feel sympathy for me in my troubles but that you have sympathy for the cause, in serving which I have to undergo what you call my troubles. If I know that the rising generation has taken up this cause, that wherever I go, I go leaving behind others to carry on my work, I shall go without the least regret. I take it that whatever respect you have shown to me today was shown not to me, not merely even to the Principal, but to your country, to the Mother in me, because what little I have done has been done for her, and the slight suffering that I am going to endure will be endured for her sake. Taking your sympathy in that light I can feel that if I am incapacitated from carrying on my work, there will be so many others left behind me. One other cause of rejoicing for me is to find that practically all my countrymen have the same fellow-feeling for me and for the same reason as yourselves. The unanimity with which all classes have expressed their sympathy for me and even offered help at the moment of my trial, is a cause for rejoicing, and for the same reason. For I am nothing, what I have done is nothing. I have earned this fellow-feeling because of serving the cause which all my countrymen have at heart.

“The only piece of advice that I can give you now is—carry on the work, the mission, for which this college was created. I have no doubt that all of you have realised by this time what this mission means. When we established this college and left other occupations, other chances of life, to devote our lives to this institution, we did so because we hoped to see in it the foundation, the nucleus of a nation, of the new India which is to begin its career after this night of sorrow and trouble, on that day of glory and greatness when India will work for the world. What we want here is not merely to give you a little information, not merely to open to you careers for earning a livelihood, but to build up sons for the Motherland to work and to suffer for her. That is why we started this college and that is the work to which I want you to devote yourselves in future. What has been insufficiently and imperfectly begun by us, it is for you to complete and lead to perfection. When I come back I wish to see some of you becoming

rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother with your riches I wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light. Even those who will remain poor and obscure, I want to see their very poverty and obscurity devoted to the Motherland There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service You will earn your living that you may live for her sake You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her Work that she may prosper Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice My last word to you is that if you have sympathy for me, I hope to see it not merely as a personal feeling, but as a sympathy with what I am working for. I want to see this sympathy translated into work so that when in future I shall look upon your career of glorious activity, I may have the pride of remembering that I did something to prepare and begin it ''¹⁷

It may be surprising to the present generation, especially the student community, to note that in the entire text of the address there is not a single word relating to politics, although it was for a political reason that he had resigned He simply spoke with ardent sincerity about three things which greatly attract our attention: First, the mission which he had taken up from his childhood, second, the respect that was shown to him by the students was not shown to him but to their country, to the Mother in him, and third, 'to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light'

In his article under the title, *The Demand of the Mother*, published in the *Bande Mataram* on 11 April 1908, a few weeks before his arrest in connection with the Alipore Conspiracy Case, Sri Aurobindo elucidated what he meant by 'the deeper regeneration through which the country must go before it could be free', and at the same time made the people aware of what the Mother demanded of them He did not agitate them to plunge into total revolution against the alien administration but to prepare themselves to serve the Mother Obviously the quintessence of the idea contained in the article is to promote an awareness of our inner being who is the guide of all our outer action We are to live and act from within and not from without. Let us have an overview of the last two paras of the article

''Those who have freed nations have first passed through the agony of utter renunciation before their efforts were crowned with success, and those who aspire to free India will first have to pay the price which the Mother demands The schemes by which we seek to prepare the nation, the scheme of industrial regeneration, the scheme of educational regeneration, the scheme of political regeneration through self-help are

subordinate features of the deeper regeneration through which the country must go before it can be free. The Mother asks us for no schemes, no plans, no methods. She herself will provide the schemes, the plans, the methods better than any we can devise. She asks us for our hearts, our lives, nothing less, nothing more. Swadeshi, National Education, the attempt to organise Swaraj are only so many opportunities for self-surrender to her. She will look to see not how much we have tried for Swadeshi, how wisely we have planned for Swaraj, how successfully we have organised education, but how much of ourselves we have given, how much of our substance, how much of our labour, how much of our ease, how much of our safety, how much of our lives.

“Regeneration is literally re-birth, and re-birth comes not by the intellect, not by the fullness of the purse, not by policy, not by change of machinery, but by the getting of a new heart, by throwing away all that we were into the fire of sacrifice and being reborn in the Mother. Self-abandonment is the demand made upon us. She asks of us, ‘How many will live for me? How many will die for me?’ and awaits our answer.”¹⁸

This then was Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of political revolution. One wonders how Sri Aurobindo, being an ardent admirer of Mazzini and Garibaldi, applied his philosophy based on the teachings of the Vedanta to awaken the moribund people of his motherland with a view to building up a heroic nation and waging war against alien administration to free India so that she might be reborn.

It is indeed a matter for great admiration to have politics transformed into an effective vehicle of the teachings of the Vedanta. The political thinkers of the present-day-world are still sceptic of it. Yet it is the political Vedantism that proves to be the right instrument for the regeneration of the entire human race.

It is this unique element in his philosophy of political revolution that infused inexhaustible energy in Barrister Chittaranjan Das—the Defence Counsel—and enabled him to defend Sri Aurobindo so enthusiastically and with ultimate success in the historic Trial. Some interesting features of the Trial may be highlighted here before we proceed further to have some glimpses of his eight-day speech, especially his appeal to Mr. Beachcroft—the judge—which he made in his peroration when he was indeed at the peak of his eloquence.

(To be continued)

SAMAR BASU

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A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

103. DEVOTION TO DUTY

To speak of the greatness of Urayyur, the most ancient capital of the Chozha dynasty, is far from easy. Poets endowed with a fertile imagination too would run short of words. Yet a few poets have tried their best and succeeded to a certain extent in describing the city. One has to go through *Periyapuranam* to know how well its author Seikizhar brings before our mind's eye the glory of this beautiful and affluent city.

Pugazh Chozhan (meaning the famous Chozhan) once ruled the Chozha empire by dwelling in Urayyur. "The world is too small for me," said he whenever he conquered a mighty land and hoisted his flag there. He was powerful enough to bring the whole land under his rule and with the help of his able warriors he made all other kings his vassals. Yet he wielded his sceptre in justice and cared very much for the growth of the Saiva religion. He took keen interest in the upkeep of temples all over his domain and saw that the services were conducted properly there.

Once King Pugazh Chozhan went to Karur, another of his capitals, where hundreds of kings who were by now his vassals had gathered to pay him their tribute.

All the kings invariably paid their tribute, first in words by praising him sky-high, before they presented him with what they had brought with them. Some presented to him golden ornaments studded with precious stones, some offered top quality pearls, some herds of elephants, some antiques and curios, and some women of great beauty whose very sight made the king speechless.

The king rewarded everyone of the vassals suitably and threw them a party which was a real feast for their eyes as well as their stomachs.

By sundown everything was over and the rulers of the West Coast began their homeward journey. The king himself saw them off.

"Any defaulters?" the king asked his minister to know if there were any among the kings proving disobedient.

The able minister always had such data at his fingertips and replied: "Yes, your majesty! Athigan of Malaya Nadu didn't turn up today. Neither did he send his tribute through his envoy."

"Reduce him and his hill-fortress to nothing," commanded the king before he retired to his chamber.

On the morning of the next day, the minister ordered an expedition to Malaya Nadu in order to put its ruler, Athigan, in his place.

In the fierce battle that ensued, several of Athigan's men lost their lives. The very sight of carrion crows and vultures on wings, holding the flesh of the dead in their beaks, drove a chill down the spine of Athigan. And he disappeared into the dark dense forest nearby, abandoning his subjects and his land of hills.

King Pugazh Chozhan's warriors rejoiced to their hearts' content and carried home with them vast wealth and the heads of the slain.

The king came, congratulated his commanders and soldiers, spoke highly of their valour and sanctioned gold to every one of them

The king then began to view the spoils. His heart was filled with joy His eyes began to roam among the heads kept side by side

Looking at one of the heads, he shuddered and moved closer to it Heart drumming against his chest, he took the head by its ears and viewed its hair at close quarters

“Braided hair,” he mumbled, as his eyes began to pump out deluges of tears

While all his men blinked, the king howled at his warriors “Oh, you brutes! What have you done? Didn’t you see this man’s braided hair? Why did you fail to recognise him as a devotee of our Lord Siva? And which fool among you severed the head of this servant of God?”

The soldiers looked at one another in great trepidation.

Placing the head respectfully in its place, the king dashed his brow against a wall, yelling, “My own men have brought disgrace on me and my rule To boast further of the rule of religion in my kingdom would be a sham. And how could I ever continue to rule even after this religious man’s head is severed and brought to me?”

Pressing his fingers against his temple, he gnashed his teeth and lost himself in remorseful thought Minutes later he nodded his head as if he had taken a decision

“I have resolved to crown my son king Let no soldier bring disgrace to him by repeating that gruesome mistake of severing the head of a devotee of Siva,” said King Pugazh Chozhan maintaining a calm that he had never before experienced

“Think it over, your Majesty! Please think it over, for our sake at least.” pleaded the minister.

The commanders and the soldiers echoed and re-echoed the words of the minister.

But the king said “All of you know that I take a decision after careful thinking And once I take a decision it is final Please do what I have said ”

Sorrow gripped the hearts of the king’s men. And when the king ordered a huge fire to be built for him to jump into it and atone for his sin, they were virtually in tears.

The minister tried to dissuade the king from this act, but the king simply said, “Please do what I say This is my last wish.”

Several sandalwood trees were felled for making a huge fire for the king

King Pugazh Chozhan appeared before the pit of the fire at the appointed auspicious hour Smearred with holy ash all over his body he carried on his head a plate made of gold The severed head of the devotee sat majestically on the plate

The king went round the fire thrice before he descended into it, and thereby became a noble example of the highest devotion to duty of a king

To the joy of everyone gathered there, the heavenly beings rained down flowers and the celestial minstrels sounded their musical instruments to inform all of them of the arrival of Pugazh Chozhan to the abode of Lord Siva.

(More legends on the way)

P RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Bhagavadgita and Contemporary Crisis by Kireet Joshi. Nag Publishers, New Delhi, 1996. Price Rs. 350/-

It is a remarkably lucid exposition of a few insights gleaned from the Gita, concerning the crises we face in life. Some problems of administration, law and order in the State and in the world are put forward for an individual's search for their right solution. This finally leads one to seek guidance from the ancient spiritual culture of India and inevitably raises the issues of education

The introductory chapter sets the theme and the purpose of the book,—the usual turmoil and agony that an ordinary seeker goes through in the world of conflicts around him. He finds that the external circumstances are in some way a reflection of what is within him. He asks, How can one change them without finding and changing their cause within, which is responsible for them? What does one do when one aspires for absolute love, but finds that some jealousy has crept in and “human relations have become brittle”? What is the solution when politics has become “the game of strife, deceit and charlatanism”? What is to be done when those who must serve to uplift the country and create conditions for the perfection of the individual and the society, stoop to their lower nature and indulge in corruption to serve their ambition for power and egoistic self-interests? What place has revolution and violence in such situations? Can human nature change? How can education contribute to it? What is true education?

This ordinary seeker is in all of us, asking these and many other questions which are scattered throughout the book. All the characters in the different stories of the book are sincere seekers who wish to change the conditions of their life and environment and they arrive at the same conclusion, which in the words of the Mother is: “To change the conditions of life without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera.” This is a matter of spiritual education, which was the advice given by the Mother to the Commission on Education sent by the Government of India to enquire what was the need of the hour.

All the issues concerning education in this book bear the light of the Mother. The author seems to have drawn a great deal on this subject from his past experience as the Registrar of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education under the direct guidance of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, though no such direct reference or acknowledgement is given.

We are charmed by the Princess of an unspecified country, who later becomes the Prime Minister, a position allowing a great scope for the ideals she cherishes in the enlightened goodness of her heart. She who was an atheist, but believed in scientific humanism, is open-minded enough to study the Gita and has brilliant conversations and correspondence with the hero of the chapter. There is an enlightened discussion on forms of government, world affairs, the role of the UNO and the problems of human unity too. The Yoga of the Gita is elaborated. The difference between philosophy,

religion and Yoga and their specific purposes are well explained, though briefly. So also is the distinction made later in the book between the spiritual, religious and ethical lives.

The other important characters are Brahmanandji, Vishuddha and Navin Chandra, who guard the ancient spiritual knowledge and lead the seekers towards new paths for building the future. The most powerful character of Brahmanandji reminds us of our bygone age of rishis, well-versed in material and spiritual knowledge, who lived in God and whose very sight was a veritable enlightenment. The questions put to him are profound, such as "What is the most synthetic thought? What is the nature of the highest realisation? What is the most comprehensive law in the world?"

In a sweeping glance, the book covers a wide variety of subjects pertinent to our life with the keen eye of the scholar who discusses them freely in a comprehensive way with other erudite persons, throwing the light of the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas, as revealed by Sri Aurobindo, whose illuminating influence penetrates the book throughout. There are gleanings from his other works too.

In a lighter vein, we have a passage from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* where Portia exhorts Shylock, the Jew, indicating that Law should yield to Mercy. For, "Mercy seasons justice." And though it fits the fictional form and shows a humane aspect of life, its pitch is much lower in comparison with much deeper insights of the book, which deal with the intellectual proof and conviction of the existence of God, the integral knowledge of the Self, world, Nature and Spirit, the right action in consonance with the truth of one's being and the law of one's nature—swabhava and swadharma.

On p. 239, we are told that it is possible to have an intellectual proof and conviction of the existence of God. Here, I have my reservations. During the conversation on this subject, we are led to the Gita, according to which the Supreme Reality can rightly be approached only through divine nature, divine consciousness and divine power. However, later on, we are told that the Supreme Reality is supra-sensuous, but is still seizable by intellect. This is contrary to the statement of the Gita, since intellect is a human faculty and not a divine one.

Finally, we are given three statements from the Gita: 1) While all things are in God, God is not in them, 2) God is in all things and is seated in all creatures and rules over them, 3) God is all things. The author states that these seemingly contradictory statements can be reconciled and God is seizable through intellectual thought. But this is not followed up by any explanation to show how this reconciliation is arrived at. This is unfortunate, because the first statement is rather confusing in the context of the latter two statements. Perhaps what is meant by the first statement could be clarified by explaining that God is not confined or limited to all things. He is in them and also beyond them.

Also, there can be no intellectual proof and conviction of the existence of God. All intellectual arguments to prove the existence of God have failed. Even Pure Reason, though free from any preconceived idea, bias, prejudice and preference, cannot prove the existence of God. But it can have a concept of God. Even an atheist has a concept of

God. However, to have a concept of God is not the same as to have a proof of the existence of God. For when we talk about God we are pointing to another dimension.

Let us make a distinction between an intellectual concept of God and an existential concept of God. In the existential concept, God is not merely conceived intellectually, but there is a total commitment, self-giving and surrender to God. In other words, the existential concept of God carries with it the commitment, where *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) is necessary for the realisation of the existence of God. The question of proving the existence of God does not arise, because the commitment is transformed into realisation of the existence of God, for which the intellectual reason is an insufficient light. As Sri Aurobindo says, ‘real knowledge is supra-intellectual.’ He also says, ‘Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude.’

The book scintillates with the brilliant light of Sri Aurobindo. It is indeed a successful and convincing effort on the part of Kireet Joshi to turn his readers to Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita*, which is a source of ‘true illumination’ and inspiration to him, as to many of us.

The discussions often seem to be incomplete, but they offer suggestive guidance in building some new paths of the future. The book therefore serves a useful purpose. One expectantly looks forward to further contributions from the author in the all-comprehensive and penetrating light of Sri Aurobindo who has given us very valuable and illuminating guidance on many issues which perplex humanity in various fields of life’s activities and human relationships. As one who has not only recovered the lost truth of India’s spiritual knowledge and culture, but also hewed out the sunlit path of the Integral Yoga for the transformation of human nature into the divine nature and the manifestation of the godhead seated within us, Sri Aurobindo can securely guide India to take her rightful and unique place among the nations of the world, as a leader in the ways of the Truth and help humanity to build a solid foundation for the unity in diversity of cultures, manifesting the spiritual and material richness in existence.

KAILAS JHAVERI

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

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RELIGION IN THE FUTURE EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY

Speech by Arvind Akki

IN the evolution of the earth's consciousness man cannot conceivably remain shut up in his own ignorant hard shell. He cannot remain stagnant for long in any one stage of his development. He has to fly higher and stretch upwards into the unrevealed realms of the infinite. This is an exceptional privilege which is assigned only to man by the Divine.

To unveil the mysteries of his life and of Nature has been the constant search of man from time immemorial and this search will go on till man becomes one with the infinite.

From time to time the Divine incarnates himself to help mankind in this endeavour of spiritual realisation. The prophets who have glimpsed some aspects of the Divine show mankind how to reach there. These prophets have realised the Truth in its different aspects. But, as usually happens, after the departure of the prophets, their teachings get distorted and twisted into something else which is far from their intention. Men misconceive and misinterpret their teachings and turn them into rigid dogmas, doctrines and religions.

Those who thus deform these teachings into rigid doctrines usually take up the leadership and call themselves Gurus of this religion or that religion. And the fight for superiority continues. It is extremely difficult to become a true Guru. The Guru is a messenger of the Divine; he has experienced some aspect of the Truth. Therefore he is in a position to take up the burden and the responsibility of others and lead them to realisations.

Any ordinary man cannot become a Guru. It is no joke to claim such a position. Lots of people talk a great deal of God only to show how religious they have become. But how many of such men have truly realised God? For instance, Swami Vivekananda as a young boy was a great seeker of Truth. In his college days, he used to often attend religious talks by great orators and Pandits. At the end of each discourse he would inquire, "Sir, have you seen God?" Each one of whom he inquired gave a negative response. The only man who could not only say 'yes' but also assure Vivekananda that he would bring him to the ultimate realisation was no other than Sri Ramakrishna. Each one wants to talk a great deal of God but without oneself making the necessary effort to realise God. How foolish it is on our part to try to spiritualise mankind! The Mother

says, “A little sincere and regular practice is worth more than a lot of short-lived resolutions”¹ Once a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. But no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now who will tell us the depth of the ocean? Likewise the nature of the Divine cannot be expressed in words. If we taste sugar we can only say it is sweet but the quality of sweetness remains one’s own experience.

Once Sri Ramakrishna heard a bullfrog croaking. When he tried to find out the reason he saw that a water-snake had seized the frog. Now this snake could neither gulp it down nor give it up, the frog was trying hard to come out of the snake’s clutches but without any success. This is an illustration of the so-called worldly Gurus. Neither can the Guru take the full responsibility of the disciple nor can the disciple come out of the clutch of the Guru. So ultimately both suffer. There is no liberation for them.

Some Gurus like to show their powers through miracles. Moths rush to light because there is light. Light does not need to invite them. The mass thinks that the greater the number of followers the greater is the Guru. All this has no meaning. Sri Krishna told Arjuna that even if he acquires all the Siddhis, they are not enough to realise Him.

According to Sri Aurobindo, “The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment, but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him; and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source, and the rest will grow up in the sadhak of itself by the Grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it”²

Let us turn back the pages of the history of religions, and what do we find? In the name of religion there have been interminable wars and bloodsheds. Is this the aim of religion? In the words of the Mother, “All the crimes, the horrors perpetrated in the name of religion are among the darkest stains on human history, and simply because of this little initial error—wanting what is true for one individual to be true for the mass or collectivity”³ Why should this be so? One man’s meat is another man’s poison. Why should all be alike? Then there is no meaning in the Divine’s creation. How can we question the Divine Lila?

All religions have helped mankind in one form or another. Some individuals have attained great heights of realisation. But these religions have not been able to spiritualise mankind, because each one asserts its truth as the only truth and stigmatises all others as false. In each religion there are some positive truths that have kindled fire in the hearts of true aspirants. As Sri Aurobindo says, “Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection, Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity, Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer, Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to

God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way.”⁴

What is essential for us is to accept these noble truths that have helped mankind and march towards the realisation of the Divine without getting ourselves stuck in the thorny bushes of religious dogmas

The religions of Mussalmans, Christians, Vaishnavas, Buddhists, Shaivas, Shaktas and others are all true in the sense that all ultimately lead us to the Divine. This was clearly demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest synthesiser of all religions. He followed many of these religious doctrines and arrived at the Divine Experience

People like to call themselves religious. But if you carefully observe them, in most of the cases they have personal worldly motives. A true devotee says, ‘Lord, I do not want anything from this world. Give me only devotion, love and faith. Let me do and let me be what Thou wilt in me to do and become.’ Where do we find such devotees?

The Mother has visited many holy places and in most of them she found that these are invariably ruled by some lower vital entities. I cite here her own personal experience: ‘In all religious monuments, in monuments considered the most well, as belonging to the highest religion, whether in France or any other country or Japan—it was never the same temples or churches nor the same gods, and yet my experience was everywhere almost the same, with very small differences—I saw that whatever concentrated force there was in the church depended exclusively upon the faithful, the faith of the devotees. And there was still a difference between the force as it really was and the force as they felt it. For instance, I saw in one of the most beautiful cathedrals of France, which, from the artistic point of view, is one of the most magnificent monuments imaginable—in the most sacred spot I saw an enormous black, vital spider which had made its web and spread it over the whole place, and was catching in it and then absorbing all the forces emanating from people’s devotion, their prayers and all that. It was not a very cheering sight; the people who were there and were praying, felt a divine touch, they received all kinds of boons from their prayers, and yet what was there was this, this thing. But they had their faith which could change that evil thing into something good in them; they had their faith. So, truly, if I had gone and told them, ‘Do you think you are praying to God? It is an enormous vital spider that’s feeding upon all your forces!’ that would really not have been very charitable. And that’s how it is most of the time, almost everywhere; it is a vital force which is there, for these vital entities feed upon the vibration of human emotions, and very few people, very few, an insignificant number, go to church or temple with a true religious feeling, that is, not to pray and beg for something from God but to offer themselves, give thanks, aspire, give themselves. There is hardly one in a million who does that. So they do not have the power of changing the atmosphere. Perhaps when they are there, they manage to get across, break through and go somewhere and touch something divine. But the large

majority of people who go only because of superstition, egoism and self-interest, create an atmosphere of this kind, and that is what you breathe in when you go to a church or temple. Only, as you go there with a very good feeling, you tell yourself, 'Oh, what a quiet place for meditation!' ''⁵

There are people who are of the opinion that Sri Aurobindo's teaching is a new kind of religion. Those who think in this manner are making a big blunder. In the words of the Master, "It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion—for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature."''⁶ Let us hear these soul-stirring words of the Mother, "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the earth's spiritual progress is not a teaching, not even a revelation, it is a mighty action straight from the Supreme."''⁷

Here I must mention a point where a Mussalman who was very much attached to his religion was in a confusion. He sought Sri Aurobindo's help. Here are the Master's illumining words: "You have insisted on my writing and asked for the Truth and I have answered. But if you want to be a Mussalman, no one prevents you. If the Truth I bring is too great for you to understand or to bear, you are free to go and live in a half-truth or in your own ignorance. I am not here to convert anyone. I do not preach to the world to come to me and I call no one. I am here to establish the divine life and the divine consciousness in those who of themselves feel the call to come to me and cleave to it and in no others. I am not asking you and the Mother is not asking you to accept us."''⁸

So, let us not be shut up in our own creeds and dogmas. Here are the celebrated words of Swami Vivekananda: "After long searches here and there, in temples and churches, in earths and in heavens, at last you come back, completing the circle from where you started, to your own soul and find that He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, on whom you were looking as the mysteries shrouded in the clouds, is the nearest of the near, is your own self, the reality of your life, body and soul."''

After wading through the religions, we find that they are only partial truths. We must go deep within ourselves and seek for some greater and higher Truth that can transfigure us. According to Sri Aurobindo, "Truth can not be shut up in a single book, Bible or Veda or Koran, or in a single religion. The Divine Being is eternal and universal and infinite."''⁹ The Mother has declared: "The time of religions is over. We have entered the age of universal spirituality, of spiritual experience in its initial purity."''¹⁰ Therefore the birth of any new religion is not only insignificant but meaningless. The Mother has categorically stated, "A new religion would not only be useless but harmful."'' So what is required of us is to look forward to the call of the future, the change of consciousness and the spiritual revolution of the New Age about which Sri Aurobindo speaks voluminously in his writings.

References

- 1 *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol 16, p 274
- 2 *Letters on Yoga* SABCL Vol 23, p 617
- 3 *CWM*, Vol 9, p 408
- 4 *Thoughts and Glimpes*, SABCL, Vol 16, p 394
- 5 *CWM*, Vol 6, pp 194-195
- 6 *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, p 97
- 7 *CWM*, Vol 13, p 4
- 8 *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, pp 483-4
- 9 *Ibid* , p 483
- 10 *CWM*, Vol 15, p 32

SHE

I WAS treading the dark, gloomy road of winter
before I came to know her;
Walking on the road of darkness;
walking through the night
Not knowing if dawn awaited me,
I did not know where the road would lead,
Nor did I know what consequences were to follow
I was on the verge of destroying myself
When I met her.
She was the very image of kindness and love,
Offering me promise and lost glory,
Promising me all that he had sworn to give
He had lied Would she?
She gave me the promise of a new life,
She showed me light after the darkest night.
I had but to turn back and look,
See what I had left behind.
She showed me my last refuge.
I had but to open the door and be re-born.
I was granted a new life—
Dared I refuse?
She said she would never leave me ..
She never did.
Whenever I needed her, I called
And she answered
I was proud, fearless, fiery.
Here, too, there were consequences to be borne
They said I was foolish to hold her hand
Was it wrong to love someone
Who showed me who I really was?
Was it wrong to say
I loved her even though others hated her?
Was it wrong to say
I would never leave her,
The Light of my Darkness...

TRUTH?

AURPON BHATTACHARYA (Age 15)

THE ISOLATION TEST

I HAD hardly arrived when I was escorted by a young Indian Air Force officer through corridors where the notice was getting increasingly brusque

‘If you do not have the special pass A-Q6, you are already attracting attention ’

‘You are entering the hot zone Obey your escort ’

And so on But I was not the least bothered. I did have the special pass A-Q6 And my escort was treating me more like a privileged guest than like a mere delivery boy. I also had a note signed by the Chief of the Project himself

Despite all this, my nerves were giving way, for it was always at this stage of a story—this was my fourth special assignment for ‘Living media’—that I began to wonder whether the substance I had written was good enough

Well, it had to be

Today, Monday the 15th of March 1980, I was here to see the start of an isolation test. I would be here again a fortnight later to see its end

The young officer was taking me beyond other notices

‘Chief of Test Laboratory Entry strictly prohibited ’

‘Control Chamber Red light indicates out of limit.’

But I was habituated to this distrustful atmosphere, it had been the same at the other places Medical Research and Development Centre, Aero-Medical Establishment, Central Bureau of Missile Flight Plan. They had shown me everything—everything, except the few secrets to which only the Prime Minister had access

Out of old habit I was already formulating my introduction It was something like this

On this fresh March day, I’m in the hermetically sealed ‘Hive’ known officially as the Aero-Medical Psychological Stress Research Laboratory for Man-High Project III I’m here to meet Captain Kripesh Sharma In a year, if the project is successful, he will be one of the pillars in the History of Man, for he and his team will leave us to discover the unknown corners of space

My thoughts on the article were interrupted the young officer and I were entering the test chamber It was small, high, clinically clean, and quiet as a morgue.

My escort spoke softly, “Captain Sharma, this is Pavan Seshan from ‘Living Media’.”

“Glad to meet you, Mr Seshan,” replied Captain Sharma

He was like the others of the research centre, with dark, intelligent, penetrating eyes, and a crew-cut Behind him loomed the capsule like a tomb, in which he would be enclosed for a fortnight This was the tenth time he was to be sealed in that capsule He had undergone the same experience with each time the period of stay increasing Thus, everyone hoped, he would slowly get accustomed to prolonged isolation

Addressing me he said, “You are right This ‘trip’ will last two weeks—the duration of two return trips to the moon No, the capsule will never leave the chamber—all that we are testing is my resistance to claustrophobia. During the two

weeks, I won't see anybody nor will I hear a voice. Maybe it doesn't seem so difficult."

I disagreed. I said it was terrible. I also told him about the time when in my childhood I was accidentally locked up in a cupboard only for an hour, and how I suffered nightmares for years afterwards.

A doctor of the research centre arrived and started examining him discreetly so as not to disturb him while he was talking to me and looking firmly into my eyes, evaluating me as if I would be entering the capsule with him.

When I asked whether he had anything with which to keep himself occupied for these fourteen days and nights he said, "I have to make routine verifications. But I won't have a stereo nor a television. The isolation must be complete. All that I am allowed to take in there is my own brains. And my thingamujig."

"What is this thingamujig? Is it a giant jigsaw puzzle?"

"Not at all. It's purely mental. That's why I can take it with me. Maybe I'll tell you the details on our next meeting. You will have to wait until Monday noon of the week after the next."

His 'thingamujig' was intriguing me. But I did not persist. He put on his spacesuit and helmet. I mouthed "good luck" at his visor and the big white helmet nodded. Then the team helped him climb into the capsule. The director of the test talked to him through a radio—this was to be the last voice that he would hear for a fortnight.

"Captain Sharma, stand by. We are disconnecting you!"

As I was coming out with the team, I suddenly wanted to shout, "You can't leave him in there sealed for two whole weeks! Take him out!" But I controlled my anxiety. This was what was organised so meticulously. This was the way it had to be.

Returning to the ground floor, I asked the young officer, my escort, "Have you undergone this test?"

"Oh yes!" he replied. "After holding out for nearly five hours, I chickened out. Then I had to press the 'chicken switch' to call them to take me out. I don't intend to try again."

"Can Captain Sharma use the 'chicken switch'?"

"Certainly! But I don't think he will do that. He has a very special training."

Monday night, the first night, was like any other night. But Wednesday, I could not keep Captain Sharma out of my mind. Friday, I did not have my dinner: I did not have an appetite. Saturday, I had to take a sleeping pill. What was worrying me was what the doctor who had inspected Captain Sharma before his entering the capsule had told me at the research base.

"Our men are now ready for the final action. But now there is only one human factor to conquer. This psychological effect is very serious. It is called the 'Break-off Effect'. In these tests we have seen grown men shout and weep like toddlers because they were frightened of the unknown. They were convinced they were losing the touch of their mother, the Earth. If, staying on Earth, they feel this way, what will happen when they are all alone in space? The Indian Government cannot afford crores of rupees for the derangement of astronauts in space."

These words of the doctor echoed in my mind. Was Captain Sharma, in his isolated coffin, shouting now? Even if he was, nobody would make a move until he pressed the 'chicken switch', which was unlikely, or a doctor advised them to do so.

On the tenth day, I was like a doll. I tried to tell my wife what I was feeling. I thought she understood. But her reasoning did not help. "Look, Pavan, they are testing him, and not you. It affects only him. So why are you feeling like this?"

We tried going to a theatre to see a film, but we had to come out, for, the film being excellent, the hall was overcrowded and I was starting to feel claustrophobic. We could not return home even by taxi, for the seats were of foam, just like his seat.

The Friday of the second week was really a bad day. My wife called the family doctor who prescribed a new regime of sleeping pills. But my provoked sleep was full of nightmares. I was in the capsule, all alone, sealed. And the umbilical cord, linking the world to the unknown, was severed. When awake, I was not conscious of what I was doing. When I was talking to someone, I shouted as if he were very far and could not hear.

Because of the doctor's drug I was calmer on the Sunday. But my wife asked my doctor for help every time I woke up and started looking for the 'chicken switch'—my only hope. He dispatched a male nurse to give me an injection when I acted neurotic.

The only time when I was all alone, I tried to end my worries by calling the research centre. I yelled in the phone, "Tell him to press the 'chicken switch'. Do you hear me? Take him out of his coffin!"

Nobody answered. Nobody had heard me. How could they when the line was cut?

Monday, I was weak because of the injections that the male nurse had given to me. The doctor of the research center came to pick me up. He assured my doctor and me that I would feel better once I saw Captain Sharma safe and sound.

We were taken to the test chamber which was full of technicians. The second-hand of the wall clock was counting the last seconds—and suddenly it was noon!

Monday, noon!

The team started working, and a voice said, "Release zero pressure. Equalise air pressure. Both the relay equalisers are working. Ready now."

The speaker in the room connected with the microphone of the radio, was working and a voice gently said, "Captain Sharma. We are now opening the hatch of the capsule. Please stand by."

Two men undid the levers of the hatch, and it opened. Both men moved away.

What happens to a man, I thought, sealed alone in a capsule for two whole weeks? All of us waited.

After a few seconds the captain came out, and the air was filled with shouts of success. I felt the doctor's hand on mine. "Hold on," he encouraged me.

"I'm feeling better, doctor. Much better."

I was taken to another room while the team celebrated. He was cleared to come for his interview after an hour. It seemed an age. However, I started clumsily.

"You are the first to succeed."

“I think so,” he smiled “The thingamujig worked.”

I nodded my head while taking notes. “This thingamujig, you had said you would explain today ”

“Certainly, Mr Seshan.” He surprised me by remembering my name I had thought it would not be easy to remember a stranger’s name after that prolonged isolation test “For its worth,” he continued, “anybody can try it.

“It is like this. When I’m in there, I start losing my emotional control. Something in me tells me to call my friends to take me out of there Then, I project my thoughts and my fears out of that capsule. I imagine that I’m in the ordinary world, you know—watching a movie, eating a nice dinner, talking to my wife, everyday things like these And it works. I have passed on my burden to someone else.”

“To someone else?” Not wanting to misunderstand him, I asked, “You mean to say to a particular person?”

“Exactly Naturally I did not choose anyone of this research centre because I know that they work day and night and don’t have the time to watch a film or do what ordinary people do. So I chose a person whose face I have observed closely before entering the capsule so that I can remember him effortlessly.”

His dark eyes looked at me firmly, just as they had fifteen days back.

“A stranger is the best candidate, Mr. Seshan Someone like you ”

SIDDHARTHA (Age 19)

(The story was written as an assignment for the First Year English Class of the
Higher Course at Knowledge)