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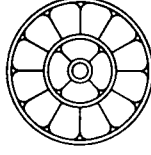
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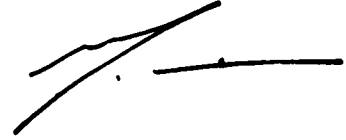
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. L

No. 6

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## TOO GREAT THE SPLENDOUR OF HER YOUTH

A BOUNDLESS knowledge greater than man's thought,  
A happiness too high for heart and sense  
Locked in the world and yearning for release  
She felt in her, waiting as yet for form,  
It asked for objects around which to grow  
And natures strong to bear without recoil  
The splendour of her native royalty,  
Her greatness and her sweetness and her bliss,  
Her might to possess and her vast power to love  
Earth made a stepping-stone to conquer heaven,  
The soul saw beyond heaven's limiting boundaries,  
Met a great light from the Unknowable  
And dreamed of a transcendent action's sphere  
Aware of the universal Self in all  
She turned to living hearts and human forms;  
Her soul's reflections, complements, counterparts,  
The close outlying portions of her being  
Divided from her by walls of body and mind  
Yet to her spirit bound by ties divine  
Only a few responded to her call·  
Still fewer felt the screened divinity. .  
For even the close partners of her thoughts  
Who could have walked the nearest to her ray,  
Worshipped the power and light they felt in her  
But could not match the measure of her soul.  
A friend and yet too great wholly to know,  
She walked in their front towards a greater light,  
Their leader and queen over their hearts and souls,  
One close to their bosoms, yet divine and far. .  
They could not grasp the mighty spirit she was  
Or change by closeness to be even as she.  
Some felt her with their souls and thrilled with her  
To see her was a summons to adore,  
To be near her drew a high communion's force...  
Her divine parts the soul's allegiance called·  
It saw, it felt, it knew the deity  
Her will was puissant on their nature's acts,  
Her heart's inexhaustible sweetness lured their hearts,  
A being they loved whose bounds exceeded theirs,  
Her measure they could not reach but bore her touch,

Answering with the flower's answer to the sun  
 They gave themselves to her and asked no more...  
 They felt a godhead and obeyed a call,  
 Answered to her lead and did her work in the world;  
 Their lives, their natures moved compelled by hers  
 As if the truth of their own larger selves  
 Put on an aspect of divinity  
 To exalt them to a pitch beyond their earth's  
 They felt a larger future meet their walk,  
 She held their hands, she chose for them their paths.  
 They were moved by her towards great unknown things  
 They lived in her, they saw the world with her eyes.  
 Some turned to her against their nature's bent .  
 Others pursued her with life's blind desires  
 And claiming all of her as their lonely own,  
 Hastened to engross her sweetness meant for all .  
 They blamed her for a tyranny they loved,  
 Shrank into themselves as from too bright a sun,  
 Yet hankered for the splendour they refused. ..  
 Some drawn unwillingly by her divine sway  
 Endured it like a sweet but alien spell,  
 Unable to mount to levels too sublime  
 They yearned to draw her down to their own earth  
 Or forced to centre round her their passionate lives  
 They hoped to bind to their heart's human needs  
 Her glory and grace that had enslaved their souls

But mid this world, these hearts that answered her call,  
 None could stand up her equal and her mate.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 362-365)

# THE VEDIC WORD

## ITS SECRET MEANING AND MYSTIC WISDOM

. . THE preoccupation of the Mystics was with self-knowledge and a profounder world-knowledge; they found out that in man there was a deeper self and inner being behind the surface of the outward physical man, which it was his highest business to discover and know. "Know thyself" was their great precept, just as in India to know the Self, the Atman became the great spiritual need, the highest thing for the human being. They found also a Truth, a Reality behind the outward aspects of the universe and to discover, follow, realise this Truth was their great aspiration. They discovered secrets and powers of Nature which were not those of the physical world but which could bring occult mastery over the physical world and physical things and to systematise this occult knowledge and power was also one of their strong preoccupations. But all this could only be safely done by a difficult and careful training, discipline, purification of the nature; it could not be done by the ordinary man. If men entered into these things without a severe test and training it would be dangerous to themselves and others; this knowledge, these powers could be misused, misinterpreted, turned from truth to falsehood, from good to evil. A strict secrecy was therefore maintained, the knowledge handed down behind a veil from master to disciple. A veil of symbols was created behind which these mysteries could shelter, formulas of speech also which could be understood by the initiated but were either not known by others or were taken by them in an outward sense which carefully covered their true meaning and secret. This was the substance of Mysticism everywhere.

It has been the tradition in India from the earliest times that the Rishis, the poet-seers of the Veda, were...men with a great spiritual and occult knowledge not shared by ordinary human beings, men who handed down this knowledge and their powers by a secret initiation to their descendant and chosen disciples.. But .the loss of the sense of their symbols, the glossary of which they kept to themselves, made them unintelligible to later generations, even in the time of the Upanishads the spiritual seekers of the age had to resort to initiation and meditation to penetrate into their secret knowledge, while the scholars afterwards were at sea and had to resort to conjecture and to concentrate on a mental interpretation or to explain by myths, by the legends of the Brahmanas themselves often symbolic and obscure. But still to make this discovery will be the sole way of getting at the true sense and the true value of the Veda. We must...accept the Rishi's description of the Veda's contents as "seer-wisdoms, seer-words", and look for whatever clue we can find to this ancient wisdom. Otherwise the Veda must remain for ever a sealed book....

... it is a fact that the tradition of a secret meaning and a mystic wisdom couched in the Riks of the ancient Veda was as old as the Veda itself. The Vedic Rishis believed that their Mantras were inspired from higher hidden planes of consciousness and contained this secret knowledge. The words of the Veda could only be known in their

true meaning by one who was himself a seer or mystic, from others the verses withheld their hidden knowledge. In one of Vamadeva's hymns in the fourth Mandala (IV.3.16)<sup>1</sup> the Rishi describes himself as one illumined expressing through his thought and speech words of guidance, "secret words"—*niṇyā vacāmsi*—"seer-wisdoms that utter their inner meaning to the seer"—*kāvyaṇi kavaye nivacanā*. The Rishi Dirghatamas speaks of the Riks, the Mantras of the Veda, as existing "in a supreme ether, imperishable and immutable, in which all the gods are seated", and he adds "one who knows not That what shall he do with the Rik?" (I.164.39)<sup>2</sup> He further alludes to four planes from which the speech issues, three of them hidden in the secrecy while the fourth is human, and from there comes the ordinary word, but the word and thought of the Veda belongs to the higher planes (I.164.46)<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the Riks the Vedic Word is described (X.71.1-6)<sup>4</sup> as that which is supreme and the topmost height of speech, the best and the most faultless. It is something that is hidden in secrecy and from there comes out and is manifested. It has entered into the truth-seers, the Rishis, and it is found by following the track of their speech. But all cannot enter into its secret meaning. Those who do not know the inner sense are as men who seeing see not, hearing hear not, only to one here and there the Word desiring him like a beautifully robed wife to a husband lays open her body. Others unable to drink steadily of the milk of the Word, the Vedic cow, move with it as with one that gives no milk, to him the Word is a tree without flowers or fruits. This is quite clear and precise, it results from it beyond doubt that even then while the Rīg-veda was being written the Riks were regarded as having a secret sense which was not open to all. There was an occult and spiritual knowledge in the sacred hymns and by this knowledge alone, it is said, one can know the truth and rise to a higher existence. This belief was not a later tradition but held, probably, by all and evidently by some of the greatest Rishis such as Dirghatamas and Vamadeva.

The tradition, then, was there and it was prolonged after the Vedic times. Yaska speaks of several schools of interpretation of the Veda. There was a sacrificial or ritualistic interpretation, the historical or rather mythological explanation, an explanation by the grammarians and etymologists, by the logicians, a spiritual interpretation. Yaska himself declares that there is a triple knowledge and therefore a triple meaning of the Vedic hymns, a sacrificial or ritualistic knowledge, a knowledge of the gods and finally a spiritual knowledge, but the last is the true sense and when one gets it the others drop or are cut away. It is this spiritual sense that saves and the rest is outward and subordinate. He says further that "the Rishis saw the truth, the true law of things, directly by an inner vision", afterwards the knowledge and the inner sense of the Veda were almost lost and the Rishis who still knew had to save it by handing it down through initiation to disciples and at a last stage outward and mental means had to be used for finding the sense such as Nirukta and other Vedangas. But even then, he says, "the true sense of the Veda can be recovered directly by meditation and tapasya," those who can use these means need no outward aids for this knowledge. This also is sufficiently clear and positive.

The tradition of a mystic element in the Veda as a source of Indian civilisation, its



religion, its philosophy, its culture is more in consonance with historical fact than the European scouting of this idea. The nineteenth century European scholarship writing in a period of materialistic rationalism regarded the history of the race as a development out of primitive barbarism or semi-barbarism, a crude social life and religion and a mass of superstitions, by the growth of outward civilised institutions, manners and habits through the development of intellect and reason, art, philosophy and science and a clearer and sounder, more matter-of-fact intelligence. The ancient idea about the Veda could not fit into this picture; it was regarded as rather a part of ancient superstitious ideas and a primitive error. But we can now form a more accurate idea of the development of the race. The ancient more primitive civilisations held in themselves the elements of the later growth but their early wise men were not scientists and philosophers or men of high intellectual reason but mystics and even mystery-men, occultists, religious seekers; they were seekers after a veiled truth behind things and not of an outward knowledge. The scientists and philosophers came afterwards, they were preceded by the mystics and often like Pythagoras and Plato were to some extent mystics themselves or drew many of their ideas from the mystics. In India philosophy grew out of the seeking of the mystics and retained and developed their spiritual aims and kept something of their methods in later Indian spiritual discipline and Yoga. The Vedic tradition, the fact of a mystical element in the Veda fits in perfectly with this historical truth and takes its place in the history of Indian culture.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, SABCL, Vol 11, pp 4-7)

*Hymns referred to*

- 1 एता विश्वा विदुषे तुभ्य वेधो नीथान्यग्ने निष्वा वचासि ।  
निवचना कवये काव्यान्यशसिष मतिभिर्विप्र उक्थै ॥
- 2 ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन् यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदु ।  
यस्तन्न वेद किमुचा करिष्यति य इत् तद् विदुस्त इमे समासते ॥
- 3 इन्द्र मित्र वरुणमग्निमाहुरथो दिव्य स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् ।  
एक सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्यग्नि यम मातरिश्चानमाहु ॥
- 4 बृहस्पते प्रथम वाचो अग्र यत् प्रैरत नामधेय दधाना ।  
यदेषा श्रेष्ठ यदरिप्रमासीत् प्रेणा तदेषा निहित गुहावि ॥  
सक्तुमिव तितउना पुनन्तो यत्र धीरा मनसा वाचमकृत ।  
अत्रा सखाय सख्यानि जानते भद्रैषा लक्ष्मीर्निहिताधि वाचि ॥  
यज्ञेन वाच पदवीयमायन् तामन्वविन्दन्नुषिषु प्रविष्टाम् ।  
तामाभृत्या व्यदधु पुरुत्रा ता सप्त रेषा अभि स नवन्ते ॥  
उत त्व पश्यन् न ददर्श वाचमुत त्व शृण्वन् न शृणोत्येनाम् ॥  
उतो त्वस्मै तन्व वि सस्त्रे जायेव पत्य उशती सुवासा ॥  
उत त्व सख्ये स्थिरपीतमाहुर्नैन हिन्वन्त्यपि वाजिनेषु ।  
अधेन्वा चरति माययैष वाच शृश्रुवो अफलामपुष्पाम् ॥  
यस्तित्याज सच्चिद सखाय न तस्य वाच्यपि भागो अस्ति ।  
यदी शृणोत्यलक शृणोति नहि प्रवेद सुकृतस्य पन्थाम् ॥

## A COMPOSITION IN BENGALI AND ITS TWO RENDERINGS IN ENGLISH

### বুঝেছি তোমার আত্মা

বুঝেছি তোমার আত্মা, মহাপ্রাণ কাল।  
বিচিত্র আকাশ যবে কিবণ প্রপাতে  
মায়াপূরী বচর্ষিত্রী নিঃশূল সন্ধ্যাব,  
ভ্রমেছি নদীব তীবে, কলকল স্বব  
সমাকুল প্রাণগীতি তবঙ্গবীণায়  
মিলাইতে হৃদি তাবে। অনন্ত বজনী  
নামিল নিঃশব্দ পদে মুকুটেব ছায়া  
বিস্তারি গগন পটে, উডায়ে অঞ্চল  
মসৃণ আঁধার পাতি দীর্ঘ ধবাতলে।  
চিস্তামগ্ন নেত্রে . ' বিপুল সন্ধ্যায়  
আকাশ ব্রহ্মেব ধ্যানে নিলীন ভৈববী  
কৃষ্ণকায়া জগন্মাতা সমাধিস্থ এবে।  
টানিয়া গভীর কোলে শান্তিস্তরু প্রাণী  
সুযুপ্তিব অভিনেত্রী থামাইল আসি,  
জীবনের কোলাহল অন্তহীন মেলি।  
নীববতা-মধুভোজ তাবকাব পাল  
দীপ্তিব মৌমাছি সম উড়ে আসে নভে।  
মাখিতে প্রাণীব মর্মে আনন্দ কিবণ  
সুশীতল বভসেব সমুজ্জ্বল ভাণ্ড  
ভেসে উঠে শশী মণি-খচিত নিশায়।  
জ্যোৎস্নাপ্লুত অন্ধকাবে স্বপ্ন আলোকিত  
মানবেব ক্ষুদ্র প্রাণ এ অসীম প্রাণে  
ডুবাইয়া শুনিয়াছি নীববেব গান।

Sri Aurobindo

শব্দটি অননুমেষ।

পাঠান্তর 'ভবে'।

পাঠান্তর 'কেলি', মেলি = মিলিয়ে, মিলায়ে দিয়ে, মুছে দিয়ে।

**THE MUSIC OF SILENCE**

1.

I have seized your soul, mighty Spirit of Time!  
 Now the sky veers around, iridescent in the cataract of sun-rays,  
 Creating the magic city of limpid Even-tide,  
 I wandered along river banks seeking to attune my heart-strings  
 To the murmur and music of life voiced by her rippling waves;  
 Night infinite descended with silent steps,  
 Casting the shadow of her coronet  
 Upon the wide sky, flinging the hem of her robe,  
 Laying down the soft darkness upon earth's expanse.  
 Her eyes lost in thought,  
 In this vast Night, plunged in the contemplation of the supreme Void,  
 The dark Mother of the world in her ascetic mood lies in utter trance:  
 She draws deep into her bosom all creatures stilled in peace,  
 She plays her role of goddess Sleep,  
 Comes and silences the Life's noise and its ceaseless play.  
 Now is the honeyed banquet of stillness,  
 The crowded stars like bees innumerable have flown out and gathered  
 in the heavens.  
 To smear with the rays of light the hearts of creatures,  
 The luminous amphora of cooling ecstasy,  
 The Moon, floats up in the night bejewelled with stars.  
 In this darkness illumined by dream-moonlight  
 The little human soul of mine  
 I have drowned into this infinite Life  
 And have heard the music of Silence.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

2

I have known your Self, great Spirit of Time  
 When in a shower of rays the wondrous sky  
 Conjures a dream-city in limpid eve  
 I have walked the riverside, to attune, unite  
 My heart to its life-song, struck from the lyre  
 Of colliding waves Infinite night  
 Descended with soundless feet, her crown's  
 Shadow spreading in the sky, flinging

The hem of her robe, soft darkness  
 Laying down upon earth's expanse  
 Contemplative eyes withdrawn in vast night  
 Plunged in meditation of the Supreme Void  
 The dark Mother of the World lies in trance  
 Drawing into her deep lap all creatures  
 Voiceless in sleep, the Creatrix of Sushupti  
 Arriving, stills life's ceaseless din.  
 Now the honeyed banquet of stillness,  
 A swarm of stars, like bees of light  
 Comes, flying into heaven To smear  
 With rays of bliss all creatures' hearts  
 A luminous vessel of cool Delight  
 Floats up The moon, in this star-jewelled night,  
 In this moonlight-flooded Darkness, dream-illuminated  
 My little human life in this infinite life  
 Drowning, I have heard the music of Silence.

DEBASHISH BANERJI

**Editor's Note** This poem which was untitled in the original Bengali is reproduced, along with the first rendering, from *Archives and Research*, Vol 2, No 1 The second rendering is added now Later on, it was found that Sri Aurobindo's verses are the opening lines, with minor variations, of a longer poem titled *Mahakal*, published in later editions of Sri Aurobindo's *Bangla Rachana*

## DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of May 1997)

*Mother,*

*Why so sudden a change in my condition, I wonder? I was quite in a normal state this morning, and in the twinkling of an eye it all got changed and I was before You in a changed condition. Whatever it may be, I have learned many lessons today, Mother. The movements that were loose and scattered have become controlled and concentrated*

*Mother, in spite of falls and blunders, with a certitude to become as You wish*

THERE IS NO fall and no blunder and I do not know why your condition got so much changed. But if it is for the better I am very glad. Of course one has always something to learn and a progress to make, and in each circumstance we can find the occasion of learning the lesson and making the progress.

If you feel more concentrated than you were, it is a very good thing, especially if it is a concentration on the Divine, wanting more and more to avoid all influences except that of the Divine and to accept to be moved only by the Divine's will and no other. You said today that it is the end of making remarks to one another on people. Surely the day when the inmates of the Ashram will stop making among themselves remarks on the others, when all *gossip* will stop, it will be a blessed day and our work of realisation will be made much easier.

What you see, what you observe, you must keep for yourself and say to nobody except me.

Once again, be the giver of example to the others—show them how a true Sadhak must be.

I trust that you will do it and all my love and force are with you for this accomplishment

11 September 1934

*Dear Mother,*

*Surely You will tell me if Your trust in me gets shaken, if Your love is not responded to*

*You have called forth this being to live in the Ashram in the Light of the Divine, with the head filled with the Presence of the Divine, the heart filled with Your Love, the vital filled with the dynamic Force of the Divine for the execution of the Divine Will.*

*O Mother, O Lord, may You possess this being, may it come forth and live exclusively in the full splendour of Your love and Light and Truth*

*This is my prayer to the All-Gracious Divine*

Your prayer is heard, your ardent aspiration is receiving the proper response. Our trust and love are always with you and our Light and Consciousness to enlighten, transform, perfect the whole being.

With all our blessings.

11 September 1934

*Dear Mother,*

*One thing surmounts all difficulties in me: it is that my faith, confidence and trust are never shaken. This condition of faith is solid and unbreakable, it is an eternal faith, a loving present from the Divine. I am sustained by a vast faith in You, my loving Mother, and in my beloved Sri Aurobindo.*

Yes, it is your faith and love that carry you through all difficulties to an ultimate Victory.

With all my love and blessings.

14 September 1934

My dear child,

I do not understand how what you propose can help. The work you are given, the life you live must be the work and the life of a sadhak, not that of a coolie. If you were treated or lived like a coolie and not as a sadhak, this work could never be done by you.

Moreover I do not see how your renouncing the things I give you could in the least cure the discontent of H and those like him.

The true attitude is neither to be an ascetic nor to indulge in desire. The true attitude is to take in all simplicity what I give, to be perfectly satisfied with it and neither to ask for more nor to refuse what is given. This is the true example to give, the one that can help the others towards a better understanding of their duties as sadhaks.

Nothing can cure H except getting rid of this making desire and the satisfaction of desire the principle of his life.

Remain my child, simple, quiet and content, and all will be all right

5 October 1934

*Dear Mother,*

*I heard that several ladies have all made accusations against me. But that does not matter. I am quite happy—happier and more firm and quiet than ever before. There is one thing that has given me quietness and kept me at rest: Your confidence, Your Love, and my faith in Your Love*

*Dear Mother, the entire thing is ending and I have full hope that there will be better understanding and a little more peace.*

So long as all these women are living in the vital consciousness—as they do—they are bound to quarrel, to be jealous, envious, spiteful, depressed, and the rest. The best is not to give much importance to it—because in fact it has none. You set things right, the next day they go wrong again, *because the seat of their consciousness is not changed*. Even if they turn to the Divine, they will turn in the same spirit and with the same reactions: competition, strife, anger, jealousy, spite and the rest.

It is the consciousness that must change its seat and get out from the vital to a higher or deeper place

When they come to you, you can tell them that all these stories have no importance whatever, that they are the ordinary reactions of the ordinary life and that surely it is no use coming here to live in that ordinary way. They must make an effort to rise to a higher and truer, to a more disinterested and unselfish consciousness and there they will see that all will be all right for them.

As for you, I am happy that all this turmoil left you untouched. Indeed it must be so more and more and you must yourself look at all these things from the light and equanimity of a spiritual consciousness filled with the Divine Presence and Love.

Our help and trust are always with you

12 October 1934

*My dear Mother,*

*This morning, when I and K were frying the vegetable-balls, this thought passed in me:*

*We come here to stay. Suppose we are put to the test? We are put in a big pan filled with oil over a very strong fire, and we have to sit in the pan, calm, quiet, unmoved and completely at rest. Those who pass the test are allowed to take up the yoga.*

It would scarcely be a test. The moral courage and endurance are often much more difficult to get than the material courage and endurance.

15 October 1934

*(To be continued)*

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

(Continued from the issue of May 1997)

It is not easy to pinpoint the time of the radical distinction which Sri Aurobindo later habitually made between the two beyond-mind ranges of consciousness concerned. The earliest published occurrence of the distinction from his own pen seems to be in a letter of 16 April 1931 "The Indian systems did not distinguish between two quite different powers and levels of consciousness, one which we can call Overmind and the other the true Supermind or Divine Gnosis"<sup>1</sup> But the Mother's testimony shows that in the wake of 24 November 1926, which was a landmark in the Integral Yoga, the word "Overmind" had already come into use to set apart the Supermind from the plane which is the highest of those above the mental and yet is below the supramental. In her talk of 10 July 1957,<sup>2</sup> she gives an account of the period following Sri Aurobindo's choice of seclusion soon after the landmark we have mentioned. Her account runs.

Sri Aurobindo had given me charge of the outer work because he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and he had announced to the few people who were there that he was entrusting to me the work of helping and guiding them, that I would remain in contact with him, naturally, and that through me he would do the work. Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape—a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and...I must say, in an extremely interesting way.

One day, I went as usual to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening—we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm in my account of what had taken place—then Sri Aurobindo looked at me...and said "Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed," and then he smiled and said "It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want, we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality."

me in it  
in 1931  
Foundation  
1926-1931

1 *The Riddle of This World* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta 1933) pp 4-5

2 The Mother, *Collected Works*, Vol 9, pp 147-8



With my inner consciousness I understood immediately. a few hours later the creation was gone .and from that moment we started anew on other bases

The start on new bases constitutes the end of what Sri Aurobindo on 18 October 1934 designated as "the brightest period in the history of the Ashram"<sup>1</sup> and, in the course of the conversation on 7 January 1939 recorded by Nirodbaran, "the brilliant period of the Ashram"<sup>2</sup> But, before we go further, we must clarify a certain point in Nirod's book, which may confuse chronological researchers On 7 January 1939, when Purani speaks of drawing force from the Universal Vital and says that he did it while he was in the "Guest House" (that is, 41 rue François Martin), Sri Aurobindo remarks "You mean at the time when the sadhana was in the Vital, that brilliant period" Purani replies, "Yes." The suggestion may arise that the "brilliant period" occurred in the "Guest House" That is an impossibility because the Mother lived there only from 24 November 1920 to September or October 1922 when she and Sri Aurobindo moved to 9 rue de la Marine (south-west section of the present Ashram block),<sup>3</sup> and during that time she was somewhat withdrawn and was certainly not what she was declared by Sri Aurobindo on 24 November 1926—the explicit Head of the Ashram and the open Guru of the disciples. What is to be understood is that, when the brilliant period was going on at 9 rue de la Marine, Purani was staying in the "Guest House" Actually he continued there, occupying Sri Aurobindo's old room, till early 1928 when I was placed in the same room and he moved to 28 rue François Martin (north-east section of the present Ashram block) where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had shifted on 8 February 1927 and where they remained for the rest of their lives<sup>5</sup>

i.w.e.  
Cous  
Wife  
c/l  
g/l/h

The Mother's new-based start most probably took place later than 8 February 1927, for "the brightest period in the history of the Ashram" lasted, as we shall soon see, "for several months" after 24 November of the previous year. From the occasion which the Mother has recounted we cannot deduce straight away that the discovery of the precise label "Overmind" for a plane lower than the Supermind had been made fairly earlier But we may affirm that such a plane was well identified as an entity during 1927 before the occasion For, in the course of that year we have the composition by Sri Aurobindo of his miniature masterpiece, "The Four Powers and Personalities of the Mother", which together with some letters written in the same year was published in book-form in 1928 There we are told<sup>6</sup> "The Mother as the Mahashakti of this triple world of the Ignorance stands in an intermediate plane between the supramental Light, the Truth life, the Truth creation which has to be

1 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953) p 233

2 *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir Calcutta, 1966), p 179

3 *Ibid*

4 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A B Purani Fourth Ed., fully revised (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, 1978), pp XX and 174

5 *Ibid* pp XX and 182

6 *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol 25, p 23

brought down here and this mounting and descending hierarchy of planes of consciousness that like a double ladder lapse into the nescience of Matter and climb back again through the flowering of life and soul and mind into the infinity of the Spirit. Determining all that shall be in this universe and in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action . . . Although contained in two passing phrases, the distinction between the Supermind and the intermediate plane of the Gods is clear-cut and the manner in which it is brought in, without any need being felt for an explanation or elaboration, argues that it must have been current for an appreciable time. Can we affirm that it was seen before 24 November 1926 or at least on this date itself?

When the Mother recounts the progress of “a very brilliant creation”, she begins by saying of Sri Aurobindo “. . . he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness . . .” This strongly suggests that on 24 November itself Sri Aurobindo was aware of what he had to do beyond the great spiritual event of the day—namely, to manifest the Supermind which had remained still unmanifested. To seclude himself and concentrate for the purpose of hastening its manifestation means that something other than the supramental consciousness was known to have been manifested. Hence at least on the 24th the crucial distinction was seen.

Taken straightforwardly the Mother’s words can bear only this gloss. But one might urge that she may have expressed what was later recognised as the object to be attained and that on the very day the distinction had not been seen and the withdrawal had for its aim the rapid working out of the full content of that which had made a definitive commencement. In short, the Supermind rather than the plane requiring to be set apart as Overmind was understood to have descended.

*Per se* this plea would be specious. Are there any independent reasons promoting such a negative answer? If they exist they should in fairness be enumerated, so as to leave no issue undecided for the future.

*(To be continued)*

AMAL KIRAN  
(K D SETHNA)

# THE ISHA AND THE KENA

## 1. The Secret Connections

AT the head of the authoritative Upanishads stands the Isha. If we leave aside questions concerning the style, language and date of the Upanishads and lay emphasis on their substance, we understand why the Isha is given pride of place among them. There are many reasons for its unique position, but one appears to be very important and most relevant.

If we read the Isha in a proper manner, get into the heart of each word and each phrase, see how the whole Upanishad is a progressive unfoldment of a single theme and finally allow the text with its richness and harmony to sink into the deepest layer of our consciousness, then little by little it opens its secret chambers by entering which we enter all the other Upanishads, with an unparalleled insight and understanding. Not only do we see the secret connections by which the Upanishads are tied together but we realise that all their ideas and perceptions belong to the same family and possess the same significance. In other words, if we learn to see through the eye of the Isha, we shall see all the twelve Upanishads to be parts of a single unified whole. This explains why the enumeration of these Upanishads begins with the Isha.

## 2. The Three Main Subjects

We shall take the Kena as an example. The Isha is concerned with three main subjects. (i) Brahman, (ii) immortality and (iii) works. And in all of them the Isha and the Kena are identical and speak with one voice.

(i) In the Isha Upanishad the supreme Lord is seen in two ways—as one who is beyond all limitations and as one who is everywhere.

The Lord is higher than all—Nature, the world and the individual. He is higher than even the immutable that supports Nature, and the formless and nameless essence from which arise both the world and the individual.\* Though He is absolutely higher than all, He is extended everywhere, *saparyagāt*. He is in Nature and in the immutable beyond Nature, *tadejati tannajati*, in the world and in that which is beyond the world, *taddūre tadvantike*, in the individual and in that which is beyond the individual, *tadantarasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyāsya bāhyataḥ*. He is known in his completeness when we know him to be extended everywhere in these two fundamental terms,—here and beyond, *ubhayam saha*.

The Lord's extension in the immutable and the essential is quite conceivable, because He is by definition the all-exceeding Purusha. But it is unintelligible that He is extended in Nature, the world and the individual, because to be extended in them is to admit the limitations with which they are associated. He certainly exceeds all, but it

\* This is the significance put into the word *īśā*, giving prominence to the root sense, *īś*, to rule. Besides, the word implies the sense of keeping all as possessions, from the same root, to possess.

does not imply that the all are other than and opposed to Him. When the Lord is defined to be all-exceeding, the purpose is to distinguish Him from the all. But if the distinction is turned into an opposition, then the Lord's extension in the all is found to be a contradiction and an impossibility. Just as it is an error to think that there is no Lord except the all, so it is an error to hold that there is nothing except the Lord. Both are there—the Lord and the all. Since He is one without a second, *ekam*, all are Himself, multiple results of His own becomings, *ātmaivābhūt*. If the all are his own becomings, *paribhūh*, then the Lord's extension in them is as conceivable as the other.

(ii) Man is not merely a soul but a body as well. His divine significance is shared by both. A right use of all instruments lodged in his body enables him to live in the pure Buddha and overcome the dualities referred to as Death by the Upanishads. Buddha is an instrument of Nature, *avidyā*. Nature binds if the Buddha is impure and dominated by the senses, the same Nature frees if the Buddha is pure and withdrawn from the senses. If we are awakened and live in the pure Buddha, we cross over the dualities through Nature, *avidyayā mrtyum tīrtvā*. Once we are freed from *mrtyu* we realise that our true Self is not even the pure Buddha but Brahman which is eternal and imperishable, not touched by the action of Nature. With the knowledge of Brahman we become immortal, *vidyayā amrtam aśnute*.

To arrive at immortality through knowledge, *vidyayā*, is a great achievement. However, it is not the greatest. For we have to enjoy immortality by expressing it in the world through our instruments. We have overcome *mrtyu* by withdrawing from the instruments, but we have not removed it from them. Hence immortality cannot be expressed through the instruments bound by Death. Freedom from Death is not the same as eradication of Death. When it is eradicated from the instruments, they begin to express immortality in the world, *sambhūtyā amrtam aśnute*. When the soul is born in Brahman, it is a new birth, when the whole being is born in Him, it is a perfect birth, *sambhūti*, which expresses immortality through all instruments and the works performed by them.

(iii) Birth and works are considered to be twin sources of bondage. Works bind, because they are always done for the satisfaction of ego, birth also binds, because the subconscious in us is made up of the impressions of past works done for the sake of ego. As a matter of fact, the ego that now expresses itself in works is lodged very securely in the subconscious part of our being. Ascetics try to get rid of the ego by renouncing works. But there is the danger of being pushed into works without their conscious consent. For the subconscious source of ego is left intact and not touched by *karma-sannyāsa*. It is for this reason that the ascetic is advised to be extremely alert and avoid all chances of being overtaken by the subconscious. He is told that inadvertence is destruction, *pramādo mrtyuh*. He is also warned that if he falls, he can never rise again, *patitasya vinā nāśam punarnāroha īksyate*. In view of the risk involved in dealing with the subconscious the ascetic generally renounces his very birth, *dehatyāgam karoti*, and attains *moksa*.

The ascetic solution to the problem of birth and works is alien to the original

Vedanta Hence the Isha Upanishad rejects it and says that one should desire to live a hundred years doing all works here, *kurvanneveha karmānu jīviṣet śatam samāh* It further says that those who renounce their birth, *ātmahanah*, do not go to the Sun-worlds of the Veda but to the worlds that are merely known as other than the Sun-worlds, *asūryā nāma te lokāh*

Though birth and works are not inherently faulty, they appear to be so owing to their association with ego. Therefore it must be possible to remove the fault without doing harm to them. If works are done not for one's own sake but for the sake of God, they do not bind, *na karma lpyate* They begin to express His will and ultimately culminate in knowledge and freedom Birth too does not bind when the conscious being filled with God invades the subconscious being and purges it of all impressions of past works till it ceases to be a dark region of crooked-going sins, *juhurāṇam enah*, and becomes conscious like itself This is referred to as the extension of consciousness to the works of the past, *kr̥tam smara* When the whole being becomes a conscious instrument, one attains perfect birth and becomes a faultless doer of God's work This is the Vedantic solution to the problem of birth and works

### 3. The Harmony between the Isha and the Kena

If we now turn to the Kena, all the teachings of the Isha reappear here, making it obvious that we are not strangers to it. However, it has its own characteristic differences. While expounding the nature of Brahman, *brahmaṇo rūpam*, it insists that it must be known in the way in which the ancients had known of it. The attainment of immortality by the instrumental self is described through a highly suggestive story of the gods And finally, it makes a very brief comment about works, leaving all the ideas connected with them to be worked out from relevant passages

(i) Just as the Lord of the Isha Upanishad exceeds all and is also extended in all, so the Deva of the Kena Upanishad is beyond all definable terms and yet pervades both the known and the unknown.

There are two aspects of the world, the known (*viditāt*) and the unknown (*aviditāt*), the forms grasped by our faculties and the formless Self beyond their grasp. But Brahman is superior to both, for It is not definable either by the first (*anyadeva tadviditāt*) or by the second (*avidatādhi*) Though It surpasses both, It is not external to them It appears here as that which is not expressed by the word and also as that by which the word is expressed, as that which thinks not with mind and also that by which the mind is thought, as that which sees not with the eye and also as that by which one sees the eye's seeings, as that which hears not with the ear and also as that by which the ear's hearing is heard, as that which breathes not with the breath and also as that by which the life-breath is led forward in its path Brahman must be known as the highest which manifests itself simultaneously in these two aspects of the world, *tadeva brahma tvam viddhi*

(ii) Just as immortality in the Isha is to be attained by the Vidya and enjoyed by

the Sambhuti, so in the Kena it must be possessed by both the Vidyā and the Pratibodha

There are two selves, the eternal Self (*ātmā*) and the instrumental self consisting of Mind, Life and Senses (*adhyātmā*). The eternal Self is usually confused with and obscured by the instrumental self. Therefore we are not conscious of the eternal Self. Since the instrumental self is bound by Death, we think we are mortals subject to pain and grief. When this self is purified and the light of *sattva* sufficiently increases in it, the eternal Self is seen as a distinct entity. With the knowledge of the Self one enters into the supreme Self and Lord, the highest form of Brahman, *brahmano rūpam*, and becomes immortal, *vidyayā vindate 'mṛtam*

Like the eternal Self, the instruments of Mind, Life and Senses can attain immortality. If they cease to express Death and begin to reflect the Lord, they shape themselves into His image and express immortality in the world. This is possible only when immortality was already possessed through the eternal Self. Knowledge by oneness, *vidyā*, is the first and primary means, knowledge by reflection, *pratibodha viditam*, is the next and resultant means. By the first immortality is attained in the eternal Self, by the second the instruments get their share of immortality and discover their divine significance—Mind becoming the Mind of the Lord, Life becoming the Life of the Lord and Senses becoming the Senses of the Lord. This is fulfilment of the instrumental self in the Lord, *amrtatvam hi vindate ātmanā*. With the fulfilment it attains a glory and strength never to be tainted by Death, *ātmanā vindate vīryam*

Immortality is to be gained not only by the Self, eternal and imperishable, but also by the whole being, *ātmā* as well as *adhyātmā*. To be one with the supreme Self through the Self is the basic attainment, *amrtam*, but to be a true image of the supreme Lord through the instrumental self is the ultimate and highest attainment, *amrtatvam*. With the ultimate attainment alone one truly exists, *satyamasti*

(iii) Just as the Isha speaks of works not generating bondage, so the Kena says that knowledge of Brahman has works as its foundation

Mind, Life and Senses are the three instruments, the whole significance of which lies in the works they do. The character of their works is determined by the condition under which they operate. If the instruments work for the ego, works are a source of bondage and death, if they work for God, works are a source of freedom and immortality. Therefore, to found Brahman in works is to do works for God and eliminate the ego originally founded in them.

If works are the foundation of Brahman, such works eventually culminate in converting this birth itself into a perfect birth with Brahman as its sole possessor and enjoyer. For birth and works are interdependent, one influencing and modifying the other

Given the instruments and their divine significance, works cannot be renounced. They are always necessary. It is through works that the instruments fulfil themselves in God. Again, it is through works that the instruments express God in the world. In both cases God's foundation in works is an absolute necessity

A study of the two texts clearly vindicates the traditional view that the Upanishads are one and homogeneous in substance irrespective of the different names they have and the different branches of Veda to which they belong. The modern pronouncement that they are heterogeneous and contradictory is ill-founded and contrary to facts.

N JAYASHANMUKHAM

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## SARAMA

O MUSE of lightning-fire thy voice descends  
 A wonder-shaft of perilous magnificence,  
 A hounding-bird with wings of hued surprise  
 To flood mortality with thy naked skies  
 An aeonless swimmer across the waters of light,  
 A voyager lone from veilless infinite,  
 Thy body descends, a tide of revealing grace,  
 A gloried swiftness no intuition can trace,  
 Burdenless, sudden, rapture-kindled, immune,  
 A hawk of beatitude, an eagle of Noon,  
 Stupendous with a breath to ignite, free  
 The shackled-eclipse with her outpouring sea  
 O priestess, thy epic torrents I have seized  
 With frail and human clasp. I have been released  
 In the vastness of thy being's retreat.  
 Descend anew with fire-unveiling feet  
 And make of all my clay-substance thy throne  
 A white felicity, might of the unknown.

6 4 1959

ROMEN

(From the late poet's unpublished diaries)

## THE WAGER OF AMBROSIA

*(Continued from the issue of May 1997)*

### III. GLORY BE TO THE GURU

NAVAJATA remembers what he once told the Mother “Mother, I get a very strong urge to come to you at very odd hours. And I have to control myself because these are not the hours I should come and disturb you.” The Mother smiled and replied “You may come whenever you feel like coming Don’t hold yourself back, because that creates a wall. If I am free, I will ask you what you need and give you the answer, if I am busy, I will give you a flower But do come ” This is an intimacy that flowers in the sunlight of bhakti

The honey-sweetness of psychic love is what we enjoy in the informality of relationship Pranab had with the Mother. Take one occasion, as reported by him. “One day Mother told me, ‘I’ll make a pencil sketch of you.’ In those days, after lunch, Mother used to rest for some time in her chair. And I used to take a short nap resting my head on one side of the cushion on which Mother used to stretch her feet Mother said, ‘I’ll make a sketch of you at noon after lunch when you rest.’ And so one day, as usual, Mother sat on her chair to rest and I lay down to take my nap Mother made two or three rough sketches. Then one day on a large piece of paper Mother did the final sketch. Before finishing Mother told me, ‘Now you can open your eyes ’ After the picture was finished, Mother made a copy for me ”

This mother-child relationship is seen as father-son relationship between Sri Aurobindo and Purani in their personal contacts Nirodbaran reports how, one late afternoon, they were talking about an old Baroda Court Case for long hours “Sri Aurobindo was lying on one side and Purani was sitting on the floor leaning against a couch opposite. It had the air of a very homely talk, as between father and son Anybody who had seen the Master only during the Darshan, could never conceive of this Sri Aurobindo who had put off his mantle of majesty and high impersonality ” Not that an uninhibited yet respectful attitude of the disciple towards his Guru is altogether new here; but what we notice in particular is the absence of the veil of awe and distancing reverence.

A frank openness born out of a deeper conviction is yet another relationship to take the seeker-soul through newer doors of spiritual truths Dilip Kumar Roy’s narration of how, in November 1948, Krishnaprem approached the Mother is revealing “I took him up to Mother and introduced him to her He kneeled down to her and said that he had come for her blessings that he might give himself without reserve to his Guru and Krishna. Mother held his eyes for nearly a minute ‘But you *have* given yourself,’ she said ‘Not enough,’ he answered Mother told us subsequently that his words had made a deep impression on her; and yet he had spoken but a few words!” You have to give yourself



in enough to be taken over entirely for your soul's and your life's fulfilment.

Mother-child and father-son are but only two types among the innumerable relationships there can be with the relationless Divine. Not only Father or Mother, he is also Teacher, Master, Lord, Friend, Philosopher, Guide, Preceptor, Playmate, Comrade, Lover, even Antagonist. When on the battlefield Arjuna witnessed in the Avatar the aspect of the Dreadful Cosmic Spirit, he repented and spoke of the casualness with which he had behaved with him;\* Ravana wished to merge into the Supreme by following the Path of Enmity; Kutsa attained such likeness with Indra that he was taken by him to his home, the help of heroic kings as colleagues was sought by the gods in the heavenly battles; the bhakta surrenders entirely to the deity of his worship even as he practises devotion in the ninefold manner; the Jnani is ever absorbed in contemplation of the omnipresent Reality, while the Rishi does tapas on the Truth-existent, taking a new birth in its spiritual fire; the Yogi gathers himself into the Divine Being, the Giver of Siddhis, Siddheshwar, and remains in its perfection. The One in the mode of the Many establishes as many contacts in the creative manifestation of his delight. Each is a soul-relationship with the Oversoul when projected in the terrestrial play, the play working itself out in the world of death, *Mrityuloka*. Not self-oblivion or abolition of our individuality in the featureless Absolute should be the object of our true endeavour, but the perfection of free spirit in the divine nature and its conduct and happy expression in that law is what has to occur. Each one then becomes real—ideally his *amśa*, his part, a Vibhuti possessing correspondingly the aspect of him who is of infinite Quality, *ananta gunī*, one Narayana is then present in every Nara. These divine souls indeed will be the denizens of the divine creation that is to come on the earth.

When such is the state, all distances between the Guru and the Shishya disappear. The Preceptor is not seated high on a pedestal and the Disciple low on the ground at his feet. And yet in the evolving consciousness this separation has to be meaningfully and functionally recognised. In fact, according to the tradition, initiation of the aspirant into spiritual life is done in secrecy, with the tacit understanding that nothing of it will be spread around or disclosed to

\* "For whatsoever I have spoken to thee in rash vehemence, thinking of thee only as a human friend and companion, 'O, Krishna, O Yadava, O Comrade', not knowing this thy greatness, in negligent error or in love, and for whatsoever disrespect was shown by me to thee in jest, on the couch and the seat and in the banquet, alone or in thy presence, I pray forgiveness from thee the immeasurable. Thou art the father of all this world of the moving and unmoving, thou art one to be worshipped and the most solemn object of veneration. None is equal to thee, how then another greater in all the three worlds, O incomparable in might? Therefore I bow down before thee and prostrate my body and I demand grace of thee the adorable Lord. As a father to his son, as a friend to his friend and comrade, as one dear with him he loves, so shouldst thou, O Godhead, bear with me. I have seen what never was seen before and I rejoice, but my mind is troubled with fear. O Godhead, show me that other form of thine. I would see thee even as before crowned and with thy mace and discus. Assume thy four-armed shape, O thousand-armed, O Form universal." (Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Cent. Ed.), p. 375)

anybody. The Shishya lives in the physical presence of the Guru for three days and nights, as if taking a new birth in the warm luminous womb of the Initiator. The Dikshakar takes upon himself the entire burden when the Dikshita surrenders to him totally. For him “Guru is Brahman, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is the great God Shiva; Guru is the transcendental Eternal,” and before this auspicious and benedictive excellence does he ever bow

गुरुब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः । गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

is the prayer offered to the greatness of the Guru, by *Viśwasāraṇtra*. With his help even the lame can cross a mountain and the dumb pour out an ocean of knowledge in impeccable speech. According to the Veda the Teacher is the pathfinder who leads the Pupil directly forward to the goal of whole-natured Awareness, *vindatyajjasinām*. There is also a tradition which recognises four types of Gurus. Guru, Param Guru, Parameshthi Guru, and Paratpara Guru—the Preceptor, the spiritual Teacher of one’s own Guru, the most excellent Guru, and he to whom is applied the description ‘Guru is verily the supreme Brahman, the Eternal’, *gurursākṣāt parabrahma* To have the uttermost Guru, the Paratpara, the Supreme, is an exceptional privilege and one can never be sufficiently grateful to him when he happens to come to us. Rare is this relationship, possible only when the Divine incarnates as an Avatar and embraces the ready soul. But, and quite understandably, it is generally the initiator-aspect alone that we associate with the Guru In the one we see the unborn disciple, *aja*, entering into spiritual life and in the other the already realised soul, *pakva*, living in the white radiance of the Benign.

What does the Guru do? He accepts the responsibility of the Shishya, in every respect, spiritually and materially All his past Karmas are dissolved, all his predispositions or *sanskaras* are removed One gets the Guru by the grace of the Guru himself; that is grace itself. Truly, for the Shishya there is no God higher than the Guru, *na devah sriguroḥ parah*. Which then means that he should not do anything which will be harmful for his progress. Slippery also is the path and the result can be serious and grave He has to remain in the protective atmosphere of the Guru and he has to be ever-vigilant Wrong deeds done by him will accumulate fresh *sanskaras* or Karmas which will be more difficult to discard—in fact, spiritually, the consequences can be even disastrous The Shishya raising his hand against the Guru, in whatever manner or form it be, under whatever compulsions it be, particularly when the Guru is the Avatar, is the extreme perversity bearing its own calamity of consequence—unless there intervenes the Grace of the Guru. Complete sincerity is the only holiness, *puṇya*, that can help the sadhak under the Guru’s care Very often people forget why they have gone to a Guru They start having or putting non-spiritual demands and get swayed by extraneous considerations. To hold the central aim of sadhana

in focus is an obligation that rests entirely with the Shishya. His one main concern should be Godward progress. The Guru's help is always for this purpose and not for satisfying his desires and ambitions. How sad when the aim is lost! How wonderful when steadfast he remains in faith!

One of the methods by which the Guru initiates the Shishya is by giving him the Mantra, the Word of spiritual Power and Realisation, the Word that effects transformation in his soul and spirit. The initiation by the Guru can even be by putting his hand on the head of the disciple, as Ramakrishna did in the case of Vivekananda. It can be the invisible Presence which can touch the aspirant, enter into his consciousness and lead him on the path. Even in his external activities, or in acquisition of skills, the Instructor can bring him up and make him an accomplished expert in the field. Ekalavya, of the Hill-Tribe, learnt the art of archery by worshipping the clay-image of Dronacharya who had refused to accept him as his disciple in the company of the Pandavas. For exceptional souls not the human Guru but the Great Spirit of Time, *Mahākāla*, who manifests in him, is the sovereign moulder of their destiny. When the Mantra is established in a definite way Peace, Light, Power, Knowledge, Joy course through the inner being of the receiver. In the silence of his mind the quiet listener gets the message and

The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:  
Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self  
Are seized unalterably and he endures  
An ecstasy and an immortal change;  
He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,  
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea:  
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray  
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,  
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech .

(*Savitri*, p. 375)

Happy is the man when this exceptional moment arrives for him. Happier still is he who lives in it. He who chooses the Guru has actually been chosen by the Guru

Such a miracle of a high order was wrought in Jnaneshwar by the power of his Guru Nivrīti, his elder brother, who belonged to the Tantrik Nath Sect or Sampradaya, the Practitioners of the Occult Method. One day, when he was hardly a ten-year-old boy, Nivrīti lost his way in the Brahmagiri mountains around the Triyambakeshwar Temple. In that bewildered state he happened to enter a cave where a Yogi with a shining countenance was seated in deep meditation. When the Yogi opened his eyes he was struck by the boy and, smiling, spoke to him affectionately. Introducing himself as Gahīnath, he told Nivrīti

that his Guru Gorakshanath had foreseen his coming and had instructed him to initiate the boy into the sacred Mystery Gorakshanath was the preceptor of Nivrutti's great-grandfather Trimbakpant. Nivrutti was given the Mantra *Rama-Krishna-Hari* and was further told that he should initiate his brother Jnaneshwar in the spiritual path. A mission for him was already marked out by the Yogi In the epilogue to *Jnaneshwari* the author gives the lineage of his Gurus, starting from Matsyendranath who directly received the Yogic lore of ancient times given to Goddess Parvati by Yogeshwar Shiva himself Matsyendranath taught it to Gorakshanath from whom it came down to Nivruttinath. Later, this Nath Sampradaya went from Maharashtra to Bengal and from there spread to other parts of the country Many supernatural acts are attributed to these Nath.

Jnaneshwar acknowledges at a number of places,—in fact almost at every important step,—in *Jnaneshwari* the benedictive gifts he received from Nivrutti. The way an empty pitcher gets filled up with water when dipped in the sea, or the way a wick gets lighted in the flame of a bright lamp, in that way, says Jnaneshwar, was he inspired by his Guru to undertake the composition of the Gita in Marathi. It is indeed by the glory of the Guru's grace, by his lustrous majesty, *krupèchè vaibhava*, that he has been able to accomplish this task, a task of such difficulty as was there to found the Roman race—to adapt Virgil The Guru's forbearance is that of the earth who ungrudgingly and tirelessly upholds the movable and immovable objects; from his ambrosia does the moon give soothing coolness to the world, his bright radiance is taken by the sun to remove darkness all around, from him the sea gets its supply of water, and the water its sweetness, and the sweetness its beauty; from him the wind derives its strength of impetuosity and the sky its blue wideness and knowledge its imperial glow and grandeur, the Vedas find their easy yet forceful utterance because of him, as does happiness its buoyant delight, and the universe its comely form.

पृथ्वी जयाचिया क्षमा । नुबगे स्थावरजगमा । जयाचेनि अमृते चद्रमा । निववी जग ॥  
 जयाचे आगिक असिके । तेज लाहोनि अके । आधाराचे सावाइके । लोटिजत आहे ॥  
 समुद्रा जयाचे तोय । तोया जयाचे माधुर्य । माधुर्या सौन्दर्य । जयाचेनि ॥  
 पवना जयाचे बळ । आकाश जेणे पघळ । ज्ञान जेणे उज्वळ । चक्रवर्ती ॥  
 वेद जेणे सुभास । सुख जेणे सोल्लास । हे असो रूपस । विश्व जेणे ॥  
 तो सर्वोपकारी समर्थ । सद्गुरु निवृत्तिनाथु । राहाटत असे मजही आतु । रिघोनिया ॥

(*Jnaneshwari*, 18 1723-1728)

Thus Jnaneshwar gives his obeisance to the rising sun who is the Guru, who dispels the night of ignorance and spreads the day of auspicious realisation While singing this praise the transcendent (Para) and the articulate colloquial (Vaikharī) enter into the secrecy of the seen (Pashyanti) and the mature middle (Madhyama) tongues, the four divisions of speech joining together in one fulfilled expression He offers such a Song of Adoration to the Preceptor and

rests assured in him fully, without any fear. He has done Vak-Tapas in previous births and it is as the fruit of this Tapas's Truth-Word that he is now ready to do Gita-recitation in a new language. Yogic preparation and Yogic mission under the guidance of the Guru have arrived at this point; now experience and expression flow mellifluously through the revelatory utterance of another mantric lyricism. Ascetic effort (Tapah-prabhava) and benedictive grace (Guru-kripa) have given him this siddhi.

Jnaneshwar raises the Guru to the height of the Supreme, not just because of a certain tradition but because of a definite fact of spiritual truth that is there behind it. However, it is not the same thing as the Supreme coming down and becoming a Guru. In other words, what Jnaneshwar is describing is the Guru-Shishya relationship and not, for instance, the Mother-Child or Father-Son relationship. If the one is austere and spiritually luminous, the other is warm with love, is endearingly sweet and felicitous. In the one there is the fulfilment of the Yoga of Self-Realisation, with the liberation of the soul in the Brahman as its complete siddhi; in the other the constitutional nature also comes into play and it works on the material level to bring about a transformative miracle. The one is for Swargaloka; the other is for Mrityuloka. This does not mean that the Yogic stature of Jnaneshwar suffers in any way, just as the significance of the work of Rama or Krishna or Buddha does not get diminished in the later contexts. It simply means that we are living in New Time, Time that has come directly from Eternity, Time in which each individual finds his proper manifestive purpose and truth. To live and grow in it, in that multifold Reality, should be our commitment towards this New Time and we must accept it and fulfil ourselves in it. In it are the hundred relations with the Guru who is the Avataric Divine himself. Salutations be to the Guru!

*(To be continued)*

R. Y. DESHPANDE

## SAVITRI BY HEART

A POEM like *Savitri* is not a collection of 'thoughts' however lofty; not an expression of emotion, however profound. *Savitri* is a living body built of sound and sense by a power of secret knowledge seizing on words and forcing them to bear a charge of meaning that cannot be apprehended by the intellect alone. How then are we to study *Savitri*? What method do we follow in order to open our minds to its manifold secrets and our hearts to its spiritual truth?

In conversation with a young sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's yoga the Mother is reported to have said: "Indeed, *Savitri* is something concrete, living; it is all replete, packed with consciousness, it is supreme knowledge above all human philosophies and religions. It is the spiritual path, it is Yoga ..everything, in its single body "

When some members of our centre in Singapore resolved to meet once a month to begin a systematic study of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* we wanted to work out a new approach based on what the Mother had done in the Ashram. She had chosen a few short passages from each canto to read aloud on tape. The tapes were sent to Sunil, who set himself the task of translating their content into the language of music. The Mother and Huta, a painter whose gift had been nurtured by the Mother herself, used to meditate together on the chosen verses and Huta would try to express what had come during the meditation in terms of colour and line. We liked the idea of this 'multi-media' approach and wondered if it could be adapted to our own circumstances, especially as we were lucky enough to have an almost complete set of tapes recording the Mother's readings and Sunil's music

My own experience over many years as a teacher had convinced me that most people approach poetry in the wrong way. This is because they have only a vague idea of what *real poetry* is, or what the poet is trying to do. Poetry is not prose in fancy dress or a cryptic message needing to be decoded with the help of a dictionary. It is true that Sri Aurobindo's vast knowledge of the English language can be daunting, but it is still a mistake to think that translation into simpler language will enable us to understand him better. We may indeed understand something—however, the 'something' will not be what Sri Aurobindo is trying to tell us. It will be different, for there are no redundancies, no interchangeable words in *Savitri*. As he says

I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect. what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced, if for instance I indulge in a wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience.

*Savitri* is the record of Sri Aurobindo's yoga and the transcription as far as human language will permit of supra-physical realities and states of consciousness rarely if

ever attained. The Mother has rightly pointed out *that not even one word* can be changed without changing the meaning. Reading or listening to Sri Aurobindo's poetry and trying mentally to turn it into a series of simple prose statements is a self-defeating exercise. Far better to take the Mother's advice and read 'with a blank mind' than to worry over the interpretation of every line, thereby depriving oneself of everything that is most valuable, profound and significant! Much of *Savitri* is a mystery to the mind.

We needed to find an approach that would get away from the traditional search for 'explanations'. Once again, we took our cue from the Mother: "Read properly, with the right attitude, concentrating a little before opening the pages and trying to keep the mind as empty as possible, absolutely without a thought. The direct road is by the heart. I tell you, if you try to concentrate really with this aspiration you can light a flame, the psychic flame, the flame of purification in a very short time, perhaps in a few days. What you cannot do normally, you can do with the help of *Savitri*. Try and you will see how very different it is, how new, if you read with this attitude, with this something at the back of your consciousness as though it were an offering to Sri Aurobindo."

'The direct road is by the heart.' These words became our inspiration and guiding light. No longer would we rack our brains for meanings, or reach for a dictionary at the first sight of an unfamiliar expression. We would begin every session with a meditation on Sunil's music and the Mother's voice on tape. And then we would read and let the series of ever-changing images created by Sri Aurobindo impose its own message.

He speaks of the Mantra, the utterance charged with spiritual power. The mind cannot comprehend the Mantra, perceiving only 'bright hints', but still the power works on hidden levels of being, preparing for the moment when the greater revelation will come, when the ordinary mentality is overpassed and understanding merges with a vision that transcends anything language can express. *Savitri* is all Mantra.

We try to see each line of *Savitri* as an embodied Truth. So we do not want to analyze the language in search of 'meanings'. We do not take a living body apart—that kills it. Analysis of the 'form of words' will leave us with a lifeless corpse; for the soul of the poetry will have escaped us. Wherever possible, we try to read as if watching a video trying to see what is suggested or described, recreating in imagination the images as they follow one upon the other, ever changing and evolving. *Savitri* is full of images, some elaborated in detail, others deeply embedded in the text. Someone has said 'There is a picture in every line'—and it is true. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

When *Savitri* is not understood—it is because the truths it expresses are unfamiliar to the ordinary mind or belong to an untrodden domain or enter into a field of occult experience. It is not because there is any attempt at a dark or vague profundity or an escape from thought. The thinking is not intellectual but intuitive or more than intuitive, always expressing a vision, a spiritual contact or a knowledge which has come by entering into the thing itself, by identity.

The language of images is older and more powerful than the language of words.

But when words are borne on the carrier wave of metre and rhythm used by a master poet, depth upon depth of meaning unfolds. We are precipitated into that highly creative and synthesizing consciousness which may have been lost in our long love affair with analytical reasoning. The final aim must be to transcend this too, moving towards the intuitive insight that alone can fully reveal the glory of *Savitri*. "Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight..." (Book 2, Canto 11, p. 276)

It has been claimed that multi-sensory experience, which at best should include mental insight, leads to an intuitive grasp of reality that is more profound (because wider in scope) and less articulate, in the intellectual sense. We have been trying to bring imagination rather than intellect to the study of *Savitri* by an enhanced awareness of the pictorial quality of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. We do this by asking: What is he showing us? What picture emerges from these lines? What does this image suggest? rather than the more traditional question: What does it mean? We have used paintings to stimulate discussion and as a focus for meditation and, of course, the music specially composed by Sunil.

Such an approach is not easy at first. 'Seeing' creates a richness of association pointing to a meaning that is not fixed and static like a dictionary definition but complex and evolving and ultimately touching the Truth-Vision that encompasses in itself all possible meanings. The poetic word, as used by Sri Aurobindo, acquires a limitless extension of significance for the receptive reader. That is why the Mother says: "I tell you, whoever, wishing to practise Yoga, tries sincerely and feels the necessity for it, will be able to climb with the help of *Savitri* to the highest step of the ladder of yoga, will be able to find the secret that *Savitri* represents..."

Patience is needed, a willingness to wait for answers. The structure of *Savitri* is cyclic: a theme is introduced and a question arises. The theme will recur again and again, and each time the theme will receive a more complex treatment and the question a more complete answer. Really and truly, *Savitri* can be understood only in the context of our own life-experience; for it demands of the reader not just a mental understanding but a recognition, the first small step towards that 'knowledge by identity' referred to by Sri Aurobindo in the passage quoted above.

A few years ago I had the good fortune to be sitting near Nirodbaran, the 'scribe' to whom Sri Aurobindo dictated so much of the final version of *Savitri*. I told him very briefly about our plan to try a new approach. He commented: "Do you want everyone to learn *Savitri* by heart?" Since then, how many others have asked the same question! The answer is "Regretfully, no. We have something else in mind,"—regretfully, because learning favourite passages by heart, enjoying them, meditating upon them, making them part of our lives, allowing them to inspire and guide us, is the best approach of all. Then, as the Mother said, "all that we need we will find in *Savitri*."



# THE VOICE OF THE SACRED IN OUR TIME\*

## THE CIVILISATIONS OF INDIA AND THE WEST: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I WOULD like to begin with the mundane

A book which has come out recently has caused a great deal of debate. It is called *The Clash of Civilizations* and developed from an earlier essay under the same title. The author, Samuel Huntington, is a professor in the United States.

I consider Prof. Huntington's thesis to be very significant, not because of the merits of its contents, but because of what it represents in the prevailing psyche of our age—a mentality which is neither new nor restricted to any region, society or group in the world.

Huntington's thesis has been summed up as "The West versus the Rest" which describes it correctly but, I believe, it would still stand, with a few modifications, if it were called "Us versus Them"—and it could be echoed from anywhere in the world today, including India. I believe that the true contradiction lies not between East and West as much as between two kinds of mentalities being labelled as such.

Huntington's argument is about an intensely self-regarding 'Western' civilisation consolidating its powerful and successful achievement of modernisation. This is to be done, he says, through a strategy of advancement of its exclusive interests and competitive advantage *vis-à-vis* other civilisations. He proposes that a 'third' phase of "Western affluence and political influence" should follow now, after the earlier two that lasted several centuries: first, the European phase of development and expansion and then, the second, "an American phase that dominates this century." The responsibility for the third phase, he says, "falls overwhelmingly on the most powerful Western country, the US," if only it would stop wasting its time about others. He suggests, helpfully, that other societies can work out their own modernisation without necessarily merging into homogeneity. "So," and I quote, "the time has come for the West to abandon the illusion of universality and to promote the strength, vitality and coherence of its civilisation," he adds, "in a multipolar world the West's responsibility is to secure its own interests" and to "protect and promote the interests, values and culture of the precious and unique civilisation we share."

The protection and promotion, it is suggested, must be carried out in practical terms, such as the following:

(a) through a North Atlantic economic organisation as a counterpart of NATO, and

(b) by raising the fences higher around the region to keep out immigrants from alien cultures. The fences must be strong enough not only to keep out Asia, which is seen as the main challenge, but also Greece, because it is Orthodox, and Turkey, because it is Muslim.

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The set of civilisational values which are identified as the hallmark of Western culture, and in need of being thus defended, are: free market, democracy, rule of law, civil society, human rights, individualism and—Protestantism.

I shall briefly try to pick out from the above thesis some strands of thinking which may help us to discover the deeply fundamental assumptions that underlie the mentality that it articulates. These are:

1. A culture or civilisation is a homogeneous product having developed in a linear mode within a defined space, against a more or less neutral context. The dominant or reigning culture is also the result of selection and elimination from among the many possible dissipative strands within its own development and is therefore the best, being the winner.

2. Culture and heritage (being nouns rather than verbs) are commodities whose value is relative to the perceived threat from the ever present Other, the outsider. Hence, the paramount importance of the antithetical Other and the values related to defending. Among the most evocative terms still in our modern vocabulary are 'protect', 'save', *raksha* rather than reverence, wonder, or *shraddha*.

3. Individualism is the logically supreme value in terms of an ideally defined individual within an orderly society, though not the human individual as such, who may not fit the culture-specific definition or any definition at all.

4. Having barricaded individuality and culture within social, intellectual and moral parameters, the mode for function, communication and exchange with the universe is mainly one of aggression, competitive equation, suspicion and distrust. The logical response to difference is clash or negation.

5. The goals which all the above are meant to lead to are "power and affluence", which in turn become operative values and ends in themselves.

It is not my intent to point out the flaws in the thinking nor its dangers to the West, for history has done that. The West knows, and it is our hope and prayer that Europe has enough vitality and the necessary antibodies in its system to cope with this. What seems remarkable to me is how contrary it appears to the ordinary Indian mindset of my generation, a generation which has often been charged with being "Westernised."

This pattern of thinking, whatever its origin, has now, in the ongoing process of globalisation, no limits to its spread. However, different civilisations are bound to differ in their responses to it. While *one* may suffer temporary damage, *another* may be wounded mortally. Indian culture, as a part of the Asian way of life, is especially vulnerable to this negative kind of world-view. For it goes against the very grain of its civilisational code, its historical experience and the source-vision it sprang from. There are indeed differences among the founding principles of cultures and these are of the essence, not of circumstance.

Europe desired all of the world to belong to it, India, to belong to all the possible worlds. Europe sought the perfect arrangement of the circumstances; India sought the perfectibility of human nature. Somewhere at the beginning of human self-awareness we must have made a choice in the way we saw nature. Both views worked well, over

the golden ages of each. But the truth of each is incomplete without the other and, even together, would still be only a way towards the whole Truth

The most cherished value of the Western civilisation is stated to be the Magna Carta. The central and upholding principle of the Indian civilisation is Dharma. Among the many traditions within the greater Indian tradition, it is called by many names, invoked in various contexts, but it remains deeply felt and understood essentially in the psyche of the civilisation, wherever it is lived and in some of the others it has touched.

Dharma is not a creed, not a law handed down from authority, not a covenant and not a reciprocal arrangement. Yet it could be all these, being the grand unifying theory of existence itself. Above all, it is the dynamic principle of the whole creation—the self-regulating of the cosmic process of make-and-break, the balanced flow of the universe—the steadfastness of the flux. To the Indian eye of thought the process of the cosmos, the pattern behind the form, always appeared as the primary reality. It was expressed in the dance of Shiva Nataraja, the play of Nature, Leela, or the form of the fire with its leaping and falling flames. Only metaphors and symbols (artistic as well as mathematical) can indicate transmaterial principles, of course, and Indian discourse never underrated these, neither in scholarship nor as means of exchange in terms of life's values. The cultural symbols, forms and rhythms helped to transmit the precious germ of meaning they carried within, as an envelope carries a letter.

“Dharma,” says Sri Aurobindo, “is the right law of functioning of our life in all its parts.”

I understand this as the self-organising principle of the universe, very subtle, very precise, to which belong all things that exist, things that move and things that do not. And they rest in it. *It belongs to no one.*

All our perfections in this world belong to this principle of perfection expressing itself in the world. Our successes and our failures belong to its power—for the many facets of the One Intent play themselves out in Nature. Human consciousness, however, has a share in the process, for it can recognise, remember, and realign itself to know this reality, to live it, and to *be* it. And yet this calls for no superhuman ability to comprehend what the mind cannot grasp (*achintya*), because Dharma is instilled into every existing entity, from the smallest to the greatest, as *swadharmā*—the law of our individual nature or *swabhava*. In its working out at the micro level Dharma is not, and cannot possibly be, the same for all. Each particular nature has its own truth to fulfil through its living, and the overarching principle operates to enable each to do so—perhaps gradually but ultimately in all certainty—for it supports the process of the becoming of truth, through success as well as failure.

The vision and principle, the foundation of a world-view, supported the unique eclectic culture that assimilated so much, because it belonged to no group or institution or era. It was seen as the simple Truth which animates all, the culture shaped by it continues to flow through millennia in spite of upheavals. Dharma, being a principle of concordance, and not of homogeneity nor of dominion, invokes the order that is of a systemic and organic nature. It essentially rejects the simpler moral view of one

uniform law as right for all. The universality of Dharma is as complex and dynamic as nature itself. At its human level, it is the right to an ideal freedom through the fulfilment of our different natures, different capabilities, *adhikaras*, which are infinite in variety. Each one is infinitely valuable in the web of being. Every offering into the cosmic sacrificial fire confirms Dharma in its own way, and is therefore sacred.

Some 80 years ago, an essay by a little-known writer on the question "Is India Civilised?" inspired Sri Aurobindo to write a series of articles in response. These were published as a book in 1953, called *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. I shall try to present my understanding of the insights I gathered therefrom and I quote a paragraph to begin with.

There are three powers that we must grasp in order to judge the life value of a culture. There is, first, the power of its original conception of life; there is, next, the power of the forms, types and rhythms it has given to life; there is, last, the inspiration, the vigour, the force of its motives manifested in the actual life of men of the community that flourished under its influence.

This first concept that is referred to here is, to my mind, the first human intuition of its relatedness to both the subjective and the objective worlds of experience. It is a special kind of vision that begins to inform our assumptions as to who we are and the way we relate to ourselves, to others and to the reality within which we exist—very similar to the intimations of our earliest childhood. As this kind of understanding takes root in a group, and matures, it carves out and creates the spaces and processes—institutions and techniques—through the power of this vision. A certain kind of society evolves that seeks to fulfil and express this concept, which is its most fundamental premise. (Here again the analogy of childhood, the striving to express one's self comes readily to mind.) Within the matrix thus created flows the energy of the lives of human beings from one generation to the next in a kind of spiral movement towards perfecting the expression of the concept. The first intuitions are developed into more and more complex patterns and are sought to be validated.

On the theme of the original differentiation between the Eastern and Western paths, I quote again from the same book.

The European idea is a conception of a force that manifests itself in the material universe and a Life in it of which man is the only discoverable meaning. This anthropocentric view of things is not altered by the vast blank inanities of an inconscient mechanical Nature. And in man, thus adrift in the inert drift of Nature, the whole effort of Life is to arrive at some light and harmony of the understanding and ordering reason.

To me, it seems the primacy of inert matter, like a stage set, as it were, for the act to begin, is a concept which shapes the essential vital and heroic vision of man, the crown

of all creation. And the highest faculty of man is seen as reason, by dint of which he ascends, strives to understand, tame, direct and bring into order the disordered and unintelligent matter around him. Between the two forces, the strong individual vitality and the ordering reason, the tension of European civilisation was maintained as it grew, each age bringing in a wealth of contributory forces that nourished it.

The broad European conception of life remains, within its limits, a noble and invigorating impulse. The Ascent of Man, the Conquest of Nature, the Stewardship of Nature and the World, all imply an immense sense of responsibility that, at its best, goes with pride, courage and discipline in dealing with the world out there. It is not surprising that such a view should mistrust the East, with its insistence on the field of reality being trans-human and trans-rational, and its fuzzy logic in its vision of the One and the Many.

“The Indian view of the world, Nature and existence,” to quote Sri Aurobindo, “is not physical, but psychological and spiritual.” It does not see Nature as inertness but as the dance of energy in a kinetic pattern impelled by an unknown but unmistakable intent. Consciousness is not only greater than matter but precedes it and originates it. Design precedes form. This thought was beautifully expressed by Fritjof Capra, the physicist and writer, in a lecture last year, taking the simple example of a bicycle. To a person who has never seen or sat on a cycle, if the several parts, the wheels, the bars, the handlebar, were all brought one by one and placed before him, it would mean nothing at all, least of all a vehicle for movement. Without the organising, integral principle it would indeed be a heap of meaningless matter.

In the Indian view, the force that sustains the world is a conscious will. Nature is its executive power and Matter is but one of the possible fields, *kshetra*, of a consciousness hidden within it, across it and beyond it. The material universe is thus a form and movement of the Spirit.

It follows therefore, that the human being is not a life and mind that emerges out of fermenting matter but an intent, a spirit that uses life and the body to express its self, the child of immortality, *amritasya putra*. The living individual is therefore sacred. Consciousness is an axis of experience independent of the curve of time-space-matter. It may be called the Divine, it may be called the Spirit, but being unknowable, *achintya*, and undefinable it matters not what you call it. “Whichever the way men choose to seek me, that is the way I come to them, for I am the way to which all paths lead,” says Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita.

In the simplest terms, I believe that, after all, we are talking about two strong modes of human nature, one which is outgoing and the other which turns inward. Either of these, if pressed too hard and separated from its paradoxical counterpart, breaks down and loses meaning, both in individual life and in the larger life of societies. Taken too far, the heroic nature incurs the sin of hubris and the contemplative nature loses its vitality. Dharma lies in the fullest engagement on the spiritual, the mental and also the physical levels. As a race we human beings have not yet been able to tap the source of that kind of mode for living. We are in it together, all of us.

We are perhaps on the threshold of an immense change, an immense possibility, in the middle of an apocalyptic crisis. It is something which has no parallel in history; for it is new, this prospect of extinction along with the first tiny shoots of a new creation. The signs are there in the intimations coming from science, in the visible surge in different cultures seeking a deeper meaning to life. The signs are especially there among a new generation of men and women who are sensitive to both old and new, questioning tradition but also gleaning what is of value wherever they find it. In the very breakdown of modern institutions, political, economic, social and private, in the great churning process of globalisation, one seems to hear the closing notes of an age, not a phase.

SIMA SHARMA

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## THE FIGHT IS HELD BACK FOR TWELVE DAYS

AND swift-footed Achilles, addressing Priam, said sharply "Tell me this, and tell me exactly, how many days do you want for the funeral rites of noble Hector, so that I may hold myself back for so long and restrain the army?" And then the old man, godlike Priam, answered him "If you are really willing to let me give a funeral to noble Hector, you will win my gratitude, Achilles, for it. For you know how we are hemmed in the city, and it is a long way for us to carry wood from the mountain, and the Trojans are greatly afraid to do so. For nine days we would lament him in our palace, and on the tenth we would bury him, and the people would hold the funeral feast, and on the eleventh we would make a tomb for him, and on the twelfth shall fight, if we must." And swift-footed Achilles spoke to him again "These things too, old Priam, will be done as you wish, for I shall hold back the fight for the time you tell me."

HOMER

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

## “KNOTS” IN SAVITRI

IN the Concise Oxford Dictionary we find these common meanings of the word “knot”<sup>1</sup>: an intertwining of a rope, a tangle, a difficulty, a problem and the common colloquial expression, “to tie in knots” meaning to baffle completely. “Knot” is a familiar symbol often used by us in daily life. In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo uses this symbol twice to explain the early obstacles in our way towards the Supreme.

These two references are in “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”, Canto Ten, titled ‘Kingdoms and Godheads of the Little Mind’ and occur towards the end of the Canto. The passage describes what is probably a common experience starting in the early period of sadhana, and an experience which repeats itself time and again until light fully replaces darkness. I quote this whole beautiful passage (the italics are mine):

Attracted by the All that is the One,  
She yearns towards a higher light than hers;  
Hid by her cults and creeds she has glimpsed God’s face.  
She knows she has but found a form, a robe,  
But ever she hopes to see him in her heart  
And feel the body of his reality.  
As yet a mask is there and not a brow,  
Although sometimes two hidden eyes appear:  
Reason cannot tear off that glimmering mask,  
Her efforts only make it glimmer more,  
In packets she ties up the indivisible,  
Finding her hands too small to hold vast Truth  
She breaks up knowledge into alien parts  
Or peers through cloud-rack for a vanished sun:  
She sees, not understanding what she has seen,  
Through the locked visages of finite things  
The myriad aspects of infinity  
One day the Face must burn out through the mask  
Our ignorance is Wisdom’s chrysalis,  
Our error weds new knowledge on its way,  
Its darkness is a blackened *knot* of light;  
Thought dances hand in hand with Nescience  
On the grey road that winds towards the Sun.  
Even while her fingers fumble at the *knots*  
Which bind them to their strange companionship,  
Into the moments of their married strife  
Sometimes break flashes of the enlightening Fire <sup>2</sup>

This glimpse of God’s face (third line), a whisper from the inner depths, is the

work of Grace, always compassionate, and a free gift without which sadhana would be impossible for most humans. This is the wonderful expression of Divine Love that is a free gift which starts the yearning towards a light higher than ours, the aspiration to see Him in the heart, the sadhana. Then one starts seeing, without fully understanding what one sees and experiences, because one sees the "myriad aspects of infinity" but through our normal brain-mind, through the veils of "locked visages of finite things". But the aspiration, the sadhana continues because of a supra-rational certainty in the being that "One day the Face must burn out through the mask."

During early sadhana, even when new knowledge is coming in, "the error", "Nescience", does not allow its full emergence. The darkness of the new knowledge Sri Aurobindo describes as "a blackened knot of light". Of course our external being recognizes that there is a knot and "fumbles" to untie it. Seeing this weak effort the compassionate Grace steps in, the opening for it being created by the success of a strife between the being's aspiration and the still present darkness in our house. By Grace we experience "flashes of enlightening fire". As if by accident, in spite of the intimate relationship between thought and Nescience, in moments when there is an intense annoyance, a dislike in our being for the ever present darkness, the strife bears fruit revealing the bright interior in the heart of darkness, and we see, like lightning in a dark sky, "flashes of enlightening fire". These flashes are often the first signs of opening of the heart. Naturally the aspiration grows, the need to see, to experience intensifies and one's consciousness turns more and more towards the beautiful unknown.

The poet now tells what could happen following glimpses of these flashes of enlightening Fire, apart from a growing familiarity with the Divine Teacher:

Even now great thoughts are here that walk alone.  
Armed they have come with the infallible word  
In an investiture of intuitive light  
That is a sanction from the eyes of God,  
Announcers of a distant Truth they flame  
Arriving from the rim of eternity.<sup>3</sup>

And then is the promise.

A fire shall come out of the infinitudes,  
A greater Gnosis shall regard the world  
Crossing out of some far omniscience  
On lustrous seas from the still rapt Alone  
To illumine the deep heart of self and things.  
A timeless knowledge it shall bring to Mind,  
Its aim to life, to Ignorance its close.<sup>4</sup>

Amal Kiran comments on this beautiful passage thus: "A prospect of complete ful-



filment is opened up here Divine knowledge and divine power are paired and the aim of their coming from the Supreme Transcendent is to reveal to us the very core of being—‘the deep heart of self and things’—so that we may become aware of what all the roads of life are leading to and, by that awareness, stop fumbling and stumbling and go, unblinkerred, to the one all-encompassing goal the realisation of God.’”

DINKAR D PALANDE

*References*

- 1 *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Eighth Edition (1990), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p 655
- 2 Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 28, pp 257-258
- 3 *Ibid*, p 258
- 4 *Ibid*

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**A FLAME**

A FOLLY indeed  
To feel a flame  
As mere flesh ..

Flesh to the flame  
Is fuel to its fire  
But flesh without flame  
Is futile, a shame.

Rise up, O flame!  
And reveal true flesh  
Till all is merged  
In the undying one.

ASHALATA DASH

## AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—VI

### BHOLANATH GHOSH

BHOLANATH GHOSH hailed from old Benares. Born on 4 December 1923, he was neither very old nor was he an ancient arrival here. He joined the Ashram in 1949, a day before the February Darshan, and expired on 18 July 1989. Even his life in the Ashram was not too long—just over 40 years. Yet the many happy memories he left in so many prevailed on me to include him as one of the “Not so Great”

#### **Bholanath was a treat to watch, to hear and to know**

He stood all of 1m 50cm or less, solid, of fair complexion. He cut a neat figure not easily forgotten. A layer of baby fat clung to him, impartially spread all around—but not too much of it. There was not any ‘extra’ to hang or bulge unexpectedly. All angles were effaced, leaving a form of smoothness and roundness—much like a healthy toddler. Let us start at 1m 50cm—we meet a large well-formed head set on a good neck, shoulders and chest. Working downward—a beauty of a tummy, just ample enough to merge with the general contours of the bodyscape, meets the eye, without hurting, yet making its presence felt. This whole beautiful edifice was firmly set on two solid well-formed legs. (Had the Creator added a crown, a trunk and large ears, we may have had a living Nritya-Ganapati.) Bholanath had a handsome face too—a good nose, clear happy eyes, round cheeks, a smile that seemed to be perpetually playing on his lips even when he dozed! To top it all was a great ‘taak’ (bald pate)—fair and smooth as the rest of him. The ‘taak’ was ringed by a ribbon of fine black hair—looked like a bird’s eye-view of an atoll. He was always clad in a white dhoti, worn short for convenience—for Bhola-da was a good worker—and a half-sleeved shirt. This dress was discarded in the evenings. He then donned the Playground group uniform—blue shorts, sleeveless banian, half-sleeved white shirt, as well as white tennis shoes for great occasions (Darshans or Demonstrations). Then, there was the ‘ever-companion’ umbrella. It was deployed above him, a shield against sun, rain, cold, tan, and naughty boys. The skin on top was very sensitive. Some boys, knowing this, would sneak up to him from behind and blow gently on it to send a shiver down Bhola-da’s spine. Obviously the umbrella was not overhead, but it was not far away. It was rolled up and tucked under one arm. Bhola-da could, and would, take a swipe at his tormentor. That was Bholanath for an eye-ful. To know him well would be difficult, but talk to him and you could have an earful of pleasure. There may not be much said, but much was oft repeated—like classical music—for Bhola-da was a great stammerer! This was an added endearing trait in him.

Bhola-da worked in 2 or 3 departments. The earliest I know of was the old Bindery. This was the first, original bindery, set up in the Guest House in the big room near the drinking water place (Children’s Table-Tennis Room No. 2). Many old long-

forgotten sadhaks worked there. Biren Palit of long hair (may be another A.T.N.S.G.) probably started the department and headed it. There was also Chiman-bhai—big burly man built like a wrestler—a Malkhamb adept (he lived where I live now); Sudhir—bob-haired Sarangi and soccer player (Ashram Team, full back). Bhola-da also lived and worked in the Guest House. Bhola-da lived where is now Table No. 1—the room was then partitioned into two. He was a children's favourite. They came to play in the courtyard and, being ever hungry, relished Bhola-da's "toasted bread". This was but D R. bread well dried in the sun!

The Ashram Printing Press—Imprimerie—was started in 1945-46. Sometime later the Bindery was closed, rather absorbed into this Press. The workers (Biren-da, Bhola-da, Chiman-bhai) too were absorbed.

### **Bhola-da: his works and his ways**

He had three engrossing preoccupations (two of them preoccupy us too—work and food). The third one was Mass Exercises—it was a passion. He attended them with all his mind and body, with a deep sincerity. He was simple, straightforward, innocent and SLOW—slow of action, slow of speech and slow of thought. If this was a drawback there was absolutely no remedy. So, all concerned soon realised it was best to accept matters as they were and learn to live with them (maybe this was good for them). There was no budging Bhola-da, so his bosses, including the redoubtable R. S. Pantulu, gave way to Bhola-da; but more than that they came to be fond of him.

The Guest House was taken over as DORTOIR ANNEXE. Its old residents were shifted to other houses. Bhola-da was given a place quite a distance away from the Ashram. He relied on his two legs for any movement—to and fro from work, D R., Playground, etc. The speed the legs generated belied the term 'speed'. He never had touched a bicycle—never could or would. The change of speed would have upset everything—his body, nerves and his very nature. So Bhola-da went at the same steady "speed"—whether he aimed to cover half a km or 20 km.

Bhola-da had to go to D.R. for his meals. He somehow made it there before closing time. He would take whatever was given in good quantity, could be more but never less. He ate as he moved, with the same slowness. He enjoyed each mouthful; while he ate he had a blissful countenance—the bliss probably welled up from deeper down. Time did not matter.

When Bhola-da finished his breakfast he gathered himself up, his umbrella, etc. and wound his way towards the distant Press. He arrived there and set himself to his work, then he was unmovable, not only his body but the mind as well. Others left for lunch, but Bhola-da would continue working, to finish what he had started. Then back on the road—D R.-bound for lunch. Watching him you wondered if he had 36 hours in the day!

Bhola-da had another duty. In the olden days, long, long ago, very few sadhaks wrote letters from the Ashram. Very few kept any cash. When they wanted to write, the

procedure said: take the post card or envelope from Nolini-da, write and leave the letter open on Nolini-da's table. He would go through the letter and post it. Long ago we only took the post card or envelope from him, but just posted it ourselves. It's a far cry—the procedure now! But some old sadhaks continue to leave their letters open. Dyumanbhai was one such till his last days! Nolini-da had stopped going through the letters long back, but his office continued to post the letters. Bhola-da was given this duty—sticking stamps, closing the envelopes and posting. He arrived at 3.15 p.m. sharp at Nolini-da's room. He would sit down with the pile of letters on the floor, in front of Nolini-da's room—legs apart and stretched out in front, and start his work, methodical and concentrated. Any other pose or position would keep the letters out of his reach—the body's proportions and promontories were such. He made a pretty picture, like a child at his serious play. Nolini-da often walked past Bhola-da. Once he wanted to ask Bhola-da some question (maybe a clarification on Mass Exercises) and started "O, Bhola...." That's as far as he got. For Bhola-da cut him short, saying, "Na, na, kajar shomaye disturb korben na" ("No, no, don't disturb me while I am working"). Poor Nolini-da had to go away, his query postponed. On another occasion Nolini-da had to suffer with a smile. Bhola-da's chiding. Nolini-da had stuck a wrong denomination stamp. Bhola-da saw this and ... "Eto pada, lekha lekhi kore, ki tikit lagate janen na?" ("After all the reading and writing you have done, you don't know what stamp to stick?") Nolini-da was very fond of Bhola-da and Bhola-da too loved Nolini-da. He used to often get indignant and disapprove of so many people going to Nolini-da's room.

After all these doings Bhola-da would trudge home to prepare himself for the evening. He changed the dhoti and shirt for group uniform. This was a new Bhola-da now. His step higher, the look and smile more confident (like the change that came over anyone sitting on the ruins of Vikramaditya's throne). He was about to call on all his mental and physical faculties to learn and teach the Mass Exercises. This was a year-long passion, from the day the Mass Exercises book was out, around the 16th of December till the 2nd of December the following year, the day of Demonstration at Sports Ground. It (the Mass Exercises) was at once a challenge, a mantra, a ritual that guided and shadowed his physical activities in the evenings.

Bhola-da himself quickly learned the 16 or so figures of Mass Exercises. He had to, for he had a small band of shishyas (disciples) waiting to learn from him. One is tempted to think, how can Bhola-da, this roly-polly, slow, somnambulist, learn and teach anybody Mass Exercises? But, surprise of surprises, and your judgement takes a tumble—for Bhola-da mastered the Mass Exercises and was as good a teacher as any. He considered it a sort of sin making mistakes in Mass Exercises. He himself knew the figures well and performed neatly, without mistakes. The rhythmic figures were his forte—all his sluggishness disappeared, those well-built legs came into full use—he bounced around like a ping-pong ball. It was a feast for the eyes. But it was more fun hearing him teach. He was a strict and demanding teacher. He sat a bit aloof. His comments had a cutting edge and his advice was strong medicine but had to be swallowed.

He tried to teach the late Biren Bose (of Flower Room and Garden Service) The man was aged, thin, awkward with knobby joints, but was game and persistent—so Bhola-da tried to teach him. When some well-meaning passer-by suggested to Biren-da to straighten his arms, Bhola-da let go a barb from his seat, “Shara shorir anka benka, hat ki shoja hobe?” (“The whole body is full of bends—what of the arms?”) No cause to flinch. One could not be too soft-minded if Mass Exercises was to be perfected. Both Bhola-da and the students knew this, so bore each others’ shortcomings—the end was a rich enough reward. We the younger, smarter lot, with even one tenth of a similar attitude and fortitude, would have achieved great things.

Pratibha-di of Laboratoire approached Bhola-da for ‘diksha’ in Mass Exercises. Bhola-da looked her up and down and said, “Na—eto science, onko kore, Mass Exercise mushkil” (“Having studied so much science and maths, Mass Exercises will be difficult.”) No logic in this, but Bhola-da must have seen many an intellectual fail in Mass Exercises. But he was gracious. He did not reject her completely. He said, “Learn from some other teacher, I will correct you!” You can gauge Bhola-da’s supremacy in this field. He was a full five-star guru.

He advised another aspirant, who failed to do the rhythmic well, to eat less rice.

His key advice to all his students was (to others too): “Shokale uthe ekbar, ratre shobar age ekbar figureguno kore nebe” (“Repeat the figures once when you wake up in the morning and again before going to bed.”) There lay the secret of success.

Every story has to have a villain. So there was one in Bhola-da’s Mass Exercises story. The villain was our Brass Band! They appeared late on the scene — just a few days before the 2nd of December. Bhola-da had practised hard through the year. The body and mind were set to a certain rhythm and speed—especially the rhythmic jumps. He had now trouble changing all that to suit these new-comers—the bandwallas. “How is it,” he asked, “they come at the last moment and we have to dance to their tune? They should adjust to us!” None could answer his question. He had to try to change, and he did pretty well too.

2nd of December over, Bhola-da could relax, forget the old Mass Exercises, forget his disciples and wait for the new Mass Exercises. A fortnight of pleasurable days — for, the group picnics were on. Year round Bhola-da (and a few others) just went about their routine work, group activities, and had the routine diet too. They did not ask for any change or any more of anything. So when something unusual did come their way, they were overjoyed—a boyish thrill filled them. A bus ride to Ginge, Kanchi, or anywhere, filled their eyes with wonder. Then (for them) the exotic food—khichuri, potato curry, chutni, fried brinjals, sweets, etc —all this in a single day—this was simply a miracle.

Bhola-da, easily satisfied, was on such a day overfilled, stomach and spirit—the mind stopped thinking. He could tuck in any amount with ease, and no noticeable change in shape, even through the years. The digestive system too seemed to carry on quite well.

Once some boys invited Bhola-da to Corner House, put a bowl of ‘payas’ and a

dish of 'luchi' in front of him. He started to work on them. Then one boy came up to him and offered him two luchis saying they were too much for himself. Bhola-da accepted them, they were put in his dish. A while later another boy came with 2-3 more luchis—they too were accepted. This was repeated several times—and the pile grew, overflowing the dish. Then came another similar offer. Bhola-da looked sadly at the boy and said, "Dekchhoto ar jayga nai..." ("As you see, there is no more place...") Then, when the boys were about to feel they had measured Bhola-da, he said, "Achha arekta thala niye esho!" ("All right, go get another dish!") Where did all this food go? It's a mystery for science.

He usually topped off his picnic with a song—on popular demand. The song was the same every year. The refrain goes, "Ami biye korbo na." ("I will not marry.") Maybe a popular song Bhola-da had learned in his boyhood days.

Bhola-da was later shifted to the Good Will Home, near the Ashram. He did not like it much here. He felt ill at ease, but he had no choice. He put up with the new environment and carried on life as before. After dinner he would not go home, though tired and sleepy. He sat at the Ashram Gate on one of the chairs, stretched legs out on another chair in front of him and went off to sleep, until Bruno (minding the gate) or Matri played pranks with him (hiding his umbrella) or else it was closing time. Bhola-da then trudged home to continue his sleep. Then somewhere on the way something went wrong. Bhola-da took ill and had to take the doctor's help and advice. He came under Dr. Dutta's care. The good doctor advised him to slowly reduce the quantity of food. Bhola-da was not at all happy or convinced. He could not believe that much food could be the cause, or less of it the cure, for his ill-health. He remarked, "Age daktar khaiye lokeder shasto bhalo korto eto nakhaiye bhalo korbe bolche!" ("In old times doctor used to feed people to get them well, this one says he will starve them to good health!"). He concluded Dr. Dutta was not a good doctor. He doubted if at all he was a doctor, or had passed his exams. In any case, his health deteriorated. He suffered a stroke—a partial paralysis followed. His condition worsened. He passed away on 18 July 1989.

Bholanath left our shores—leaving an emptiness behind not easy to fill, nor forget. Where has he gone? What was he? When he was amongst us, it was difficult to place him. Mentally he lagged behind us. But, if we see him without the mind—maybe he is ahead. Whatever the debate, his simplicity and innocence were enough to see him safely on that last journey, to land him on vaster and brighter shores. I would picture him getting into a coracle in his usual dhoti and shirt, unfurl his umbrella, catch a seaward breeze and quietly sail away. Coracles leave no wake—but on the sea of our thoughts gentle happy eddies linger on. "There goes the true Bhola."

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

## K. D. SETHNA: THE PROSE WRITER

### Introduction

K D SETHNA is one of the major writers of non-fiction in the post-Aurobindo Indo-English scene. There is an interesting fact about his writing career: his poetry mainly ended with Sri Aurobindo's passing and his prose began almost when the muse had virtually deserted him.

The taste of his wonderful poetry is not quite unfamiliar now to the elite, but the status of his prose has not yet been pondered over. Both in quality and quantity, Sethna's prose is a miracle of parallel art in Indo-English literature. From Iyengar down to Deshpande and even beyond that to another generation, the parallel art in the Indo-English landscape is virtually a fight against obscurity and the literature of high sale value.

Although Sethna, the prose writer, had appeared even before 1950, the real prose artist took shape only in the 50s in the brilliant articles of *Mother India*, first a fortnightly and then a monthly, which he has been editing since early 1949.

There are two styles in Sethna's prose: one is the rhythmic Aurobindonian shaped in a lingering structure (see the essay *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo*), the other is in a new vein growing up in the mid-seventies and still continuing. The old style had a very distinct influence of Sri Aurobindo, both on the structure and on the attitude. The attitude was that of consciousness research, as his articles on Gandhiji and Subhas Bose will testify. As he talked on Sri Aurobindo, he followed the same principles of criticism as practised by his Master, as if he worshipped his Master with the flowers he had received from him. This becomes clear when we approach his book *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*. By and large, it is Sethna's own book, because he has reviewed here the Aurobindonian stance. Sethna was the first to start a systematic exploration of Sri Aurobindo's theory of art and literature. He taught us, a few of us who sat at his feet to learn from him, how to reject rehash and books which come out full of quotations from Sri Aurobindo without any analysis of them. The early Sethna was not less explorative. He mixed revelations with arguments in his prose. Just an instance to show how the interpreter becomes an original writer:

Before we mention the instances Sri Aurobindo picks out at a venture, we may submit some homely comparisons to stress the differences among the five styles enumerated. The adequate may be likened to a photograph in faultless focus. The effective or dynamic would be a motion picture. The illumined can be called a technicolour film. The inspired would then be a drama staged right in front of us. And the supremely inevitable would be pulsing palpable life itself, catching us up in multifarious incalculable patterns. (*Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*, p. 18)

This passage aims to clarify the five poetic styles of which Sri Aurobindo has spoken at

different places. The purpose of Sethna is not to refer to them, but to examine them in detail.

From *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare* down to the books of the 90s—these four decades have shaped out a prose writer of superior status. This study seeks to examine the status of Sethna's non-fictional prose.

*(To be continued)*

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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## HIGH, O HIGH

BEAUTY my soul, flaming bright  
 Leave this poor world never!  
 Every speck of dust is calling below my feet  
 Wherever I tread.  
 I hear a throbbing heart calling  
 "High, O high, return!  
 Rescue, O rescue!"  
 Dark beings cast their nets,  
 The unaware are falling to their doom  
 Their foul breath sent poison to  
     Water and soil—  
 The flying beauties lost their wings of feather,  
 Horses would gallop but have no legs,  
     Other galloping things too—  
 Dust upon dust everywhere  
     Choking death carries the winds.  
 Flame of my soul burn brighter,  
 Brighter still.

Rise, prayers, rouse the void!  
 I cast off my ornaments,  
 Naked before you I stand,  
 I am only a call  
 Bright light, descend—  
 Lord of my soul,  
 Divine Mother, come!

GEORGETTE COTY



## A LETTER FROM A YOUNG FRIEND

February 14, 1997

Dear Nirodbaran,

I HAVE thought of you often since I returned from Pondicherry and treasured the memory of our few meetings. The impact of that experience for me has slowly deepened and expanded with time. At the risk of sounding stereotyped, I will say that for me it was a tremendous thrill to meet the man who transcribed *Savitri* and lived in Sri Aurobindo's physical presence for over a decade. For all of us who have yearned to feel a little closer to the human reality of Sri Aurobindo, your book *Twelve Years* and your voluminous *Correspondence* have been an act of our guru's grace. Countless are the tender moments I've spent pouring over these documents and savouring the sweetness and delight, and also the mystery and majesty, which are Sri Aurobindo. Perhaps I catch only echoes of his full glory—but they are living echoes, echoes which He knows how to amplify and propagate, echoes which brocade the years of my life and which with each passing of the seasons seem magically more real than whatever else I have called real. So, in brief, it was a blessing to be able to attend the November Darshan—my first Darshan ever, to imbibe the atmosphere of the Samadhi and Sri Aurobindo's Room, and to meet you.

Since my return to America, I have often felt Sri Aurobindo's presence very concretely, giving silent guidance. This was especially strong in December and early January, and an entirely new experience. The Mother's presence in the psychic I had felt before, but Sri Aurobindo always seemed more remote and intangible. Now, however, I have an inkling of why even the Mother spoke of His presence as a marvel of marvels, something incalculable and infinite—yes, He is so quiet and humble, so ready to fade into the background, but when one can be silent and surrender, Oh, My Lord, such boundless compassion and acceptance! One feels liberated on wings of Peace, picked up by a mighty divine hand that can never fail.

I had one special treat from Him which I thought you might appreciate. On December 31, my parents "coincidentally" obtained a free ticket to the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit which was in New York City at that time. It was a display of his scientific scrolls and writings. One could note many subtle similarities between the genius of the great Renaissance master and that of Sri Aurobindo.

I am now back in school, finishing up my medical degree as I await here where I will go for my residency training in psychiatry. I am hoping to get into one of the Harvard programs in Boston as I felt a definite opening of consciousness there to things spiritual (they were very interested in my study of Eastern philosophy), and I think I stand a very good chance of getting my first pick. If not, well, maybe I'll end up in Seattle or San Francisco, all nice places. I am glad to be going into psychiatry because the revolution in neurobiology is one of the most promising developments in allopathic medicine at the moment, and because the field offers excellent venues for integrating yogic psychology into clinical practice. Also, and very importantly, one works rea-

sonable hours, so I will have the time to pursue sadhana and my study of homeopathy and flower remedies and various other "alternative" methods. Debu made a convert of me when I was in Pondy, and I am eager to apply the Mother's deep and intimate study of flowers to expand the repertoire and applications of Bach flower remedies. There will be plenty to keep me busy.

Back at the center in Los Angeles, things are slowly gathering together again after the hiatus created by the mass exodus to the Ashram. Debashish and Amrita send you their love. Hope you are feeling healthy again. With warmest regards and in the Mother's blessings.

MICHAEL MIOVIC

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## WHEN TIME MELTS AWAY

WHEN time melts away,  
you should not make an effort  
trying to stop it.

When a precious moment comes,  
it will stand still by itself

In the moon's shadow  
the colors are extinguished  
and forms distorted

When the dawn drives it away  
the world is re-established.

WERNER MANHEIM

(Courtesy *POET*)

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of May 1997)

THE ancient seers dealt with supraphysical truths. Modern science and philosophy deal with abstract concepts. But these concepts are born of the rational intellect. We may call them theories, well-arranged and systematised; hence nothing extraordinary. But the ancient seers realised and tried to express the transcendental Truth and the Power behind the world of phenomena which at once resolves itself into more and more subtle forms knitting themselves into a system. By virtue of their spiritual insight the seers discovered that the world consists of different levels of existence—sphere after sphere ranging from the gross to the subtle, peak after peak in an ascending order, one existence runs through them all. The Supreme being is there in each being. Again, the truth on one level is reflected on other levels, for it is the same power of the Supreme Being that travels from the most subtle to the most gross manifestation. So there reigns a parallelism by virtue of all the levels of existence.

“As for instance, when the Vedic seers speak of fire, they mean something of which the gross form is fire and which itself is *teja* (luminous energy) in its subtle form. In the spiritual world, in its subtler form it is called consciousness energising. Likewise serially and simultaneously are light, of the revelation and the knowledge *Idam srestham jyotiśām*. This is the Light, the highest of all lights, it has come; the Supreme knowledge beautiful and diverse, vast and all-pervading has taken birth.”\*

Sri Aurobindo’s luminous exposition of the Vedas gives its secret meaning and mystic revelation. He says

“There is a truth, deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding which comes by revelation and inspiration, and immortality towards which the soul has to rise. We have to find out our way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and immortality, *sapanta rtam amrtam*, to be born into the Truth, to grow in it to ascend in spirit into the world of Truth and to live in it. To do so is to unite ourselves with the Godhead and to pass from mortality into immortality. This is the first and the central meaning of the Vedic mystics. The Platonists, developing their doctrine from the early mystics, held that we live in relation to two worlds,—a world of higher truth which might be called the spiritual world and that in which we live, the world of the embodied soul which is derived from the higher but also degraded from it into an inferior truth and inferior consciousness. The Vedic mystics held this doctrine in a more concrete and pragmatic form, for they had the experience of these two worlds. There is the inferior truth here of this world mixed as it is with much falsehood and error, *anrtasya bhūreḥ*, and there is a world or home of Truth, *sadanam rtasya*, the Truth, the Right, the Vast, *satyam rtam brhat*, where all is Truth-conscious, *rtacit*. There are many worlds between up to the triple heavens and their lights but this is the world of the highest Light—the world of the Sun of Truth,

\* From Jagannath-ji’s class notes, unpublished (Editor)

*svar*, or the Great Heaven We have to find the path to this Great Heaven, the path of Truth, *rtasya panthāh*, or as it is sometimes called the way of the gods This is the second mystic doctrine The third is that our life is a battle between the powers of Light and Truth, the Gods who are the Immortals and the powers of Darkness These are spoken of under various names as Vritra and Vritras, Vala and the Panis, the Dasyus and their kings We have to call in the aid of the Gods to destroy the opposition of these powers of Darkness who conceal the Light from us or rob us of it, who obstruct the flowing of the streams of Truth, *rtasya dhārāh*, the streams of Heaven and obstruct in every way the soul's ascent. We have to invoke the Gods by the inner sacrifice, and by the Word call them into us,—that is the specific power of the Mantra,—to offer to them the gifts of the sacrifice and by that giving secure their gifts, so that by this process we may build the way of our ascent to the goal The elements of the outer sacrifice in the Veda are used as symbols of the inner sacrifice and self-offering, we give what we are and what we have in order that the riches of the divine Truth and Light may descend into our life and become the elements of our inner birth into the Truth,—a right thinking, a right understanding, a right action must develop in us which is the thinking, impulsion and action of that higher Truth, *rtasya presā*, *rtasya dhīti*, and by this way we must build up ourselves in that Truth Our sacrifice is a journey, a pilgrimage and a battle,—a travel towards the Gods and we also make that journey with Agni, the inner Flame, as our path-finder and leader. Our human things are raised up by the mystic Fire into the immortal being, into the Great Heaven, and the things divine come down into us As the doctrine of the Rīg Veda is the seed of the teaching of the Vedānta, so is its inner practice and discipline a seed of the later practice and discipline of Yoga. Finally, as the summit of the teaching of the Vedic mystics comes the secret of the one Reality, *ekam sat*, or *tad ekam*, which became the central word of the Upanishads. The Gods, the powers of Light and Truth are powers and names of the One, each God is himself all the Gods or carries them in him there is one Truth, *tat satyam*, and one bliss to which we must rise. But in the Veda this looks out still mostly from behind the veil There is much else but this is the kernel of the doctrine

“The interpretation I have put forward was set out at length in a series of articles with the title ‘The Secret of the Veda’ in the monthly philosophical magazine, ‘Arya’, some thirty years ago, written in serial form while still developing the theory and not quite complete in its scope or composed on a preconceived and well-ordered plan, it was not published in book-form and is therefore not yet available to the reading public. It was accompanied by a number of renderings of the hymns of the Rīg Veda which were rather interpretations than translations and to these there was an introduction explanatory of the ‘Doctrine of the Mystics’. Subsequently there was planned a complete translation of all the hymns to Agni in the ten Mandalas which kept close to the text, the renderings of those hymns in the second and sixth Mandalas are now published in this book for the first time as well as a few from the first Mandala But to establish on a scholastic basis the conclusions of the hypothesis it would have been necessary to prepare an edition of the Rīg Veda or of a large part of it with a word by

word construing in Sanskrit and English, notes explanatory of important points in the text and justifying the interpretation both of separate words and of whole verses and also elaborate appendices to fix firmly the rendering of key-words like *rtam*, *śravas*, *kratu*, *ketu*, etc essential to the esoteric interpretation. This also was planned, but meanwhile greater preoccupations of a permanent nature intervened and no time was left to proceed with such a considerable undertaking. For the benefit of the reader of these translations who might otherwise be at a loss, this foreword has been written and some passages from the unpublished “Doctrine of the Mystics” have been included. The text of the Veda has been given for use by those who can read the original Sanskrit. These translations however are not intended to be a scholastic work meant to justify a hypothesis, the object of this publication is only to present them in a permanent form for disciples and those who are inclined to see more in the Vedas than a superficial liturgy and would be interested in knowing what might be the esoteric sense of this ancient Scripture.

“This is a literary and not a strictly literal translation. But a fidelity to the meaning, the sense of the words and the structure of the thought, has been preserved: in fact the method has been to start with a bare and scrupulously exact rendering of the actual language and adhere to that as the basis of the interpretation, for it is only so that we can find out the actual thoughts of these ancient mystics. But any rendering of such great poetry as the hymns of the Rīg Veda, magnificent in their colouring and images, noble and beautiful in rhythm, perfect in their diction, must, if it is not to be a merely dead scholastic work, bring at least a faint echo of their poetic force—more cannot be done in a prose translation and in so different a language. The turn of phrase and the syntax of English and Vedic Sanskrit are poles asunder, to achieve some sense of style and natural writing one has constantly to turn the concentrated speech of the Veda into a looser, more diluted English form. Another stumbling-block for the translator is the ubiquitous *double entendre* marking in one word the symbol and the thing symbolised, Ray and Cow, clear light of the mind and clarified butter, horses and spiritual power, one has to invent phrases like the “herds of the light” or “the shining herds” or to use devices such as writing the word horse with a capital H to indicate that it is a symbolic horse that is meant and not the common physical animal, but very often the symbol has to be dropped, or else the symbol has to be kept and the inner meaning left to be understood, I have not always used the same phrase though always keeping the same sense, but varied the translation according to the needs of the passage. Often I have been unable to find an adequate English word which will convey the full connotation or colour of the original text, I have used two words instead of one or a phrase or resorted to some other device to give the exact and complete meaning. Besides, there is often a use of antique words or turns of language of which the sense is not really known and can only be conjectured or else different renderings are equally possible. In many passages I have had to leave a provisional rendering; it was intended to keep the final decision on the point until the time when a more considerable body of the hymns had been translated and were ready for publication, but this time has not yet come.”

“During the first year of the *Arya*, along with ‘The Secret of the Veda’ sequence, some ‘Selected Hymns’ also appeared—thirteen in all—in translation, and each carried its own commentary. From August 1915 to January 1920, ‘Hymns of the Atris’ from the fifth Mandala and a few other Hymns also appeared in translation, with an explanatory Introduction on ‘The Doctrine of the Mystics’ and several important notes on the ‘Guardians of the Light’, Surya, Usha the Dawn, Pushan, Savitri, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman and Bhaga

“Long after the *Arya* had ceased publication, Sri Aurobindo published in 1946 *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, a new or revised translation of the Hymns to Agni in the second and sixth Mandalas. In 1952, an enlarged edition of *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* appeared and this included Hymns from all the Mandalas except the ninth. Some of these published earlier (like the ‘Hymns of the Atris’ from the fifth Mandala) now appearing in a revised form.”

In all about 175 of the Hymns to Agni are here in translation, and from these alone it should be possible to test the validity of Sri Aurobindo’s broad conclusions, regarding the esoteric meaning of the Veda

Although many of the hymns are addressed to gods other than Agni—that is to say, Indra, Surya, Mitra, Varuna, Savitri, Brihaspati, the Ribhus, the Ushmapas, the Ashwins, the Maruts, the Vishvedevas, Ila, Saraswati, Mahi and so on—yet Agni is somehow the dominant deity in the Rig Veda

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

*Reference*

- 1 *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, SABCL, Vol 11, pp 17-20

# IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR MADHUSUDAN REDDY

(1925-1996)

## (THE MAN WHO WALKED ALONE)

WITH a long distinguished career spanning many decades of public service, Professor Madhusudan Reddy will be remembered for his varied attainments. As a scholar he excelled in works like *Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Evolution, Meta-History, The Vedic Epiphany* and *Mankind on the March*, as well as in authoring more than two hundred research papers on literature, philosophy and spirituality. As a teacher *par excellence*, he shaped the Philosophy Departments of Osmania and other universities in India and abroad. As an exponent of Indian culture and philosophy, he travelled widely on coveted international Fellowships, such as the UNESCO and the Fulbright, to leading institutions of learning in the East and the West. At the time he passed away, Professor Reddy left behind several institutions that he had founded: The Institute of Human Study, The Sri Aurobindo International School, The New Race, The Sri Aurobindo Darshan, just to mention a few. He also lent his wisdom to the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation.

It was the uniqueness of Madhusudan's personality to carry many strengths and responsibilities lightly on his shoulders. Indeed, few among us can combine such divergent interests. We are primarily men of action or men of contemplation, political-minded or apolitical, extrovert or introvert, life-asserting or of an ascetic temperament. Indeed, binaries and oppositions seem to characterize the human condition. But Madhusudan constantly endeavoured to overcome such dualities. He also seemed to believe that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied!

It is hard to put Madhusudan into any category or convenient slot. He was a philosopher but his life as a philosopher did not make him an ineffectual dreamer; for, he had keen insight into men and matters and knew how to command resources for institution building. He was a visionary who spoke the language of brick and mortar. He was moved by the Pythagorean music of the spheres no less than the "frozen music" of architecture. He revealed an eye for the smallest details as well.

Two distinct qualities marked Madhusudan's temperament: a spirit of complete dedication to the task at hand and an equally companionable spirit of divine restlessness. He was no philosopher toiling alone in the labyrinthine cellars of the Mind. Madhusudan was basically a poet at heart. For he seemed to believe that the greatness of Man lay in the quality of his dreams. The greater the dream, the greater the Man. Providence and lineage too seemed to favour such a course. Madhusudan came from a landed illustrious family that had spearheaded the Bhoodan Movement, started by Acharya Vinobha Bhave, to distribute land to the landless peasants. Generosity also came from the ambience of Hyderabad, the majesty of Salar Jung and the delights of the head and the heart that go with the Deccani culture. Thus, the act of giving came

easily to Madhusudan. He established bonds with many, aside from his own children—Ananda and Chhalamayee. That too was his greatness, his faith in the larger family and human fellowship.

Madhusudan had a natural gift for wit and humour. But frivolity of any kind was not part of it. An earnest attitude towards life is what he always cherished. He used power and pelf when they came his way, but he had no attraction for a life of mere comfort and stability. Psychologically and spiritually Madhusudan preferred the razor's edge. In his self-critique and radical introspection, he always distanced himself from the complacent and the vainglorious. That way, he had a perennial youthful self. He was the true romanticist who believed that a life of constant progress was far superior to the mere joy of reaching the goal.

Madhusudan was a child at heart. He sported no superior air despite his many achievements. He made great investments in time and energy in shaping human beings, but seldom demanded personal loyalty.

Perhaps Madhusudan's greatest strength lay in his quietly self-effacing companion, Radha, a true soul-mate forever at his side, forever supportive of his dreams and action. Together they strove towards a common goal of varied perfection.

A recurring regret that Madhusudan used to express was that he could not spread Sri Aurobindo's message as effectively in Hyderabad as he ideally desired. He admired the example of his colleagues in the near-by Orissa.

Madhusudan Reddy was a true intellectual. For along with the intellect's strength, he always understood the limitation of the human mind. The intellect, he knew, had to be illumined by a higher power. And then there had to be the path of Devotion and Work as well. Not surprisingly, three individuals in the Ashram influenced him the most: Nolini, Champaklal and Dyuman.

Madhusudan died as he had lived— with dignity and valour. He was a man who walked alone. He fought heroically against the onset of cancer and did not give up till the very end. And when the time came for him to leave the earth, his soul chose the 9th of December, the day Sri Aurobindo's body was laid in the centre of the Ashram courtyard. Could there be a more fitting case of divine dispensation?

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY



## MYRIADS OF MIGHTY BIRDS FLEW BY

MYRIADS of mighty birds flew by,  
Their plumes of mingled gold and flame  
Clove all the air to splendours high  
Who knows from what mysterious sky  
Into a dusky world they came?

They filled the silence with a whirl  
Of blended pinions whose flame-rush  
Was deeper Silence naught could stir.  
Was each a fire-messenger  
Journeying from hush to deeper hush?

At first I did not realise  
Whence streamed the soft enchanted whirl  
Of spiralled light of changing dyes·  
But soon I saw them in their eyes  
Of wedded emerald, sapphire, pearl

Birds of humility, a crowd  
Of the eternal rapture, sent  
Shot like bright pangs through every cloud  
Which dared to come between their proud  
Flight and the calling firmament

Each curve of pinion seemed to hold  
An ecstasy that traced a bow  
At every point of speed, controlled  
By some far master-hand of gold  
Arrowing the air with birded glow.

So swift they flew,—I could not count  
These dazzling hosts of angel-grace·  
But even their memories seem to mount  
Keenly to some immortal fount  
Flowing in some cool pilgrim-place.

High noon dissolved to dusk and passed  
Into a brooding night that was  
An emanation of the last  
Self-revelation of the Vast  
Mirrored to depths of starry pause

When like a multitudinous roll  
Of precious honey poured from jars  
From pole to diamond-studded pole,  
The golden bird-wings from my soul  
Melted and covered up the stars.

Myriad of giant birds flew out,  
Each an event that but occurs  
In realms unshadowed of all doubt.  
O Ancient many-jewelled rout  
Of deathless Fire-Messengers!

15 to 1, Afternoon, 8-7-34

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

Sri Aurobindo's Comment. Exceedingly beautiful.

## RESURRECTION

WHERE art Thou, O my sweet Lord,  
    Why drag me out in this night?  
As one in a spell lured by a word  
    I stagger twixt the wrong and the right

Beyond all sound, all sight, all form,  
    Beyond all reasonings of the mind,  
Battered and torn in this raving storm  
    Thou hast made me mad and blind.

The denseness deepens drowning me,  
    A formidable power reviles.  
I gasp for light, unable to see,  
    And the Demon of Darkness smiles.

“My Lord will protect me!” I cried,  
    My voice was clear and still,  
Quiet and assured though all denied  
    That even this is Thy will.

And anchored deep within me,  
    The faith that Thou art there,  
Though all seems lost, and I fail to see  
    Thy sweetness scattered everywhere

A beggar blind with my broken bowl  
    I light my night with thoughts of Thee;  
This howling emptiness, this raging soul  
    Is now appeased with Thy Felicity.

Only a drop of Thy Radiance  
    I ask—I ask no more:  
Thy Smile, Thy Touch, and Thy Glance  
    Will flood me from shore to shore

S M

# THE EMERGENCE OF BIG SCIENCE

*(Continued from the issue of May 1997)*

## 2. Discovery of Nuclear Fission

THE experiment of Michelson and Morley, performed in 1885, is a landmark in the development of physics. Its professional contents as well as the ideas and concepts that came in the sequel had far-reaching consequences. Primarily the experiment was designed to detect the presence of an "ether" filling what we otherwise call empty space. If it does exist then the earth moving through it should produce a detectable drag. But the experiment did not observe it. This negative result, almost unparalleled in the history of science, proved to be significant in many respects. Man's ingenuity to construct complex apparatus for measurements is one aspect of it. But, more importantly, the constancy of velocity of light, irrespective of the observer's frame of reference, puts the observer in a world of relativity. Now we have more elaborate, more massive, more sophisticated scientific set-ups. The change-over was gradual but steady. While the 12" Lawrence Cyclotron designed in 1932 to accelerate protons upto 12 MeV energy, the Van de Graaf Generator and the Wilson-Blakette Counter Controlled Cloud Chamber (1934) made a humble beginning in this direction, the present-day giant particle accelerators, bubble chambers, reactors, supercomputers, satellites are a proof of how important large-scale experimentation has become.

Besides experimentation, during this period physics also grew rapidly in the theoretical domain. The quantisation of energy in Bohr's hydrogen atom, De Broglie's doctoral thesis on the dual nature of matter, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, his Matrix Mechanics, and the formulation of Wave Mechanics by Schroedinger were each a tremendous leap in the progress towards the understanding of microscopic matter. Schroedinger's synthesis of Wave Mechanics and Matrix Mechanics into Quantum Mechanics in 1926 was a signal event in Theoretical Physics. It eventually led to the discovery of new forces and particles. These, in turn, gave a thrust to an altogether new dimension to scientific investigation. Advances in the interpretation of Quantum Mechanics also brought about fundamental changes in our outlook on the physical world.

In Physics, howsoever sound a theory be, pen and paper discoveries have to be confirmed with wrenches and screw-drivers. For example, Dirac, while formulating the Relativistic Wave Equation for the electron in 1927, was the first to see the possible existence of a fundamental particle which is the exact counterpart of the electron, identical with it, except for the opposite sign of its charge, later named positron. While doing Cosmic-Ray research, using a cloud-chamber, Anderson confirmed its existence in 1932. Thus, in order to verify the existence of new particles arising out of the predictions of Quantum Mechanics, new and more sophisticated instruments became imperative. The days of the billiard-ball objects and their interactions were over.

This sudden surge of intense research activity and technological upgradation resulted in a series of remarkable discoveries

Amongst them notably, again in 1932, was James Chadwick's discovery of the neutron. But more bewildering than its discovery is its role in nuclear reactions, particularly in artificial disintegrations. Its special property of readily inducing radioactivity and breaking up some of the heavy unstable elements with liberation of enormous amounts of energy opened out newer fields of investigation.

As early as 1920, when it was commonly assumed that the atomic nuclei are made of protons and electrons, Rutherford had predicted the existence of a nucleus of the simplest type—that in which a proton and an electron are more intimately united than in a hydrogen atom. This means that its mass is almost the same as that of the proton but without charge. He called it neutron. However, at that time such a nuclear particle could not be detected.

But, later, the study of the disintegrations of light elements by alpha-particles led to the discovery of the neutron. Although three different groups of scientists—German, French and English—contributed greatly to this work, it was Chadwick in England who justly deserves the credit of its final and definite accomplishment.

In 1930, when Bothe and Becker bombarded beryllium with alpha-particles, they noticed the emission of a highly penetrating radiation, instead of the expected proton ejection, unlike alpha-particles, electrons or X-rays, this radiation could not be absorbed by a brass or zinc screen.

In 1932 Joliot and Curie, in their attempt to produce transmutations with these rays, discovered the property of expelling high-speed protons from hydrogenous elements such as water, paraffin and paper. They also found that the magnetic field did not affect the rays. They therefore assumed the radiation to consist of gamma-rays; these could produce protons as a result of elastic collisions, as in the Compton effect. But, soon, they were faced with discrepancies in the measured and the calculated energies.

At this stage Chadwick reverted to Rutherford's neutron hypothesis. He showed that all difficulties disappeared if it could be assumed that the primary radiation was not made of gamma-rays but of neutrons.

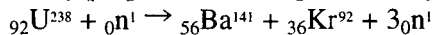
He went ahead to establish experimentally the correctness of this conclusion and the results did prove, beyond doubt, that the highly penetrating radiation is indeed made of material particles with no charge but having a mass just a little more than the mass of the proton.

With this discovery, the neutron became a very useful means to study the properties of the nucleus. Shortly, nuclear fission was discovered which, in the process, showed the way for tapping enormous amounts of energy from these reactions.

The starting-point in the discovery of nuclear fission is to be traced to the attempt of Fermi, in 1934, to produce transuranic elements by bombarding uranium with neutrons. He conceived the idea that the heaviest naturally occurring element, uranium, when bombarded by neutrons, might give rise to elements with higher mass. Experi-

ments conducted on this basis resulted in four new radio-activities. Soon Fermi's results were confirmed and extended by Hahn, Meitner and Strassmann in Germany and by Curie-Joliot and Savitch in France.

The German group made a bold suggestion on the basis of their observations that the bombarded uranium nucleus breaks up into two large fragments, each of the size of a moderately heavy atom. They proposed that the process might be represented by:



Thus, a new type of disintegration in which a heavy nucleus splits into two nuclei of comparable size, and hence called 'nuclear fission', was discovered.

*(To be continued)*

ANIRBAN DEB



Love is something that belongs to one's thoughtless youth, it is beautiful but as a fairy-tale is beautiful, it is earthly happiness, not the true happiness. It is said in the Upanishad

The good and the pleasant come to a man. The wise man considers them from all sides and knows one from the other. He chooses the good rather than the pleasant, but the dull-witted cherishes the pleasant rather than getting and keeping the good.  
(*Katha Upanisad*, 1 2.2)

Adwaita is looking for the good, *śreyas*, like a wise intelligent man, *dhīra*, and therefore he says

You are my youth, my living fairy-tale, you  
My morning-star, my only earthly happiness.

All these things belong to the pleasant and have to be spurned in order to get the good, for, says Adwaita,

Bent under the long oppression of human  
Suffering I lie in chains,

and he declares his credo.

he who knows Brahman is free

But where does he seek this freedom? At first in the frantic pursuit of learning and intellectual knowledge. This pursuit is described metaphorically as a dizzy descent on the snowy comets and on the slopes of paraboles or as a march "with Orion, past the mighty invisibility of the silent pole". But liberating knowledge does not come from learning. It comes from love that grows deep in the heart and lies enveloped in outwardness, here symbolized by the sweet prattle, fairy-tale, etc. It is that love which shows the way through intuition—and the girl who says that she is

The Sleeping Beauty of your Lotus-land

Love knows directly, intuitively, that which escapes the arduous search of scholars and philosophers

Quietly I lay in your heart all my treasure  
Of self-experienced God, no human delusion

The human delusion (*mensenwaan*) is the *avidyā*. The Dutch word "waan" is delusion,



misapprehension, false notion. This is the product of book-knowledge, indoctrination, learning, intellectuality. But the true treasure is the “self-experienced God”. Intuition comes when our Love, sleeping in the cavern of the heart, wakes up. She says

Listen, now that I am awake, to my whisperings,  
Not to the too solemn organ music of the Upanishad.

Even the Upanishads are records of the experience of some people like Yājñavalkya. Reading them only cannot give true knowledge; this too is an aspect of knowledge. Only personal intuition, that comes when the Sleeping Beauty in us wakes up, shows the path to freedom. And She admonishes the poet to abandon “that reckless tobogganing” and define his orbit—around her who is the sun.

No, close your circuit and see that your thoughts safely wheel  
Round me, your sun, in pious circles.

One of the consequences of ignorance in life is suffering. When we do not know the All and do not live for the All, when we confine ourselves to our little self-love, when the ego abides in us and tries to guide our life, then there is suffering.

The ego, limited and ignorant formation of the Self in us, lives separated from the *ātman*. Even after we experience the *ātman* as our true Self, this ego may persist and hurt us. Only when it realises its limitations and withdraws can we be free. In the case of Advaita we see that after long suffering he comes near to the liberating knowledge. Yet it is not there:

Apparently that which smote me lives in me, separate.

And then he seems to hear Something in himself that tells itself “I was myself my love.” The revelation of the love of the ego to itself makes it vanish and the Self knows it is free. “Zo werd ik vrij” (Thus I became free.)

Like knowledge, joy can also liberate man from suffering. When we see the world as the expression of the Brahmic joy in manifold beauty we cannot but forget our pain. The world is God’s play. Advaita develops this idea with the help of a protracted metaphor. When a child is sad the mother rolls before him a pretty yellow ball in a circle to amuse him, the turning ball looks like a golden ring fastened to an invisible elastic thread. Then with a small hammer she plays on a gamelan<sup>9</sup> tunes from far-off memories. The child is cheered, and it sings and beats time. In the octet of the sonnet the poet draws this picture of the mother and child. And in the sestet he elaborates the symbolism of the image. Brahman, in the same way, swings before Advaita the wheeling sun and plays on the thunder-gamelan the ancient tune. (What is this ancient tune? Is it not the primordial knowledge that we all possess in the depth of our hearts?) And Advaita concludes:

And I forge, I make verses and I am  
 Happy, so much so that I don't recognize myself,  
 A child—yes, but like Lao-tse: child and grey.

Knowledge, *vidyā*, and joy, *ānanda*, free Adwaita from ignorance and all its consequences, such as suffering, sin, slavery. And he becomes the white swan in the light of Brahman (Brahman's light).

### Conclusion

Adwaita's poetry flows directly out of his Vedantic vision, like glowing lava after a volcanic eruption <sup>10</sup> In the long poem "DAT ben j11", *tat tvam asi*, he writes.

Its flaming thunder sent forth  
 Through the glacier mouth  
 Typhoeus buried in the eternal fire  
 Of quaking Etna  
 Out of Brahman, right through the scale  
 Of the melting integral,  
 Are hurled verses, jet after jet,  
 By volcano Adwaita.

The poetic fire lay buried like Typhoeus under the glacier crater of philosophy and erudition; but the Brahmic vision, we may say the warmth of the Brahman-sun, melts the solid ice and poetry flows out like glowing lava, shoots out like burning rock. And the glacier finally appears to be a flaming crater.

Almost from the very beginning he has an amazing confidence in his new-found poetic power. After the knowledge that he is Brahman, and all this that is in the world is Brahman, that he is all, nothing seems impossible. Knowledge is also power—for Brahmic consciousness carries in it the efficient energy of expression. He can, he says, "put, with its summit in the abyss, the Atlas on the Caucasus, lift the Alps on top of that". This is apparently a bit of romantic bragging, nevertheless it shows the poet's awareness of his own power, a power that is superhuman. It is like the Vedic poet who has received divine inspiration, which is like the drinking of the intoxicating *soma*.

The luminous thought comes to me  
 like the lowing cow to the dear calf;  
 Have I then drunk Soma? . .  
 By my greatness I have surpassed  
 the sky and the vast earth,  
 Have I then drunk Soma?  
 Well, I shall put the earth

on this side or on the other side,  
Have I then drunk Soma? (Rig Veda: X.119)

Adwaita too writes from the vision of his own poetic power. Doubts may assail him but he always returns to the knowledge that he has been lifted by a mighty wind. And he hopes that one who reads his verses will hear the wind blow.

There is an inner unity in his poetic work which is the all-encompassing Vedantic experience. In this vast experience nothing needs to be left out: poetic is that which is. And therefore he can move easily and confidently from the body to the spirit, through algebraic symbols, astronomical signs, through history, philosophy, music, through fantasy and phantasmagoria, from the crude pictures of day-to-day reality to the sublime visions of the Spirit. "Seen from the purely poetical viewpoint," says Gerrit Komrij, "the theme of Brahman that overcomes the oppositions is a masterly strategy. thereby the poet has a share of omnipotence, to him nothing is impossible."<sup>11</sup> But this attitude can lead to an exuberance of expression that can be detrimental to the poetic art. Adwaita seems to have recognized this danger and to avoid it he chose the austere form of the sonnet in which the law of numbers provides for sobriety and measure. The study of mathematics and the prosody of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit had made him aware of the importance of numbers. In fact he speaks of the "Number" as the ubiquitous ruler.

In order not to lose his way into the vast world of poetic speech which is open to him, he chooses to chastise his poetic imagination by adopting the sonnet almost as the exclusive form. Only a tiny fraction of his poetry is in other forms. But this fixed form seems never to have disabled his Muse or made her uncomfortable. His language is generally supple and modulated; metaphors come to him naturally. He brings together the extremes that are an infinity apart, through the grace of his Brahmic vision. A magnificent example of this is a sonnet which is perhaps the best-known of his poems: many Dutch men and women who otherwise know almost nothing of Adwaita's poetry are familiar with the first line of this sonnet.

I am Brahman. But we are without a maid-servant  
In the house I do the only thing I can:  
I throw away my dirty water and fill the can;  
But I don't have a floor-cloth and always make a mess  
She says that such work is not for a man  
And I feel helpless, full of self-reproach  
When she coddles my long-indulged impracticality  
With what she has conjured up in the pan  
And I have always worshipped Him who unfolds Himself  
In magical spectacles of the world and art and wisdom:  
When she gives me my plate of porridge  
And I see her fingertips are cracked

Then I feel the self-same adoration flame up in me  
For the sun, Bach, Kant and her callous hands.

In this article I have mainly spoken of the vision and contents of the poems. In order to grasp their poetic qualities one has to read them in the original. I would only like to say that poetry being the union of word and sense, *śabdārthau sahita*, the form reflects the same unified quality of the vision, namely that all oppositions are reconciled; they are, as one modern Dutch critic calls them, “Organ music in colloquial speech. Wagnerian symphonies in the style of letter-writing.” This description of the poems is in no way depreciative; for, the perspective of the Brahmic vision reconciles all formal and linguistic oppositions in a vast harmony which becomes universal, precisely because not even the so-called vulgar is excluded.

To conclude, I cannot do better than quote what Komrij, who edited a selection of Adwaita’s poems in 1980, says: “Nothing in this poetry is dated, everything is new as on the first day.”<sup>12</sup>

(Concluded)

RANAJIT SARKAR

#### References

- 9 An Indonesian percussion instrument
- 10 See, Marcel F. Fresco, “dèr Mouw en Spinoza”, in *Bulletin*, No 121, p 28
- 11 G. Komrij, Introduction to *'k Ben Brahman Maar we zitten zonder meid*, p 8
- 12 *Ibid*, p 10

# POLITICAL VEDANTISM—ITS CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

(Continued from the issue of May 1997)

## CHAPTER III (contd.)

### POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION TO CREATE FREE INDIA

#### THE ALIPORE CONSPIRACY CASE

THE case is otherwise known as the Alipore Bomb Trial. On his way to Calcutta after attending the memorable Surat Session of the Indian National Congress held on 26 December 1907, which is marked as the 'Surat Split' in the history of the Freedom Movement because the final rupture between the Nationalists and Moderates was its outcome—Sri Aurobindo delivered lectures at different places in Maharashtra. When he reached Calcutta he was informed by Barindra (his younger brother) of their preparation in the Muraripukur Garden at Maniktola—Sri Aurobindo knew that the general atmosphere of Bengal was ready. And now he was apprised that the Maniktola Centre was fully equipped to deal with the authorities trying to put down every mode of agitation with severe repressive measures. One such authority was the magistrate Kingsford who was known for his extreme cruelty. An attempt on his life having failed, two young boys—Khudiram Bose and Profulla Chaki of the Maniktola Garden Centre—came forward for the second try. They were sent to Muzzaffarpur in Bihar where Kingsford had been transferred for his safety and security.

It was in the dark night of 30th April 1908 that a bomb was hurled against a carriage by Khudiram to kill the Magistrate Kingsford who was presumed to be the occupant of the carriage. But actually there were two women, wife and daughter of Mr Kennedy, both were killed. When the telegram containing the message of the above incident came to the *Bande Mataram* office, Hemendra Prasad Ghose—one of the editorial writers of the *Bande Mataram*—received it and sent it to the press after deleting the contemptuous comments contained therein. After sometime when Sri Aurobindo came he was informed of the fact. Thrice he read the telegram and then enquired if the news had been sent to the press. Hemendra Prasad replied that he had sent it to the press for publishing the news portion only. Sri Aurobindo remained silent.

Next morning it was seen that a police picket was posted in front of Sri Aurobindo's residence at Scott's Lane. But Sri Aurobindo was not there. He was in Grey Street.

It was at this residence that Sri Aurobindo was arrested on 2nd May 1908 at about 5 a.m., when he was sleeping without a worry. His sister rushed to his room in an agitated manner and called Sri Aurobindo out by name. Sri Aurobindo got up to see that

his small room was filled with armed policemen

Now let us listen to what Sri Aurobindo stated about this interesting event in his *Karakahini* (Bengali) as translated by Sisir Kumar Ghosh

“I was sitting on my bed, still half-asleep, when Cregan inquired, ‘Who is Aurobindo Ghose? Is that you?’ I answered ‘Yes, I am Aurobindo Ghose.’ Immediately he ordered a policeman to put me under arrest. Then, because of an extremely objectionable expression used by Cregan, there was a little exchange of words between the two. I asked for the search warrant, read and signed it. Finding a mention of bombs in the warrant, I understood that the presence of these soldiers and policemen was concerned with the Muzaffarpur killing. The one thing I did not understand was why, even before any bombs or explosives had been discovered in my house, I was arrested in the absence of a body warrant. But I did not raise any useless objections. Afterwards, under instructions from Cregan, my arms were handcuffed, and a rope tied round my middle. An upcountry constable stood behind me holding the rope end . . .

“Nearly half an hour after, I do not know at whose bidding, they removed the rope and the handcuffs . . . after which Cregan asked me:

“ ‘It seems you are a B A. Is it not a shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this?’ ‘I am a poor man, and I live like one,’ I said.

“ ‘Then you have worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man’, Cregan spoke in a loud voice. Knowing how impossible it was to explain the love of the motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton I did not make the attempt.

“All the while the search continued. Beginning at five-thirty, it was over at about eleven-thirty. Inside or outside the boxes, all the exercise books, letters, papers, scraps, poems, plays, prose, essays, translations, nothing escaped the clutches of the all-engrossing search.. Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshinেশ্বর that had been kept in a small cardboard box, he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark’s suspicions were not unfounded. In the end the decision was reached that it was a piece of earth which it was unnecessary to send to the chemical analyst. I did not join the search except to open a few boxes. No papers or letters were shown or read out to me... Nor was I at all curious, since I knew it was impossible that there might be in my house any formula for the manufacture of explosives or documents relating to the conspiracy . . .”

Sri Aurobindo was then taken to the police station and from there towards Lal Bazar. At the Lal Bazar lock-up Halliday, the Police Commissioner thundered:

Halliday Aren’t you ashamed of being involved in this cowardly, dastardly activity?

Sri Aurobindo. What right have you to assume that I was involved?

Halliday I am not assuming, I know everything.

Sri Aurobindo What you know or do not know is your concern. I wholly deny having any connection with these murderous acts .

From there to the magistrate's court and then to Alipore.

“ . My prison life at Alipore began on May 5 Next year, on May 6, I was released ”<sup>19</sup>

The Alipore Bomb Trial was the first State trial of any magnitude in India, as viewed by the compiler of the Trial, because it was the biggest news in many of the Indian newspapers for one full year.

Now let us have some glimpses of the Defending Counsellor Barrister Chittaranjan Das's historical eight-day speech defending Sri Aurobindo in the Trial, from which one may have a clear idea of Sri Aurobindo's role in Indian politics during the early period of the Independence Movement

“May it please your honour, and gentlemen assessors,—it is a matter of congratulation for us all, that at last this trial has come to a close . .

“In a case like this, the first thing to do is to prove that a conspiracy did exist and the next thing is to connect the particular persons with the conspiracy. What has been the method followed by my friend? Whether he discussed oral evidence or documentary evidence he started with the assumption that these persons are guilty. He assumed their guilt and then tried to connect them with the evidence ..

“There is another point—that is with regard to Aurobindo's domestic letters. Read those letters and you will find that they throw no light on the charges against these accused. The sanctity of his private correspondence has been wantonly and improperly violated. Was it for the purpose of proving to you that these men are guilty? I submit not. There is nothing in those letters from beginning to end which throws any light on the charges for which these men are being tried . .

“I have already told you that the correspondence of Aurobindo has been placed before you, in fact, gentlemen, his whole life has been laid bare before you. My friend's contention is that on that evidence which deals with his inner life you will see signs of conspiracy and waging war. I shall confidently take my stand upon that very correspondence and material I shall show you that during the whole life of Aurobindo, beginning with his first work up to the day of his arrest, he was actuated by a noble ideal. ..

“The doctrine of Vedantism is that man is not dissociated from God: that is to say, if you want to realise yourself you must look for the God within you. It is within your heart and within your soul, that you will find that God dwells and as no man can attain his own salvation without reaching to that God that is within you, so also in the case of nations without any national question arising—no nation can attain this unless it realises the highest and noblest and the best of that nation As in the case of individuals you cannot reach your God with extraneous aid, but you must make an effort—that supreme effort—yourself before you can realise the God within you; so also with a nation It is by itself that a nation must grow, a nation must attain its salvation by its

unaided effort. No foreigner can give you that salvation. It is within your own hands to revive that spirit of nationality. That is the doctrine of nationality which Aurobindo has preached throughout and that was to be done not by methods which are against the traditions of the country. I ask your particular attention to that. Accordingly we find Aurobindo preaching 'you are not cowards, you are not a set of incapable men, because you have got divinity. Have faith in yourself and in that faith go on towards that goal and become a self-developed nation' .<sup>20</sup>

Referring to the period from April 1907 to September 1907, i.e. up to the acquittal of Aurobindo Ghose in the *Bande Mataram* case, Chittaranjan said that Aurobindo's activities during this period were confined to the National College and *Bande Mataram*. In this connection he read out a letter written to Aurobindo from Tokyo sympathising with him in his trouble with the *Bande Mataram* Trial.

Mr. Das referred to the evidence of several other witnesses and commented on them, and thereafter he summed up: "I must thank Your Honour and gentlemen assessors for the very kind and patient hearing you have given me throughout this case. . . There is one point which struck me at the outset of this case but I did not refer to it so long, as I thought it could be dealt with more conveniently and appropriately after I had finished dealing with the evidence oral and documentary, on the record. Your Honour will find that my learned friend's case is that Aurobindo is the head of this conspiracy. He has credited Aurobindo with vast intellectual attainments and with vast powers of organisation and his case was that he was directing this conspiracy and was working from behind. Now it is with reference to this that I make my submission before Your Honour, that having regard to the nature of the conspiracy which has been established by the evidence,—if it has been established at all,—it is impossible that Aurobindo could ever have believed that that conspiracy was likely to succeed. If you say that Aurobindo is not gifted with the intellectual powers with which you have credited him, that is another matter. But if you say that he is all that you have been kind enough to say he is and concomitant with that he is the head of the conspiracy and is directing the conspiracy, my answer to that is, the conspiracy is of such a nature that it is impossible to believe that Aurobindo could ever have thought in his mind that it could succeed. I ask you to disregard all that, the conspiracy is in my learned friend's imagination, . . .

"My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History.

"The time has come for you, sir, to consider your judgement and for you,



gentlemen, to consider your verdict. I appeal to you, sir, in the name of all the traditions of the English Bench that form the most glorious chapter of English history. I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of the distinguished Judges who have administered the law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they had administered the law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history and let it not be said that an English Judge forgets to vindicate justice. To you gentlemen I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Aurobindo preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that only two in the jury of his own countrymen were overcome by passions and prejudices and yielded to the clamour of the moment.”<sup>20 21</sup>

The Jury gave a verdict of “Not guilty” on 14 April 1909. The Judge Mr Beachcroft accepted their verdict and delivered his judgement on 6 May 1909 acquitting Sri Aurobindo and many others—about fifteen of the co-accused. The relevant excerpts from Mr. Beachcroft’s Judgement are quoted below:

“I now come to the case of Aurobindo Ghose, the most important accused in the case....

“Before dealing with the evidence against him, I shall put as shortly as possible the ideal which his counsel claims that he has always set before himself..

“His counsel argues that he is a Vedantist and that he has applied the doctrines of Vedantism to mould his political views; that as the doctrine of Vedantism applied to the individual is to look for the godhead within oneself and so to realize what is best within oneself, so in the case of a nation, it can only grow by realizing what is best within itself, that no foreigner can give it that salvation, which it can only attain by methods indigenous to the country.... He has been saying to the people, you are not cowards, believe in yourselves and attain salvation, not by assistance from outside, but through yourselves. And this, Mr Das says, is the key of his case.”<sup>22</sup>

Mr. Beachcroft discussed the entire evidence that had been put forth by the Prosecution to prove his connection with the conspiracy and dismissed it as insufficient or remote. Then he stated:

“In his favour we have the fact that he has in the columns of the *Bande Mataram* deprecated violence, there is such an article dated 28 May 1907. And so late as 10th April 1908, there is an article saying that the national movement cannot be allowed to be driven inward and made an affair of a secret society as it would if outward expressions were stopped. His connection with the conspiracy can only be considered established if we find that while writing one thing he has been doing another....

“It is possible that Aurobindo may have been in that position in this case, but in such a case it must be clearly shown that his preachings were part of such a conspiracy, and in the present case it would be difficult to do that without showing some connection with the part which the garden plays in the case. Considering the circumstances of India, it may be dangerous for a man to publish doctrines inconsistent with the existing order of things; in certain circumstances it might justify a charge of sedition. Whether

such a charge could be laid at Aurobindo's door does not now concern me.... The point is whether his writings and speeches, which in themselves seem to advocate nothing more than the regeneration of his country, taken with the facts proved against him in this case, are sufficient to show that he was a member of the conspiracy. And taking all the evidence together, I am of opinion that it falls short of such proof as would justify one in finding him guilty of so serious a charge . ''<sup>23</sup>

*(Chapter III concluded)*

SAMAR BASU

*References*

- 19 *Tales of Prison Life* (Translated by Sisir Kumar Ghosh), pp 8, 18, 23
- 20 Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*, pp 53-57
- 21 *Ibid* , pp 62-64
- 22 *Ibid* , pp 65-66
- 23 *Ibid* , pp 68-69

## A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

### 104. A LESSON IN HUMILITY

KALIKKAMBANDAR hurried to the backyard of his house. He was disheartened to see the mounds of fresh vegetables on a mat, still uncut for cooking. He attracted the attention of the headcook busy in giving instructions to his subordinates, who were engaged in one work or another.

“I told you that the servants of Lord Siva would be here by noon. The sun is nearing the mid-sky and these vegetables here still remain uncut,” barked Kalikkambandar.

“Sweets and crispies are all ready. Rice is boiling in pots. Don’t worry about the uncut vegetables. There are eight cooks working for you here. The vegetables will disappear into the pots in no time. And, you shall see, everything will be ready before the sun reaches the mid-sky,” assured the headcook.

“Keep your word,” warned Kalikkambandar and rushed towards the well where a couple of women were drawing out water in pitchers and emptying them into the cauldrons kept near the well.

“Quick...quick . . . Many cauldrons are still empty. By noon the servants of God will be here. See to it that all the cauldrons are full.”

As the women bowed before him, he hustled back into the house and entered his wife’s chamber. He saw her standing before a large mirror and studding herself with jewels. He tiptoed towards her and cooed into her ear: “Are you ready, dear? It’s time.”

The wife turned around and throwing her arms on his shoulders said, “Not yet... but almost.”

Kalikkambandar heaved a sigh and slumped down into a cushioned chair nearby and went on ogling at his wife beautifying herself. “All the gold, silver and precious stones will shy away at the natural beauty of my wife,” he said to himself and gratefully smiled at her.

The wife, who was watching her husband from the corner of her eye, whispered, “What is that smile for?”

Kalikkambandar smiled a meaningful smile again. He didn’t know how many hours passed like that. He woke up to his surroundings when he heard people shouting, “Long live the servants of the Lord!”

Kalikkambandar, motioning his wife with a sway of his hand to accompany him, rushed out to give a warm welcome to the guests.

At the sight of the host, the guests all hailed: “Praised be Lord Siva.”

Kalikkambandar welcomed the gathering by shouting ‘Great is Lord Siva,’ and then said: “I am honoured. I am greatly honoured by your visit. Your dinner is ready. And before you take your seat allow me the pleasure and benefit of washing the dust off your feet.”

The devotees of Lord Siva, all of them red-robed around the loins and the uncovered portions of their bodies covered with holy ash, formed a queue

As the first devotee entered the house, Kalikkambandar sat on his haunches near the devotee's feet. While his wife poured water on the devotee's feet, the husband washed them clean. An assistant ushered the devotee into the huge hall of the house where dainty dishes were spread on several banana leaves.

While the first devotee took his seat, the second devotee had his feet washed by the host.

As Kalikkambandar was engaged in washing their feet in succession and his smiling beautiful wife poured out the water from a vessel, the devotees blessed the couple whole-heartedly.

Fifty or so devotees had already occupied their seats, when all of a sudden Kalikkambandar's wife stopped pouring water.

Still seated on his haunches, Kalikkambandar wondered why. He looked at his wife who was lost in thought. He tugged at the hem of her silk sari. When she looked at him he raised his eyebrows twice and thereby called for an explanation.

The wife motioned to her husband with a swing of her head to look at the face of the devotee whose feet were about to be washed.

Kalikkambandar raised his eyes towards the face of the devotee and understood the cause of his wife's hesitation.

The devotee had been at one time his servant and was fired for misconduct. Perhaps the beautiful lady wondered why her husband should wash the feet of a sinner whom he had sent away in disgrace.

Without any hesitation, Kalikkambandar rose to his feet and plucked the water vessel from his wife's hands. Holding the vessel in one hand, he drew out his sword with the other and cut off her hands.

As his wife ran screaming in pain and shame into her chamber, bleeding profusely all the while, Kalikkambandar poured the water and washed his servant's feet, and fed the devotees himself.

### 105. A WIFE FOR SALE

Sakkarapadi, an affluent street in Thiruvotriyur, was inhabited by oil merchants who shipped oil to many parts of the world. It was a very broad street that held high buildings and all the residents were pretty rich.

Kaliyanar was one among them. His parents had taught him untiring devotion to Lord Siva.

When Kaliyanar grew up he gave a facelift to the temple of Lord Siva there. To crown his efforts he made it his job to light innumerable lamps in the temple both day and night. In this endeavour, he spent a lot of his wealth. But he cared little for the wealth spent, for gold continued to pour into his coffers every day due to the profitable business of selling oil.

While the people in Sakkarapadi Street thought Kaliyanar a fool for burning innumerable oil lamps in daytime too, people in the other streets of Thiruvotriyur lauded him for his devotion to the Lord

Lord Siva who wanted to put Kaliyanar's devotion to the test and to know how long his love for Him would last, sent the Goddess of Misfortune to play havoc with the life of Kaliyanar.

As a first step, the goddess sent devastating whirlwinds and sank several ships that carried casks of oil and thereby she brought heavy losses to Kaliyanar. But since he believed in the workings of Fate, he didn't desist from his service

Kaliyanar found only a little money left in his coffers. And he had only a few jars of oil left in his godown

"These jars of oil may not last even for a couple of weeks to fill the earthen lamps," he said to his beloved wife

"If one door closes another door opens," remarked his wife and suggested to her husband: "With the little money we have, we shall buy oil from others and sell it in retail. And the profit so earned shall be utilised for continuing with our noble service of burning lamps."

Kaliyanar agreed. The retail business went on but didn't make any progress. And when this source of income failed, he engaged himself as a coolie in the oil-press.

But since he was not accustomed to such manual labour, he lagged behind other workers and soon lost his job. And several other oil-press owners, who were his one-time friends, now refused to give him a job, for they believed that he had foolishly wasted his wealth and deserved no sympathy from them.

When he reported the matter to his wife, she said "Nothing to worry about. That's the way of the world. Now that we are left with no money, we have to sell this house and carry on the service."

Kaliyanar happily sold the house, the last item that remained of all his property. The couple built a hut for themselves, lived on a meagre diet and continued with their service to the Lord. But they couldn't carry on for a long time, for the money soon got exhausted

"Now that we have nothing to sell, what shall we do?" asked Kaliyanar and awaited his wife's suggestion

"Why do you say we have nothing to sell? I'm here. Sell me to someone who gives you good money and I'll slave away the rest of my life," said the wife.

Kaliyanar had no second thoughts. He took his wife round the town and cried her for sale. Time passed, but there was no one to buy her.

Lord Siva was quite satisfied with the endurance and strong will of Kaliyanar and, as the last round of the ordeal, He drained the only jar of oil to its last drop

Finding not a single drop of oil left in the jar, Kaliyanar was dejected beyond words. "I'll die before the last light in the temple dies out," he vowed and prepared himself to fill the earthen lamps with his own blood

Kaliyanar gashed his throat with a knife and blood began to gush out of the

wound. But to his surprise, the wound healed itself and not a drop of blood dripped out of his body.

Lord Siva stood before him in all heavenly glory and blessed him.

Kahyanar and his dutiful wife became the talk of the rich, for the couple were blessed with such riches as the other rich people could not even dream of.

*(More legends on the way)*

P RAJA

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Saṃskṛtasya Vyāvahārikaswarūpam** (Functional Sanskrit: Its Communicative Aspect). By Dr Narendra, Sanskrit Karyalaya, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002. 1996, pp. 335. Rs. 180.00

EVERY language has an axis of its own. The axis is the one around which the entire language-world revolves. This axis decides the outlook of the language on the world of things and beings. To apprehend this and to try and stay in tune with it is the task that is cut out for the student. Only when he recognises this axis, is his understanding of the language complete

When we talk of 'mastery' of a language, it is not that the person is probably aware of its entire vocabulary, rules and injunctions, but he recognises 'the way' the language approaches and feels the world around. The more one appreciates this, the more one is comfortable with the language, the better one understands its scope and spread and, most importantly, its limitations.

Therefore, one who presents the language should also convey its approach. No language by itself is tough or easy. It only has a 'language' of its own. It is in the ability of the one who presents the language, its systematic patterns and logical networks, that the language 'becomes' tough or easy. The 'presenter' has to make his 'presentation' as transparent as possible, that the student may detect the axis and immediately make an attempt to align himself with it.

Seen from this point of view the book under review, *Saṃskṛtasya Vyāvahārikaswarūpam* by Dr. Narendra, must be considered as a masterpiece. Dr Narendra attempts to woo the student by making him give up his misconceptions about the language as well as make him believe that "he can in fact learn Saṃskṛtam." Having achieved this initial task convincingly, the author goes about trying to introduce the student to the subtle nuances of the language; while doing so he yet remains sensitive to the student's immediate limitations to grow in the Sanskrit world.

Most importantly, it is not just that a book has to be delightfully presented; it is also to be used as a manual or a ready reckoner. A language can be truly understood only when the student gives up using the other languages as 'props' for learning. To learn Sanskrit one has to think the Sanskrit way, too much of reliance on English or any other language tends to diminish the possible confidence the student could get during his learning. Keeping this in mind, Dr Narendra presents the whole book in simple Sanskrit, almost making one believe, while reading the book, that one has already mastered the language!

The printing of the book and the general get-up are excellent. It is apparent that a lot of constructive and creative work has gone into the making of this book. A glance into it reveals that a great effort has been made to weed out mistakes and aberrations. I am sure that this book will become popular amongst genuine lovers and students of

Sanskrit; a casual gazer of the Sanskrit world will also profit by it

We must congratulate Dr Narendra for doing such a wonderful job, as well as the publishers for recognising its worth and promoting it

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA



## *Students' Section*

### **THE MORNING OF SILENCE**

A MORNING of silence reigns,  
When the soul is conscious  
Of itself and freed from eternal chains  
Of sorrows and endless dreams.  
The universe dances to the rhythm  
Of happiness and great glory;  
The lights of the mind, no longer dim,  
Shine with splendour and beauty  
The new night-sky vibrates  
To the dance of the universe,  
To the dance of the eternal,  
And they all sing of an unwritten verse.  
The stars grow bright,  
The moon's absence is felt,  
But their white light grows dense  
And shines forth, no longer hesitant.  
The darkness of space is banished  
By the light of the new-born stars,  
And diseases and pain dispelled  
In the new world void of bars  
An eternity of happiness reigns,  
Where the lights of the great world  
Dance and sing without change,  
A new world is born and all miseries end

AURPON BHATTACHARYA (Age 15)