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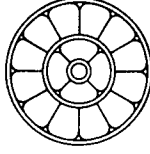
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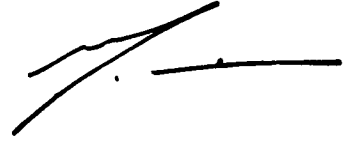
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. L

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## A LAMP IN PERFECTION'S HOUSE

BUT mid this world, these hearts that answered her call,  
None could stand up her equal and her mate .  
Although she leaned down to their littleness .  
And though she drew their souls into her vast  
And surrounded with the silence of her deeps  
And held as the great Mother holds her own,  
Only her earthly surface bore their charge  
And mixed its fire with their mortality:  
Her greater self lived sole, unclaimed, within  
Oftener in dumb Nature's stir and peace  
A nearness she could feel serenely one,  
The Force in her drew earth's subhuman broods,  
And to her spirit's large and free delight  
She joined the ardent hued magnificent lives  
Of animal and bird and flower and tree  
They answered to her with the simple heart  
In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;  
It knows but turns away from divine Light  
Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall  
Among the many who came drawn to her  
Nowhere she found her partner of high tasks,  
The comrade of her soul, her other self  
Who was made with her, like God and Nature, one  
Some near approached, were touched, caught fire, then failed  
Too great was her demand, too pure her force. .  
Puissant, apart her soul as the gods live  
As yet unlinked with the broad human scene .  
She schooled her heavenly strain to bear its touch,  
Content in her little garden of the gods  
As blossoms a flower in an unvisited place  
The wide world knew not yet the inhabitant flame.  
Yet something deeply stirred and dimly knew;  
There was a movement and a passionate call,  
A rainbow dream, a hope of golden change;  
Some secret wing of expectation beat,  
A growing sense of something new and rare  
And beautiful stole across the heart of Time  
Then a faint whisper of her touched the soil,  
Breathed like a hidden need the soul divines;  
The eye of the great world discovered her,

A wonder lifted up its bardic voice.  
 A key to a Light still kept in being's core,  
 The sun-word of an ancient mystery's sense,  
 Her name ran murmuring on the lips of men  
 Exalted and sweet like an inspired verse  
 Struck from the epic lyre of rumour's winds  
 Or sung like a chanted thought by the poet Fame.  
 But like a sacred symbol's was that cult.  
 Admired, unsought, intangible to the grasp  
 Her beauty and flaming strength were seen afar  
 Like lightning playing with the fallen day,  
 A glory unapproachably divine.  
 No equal heart came close to join her heart,  
 No transient earthly love assailed her calm,  
 No hero passion had the strength to seize,  
 No eyes demanded her replying eyes.  
 A Power within her awed the imperfect flesh;  
 The self-protecting genius in our clay  
 Divined the goddess in the woman's shape  
 And drew back from a touch beyond its kind,  
 The earth-nature bound in the sense-life's narrow make.  
 The hearts of men are amorous of clay-kin  
 And bear not spirits lone and high who bring  
 Fire-intimations from the deathless planes  
 Too vast for souls not born to mate with heaven.  
 Whoever is too great must lonely live,  
 Adored he walks in mighty solitude;  
 Vain is his labour to create his kind,  
 His only comrade is the Strength within.  
 Thus was it for a while with Savitri,  
 All worshipped marvellingly, none dared to claim.  
 Her mind sat high pouring its golden beams,  
 Her heart was a crowded temple of delight.  
 A single lamp lit in perfection's house,  
 A bright pure image in a priestless shrine,  
 Midst those encircling lives her spirit dwelt,  
 Apart in herself until her hour of fate

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp. 365-368)

# HEAVEN UP-PILLARED WITH MANTRAS OF TRUTH

## A VEDIC HYMN TO AGNI: I.67

वनेषु जायुर्मतेषु मित्रो वृणीते श्रुष्टिं राजेवाजुर्मम् ।  
क्षेमो न साधु क्रतुर्न भद्रो भुवत्स्वाधीर्होता हव्यवाट् ॥१॥

1. He is the conqueror in the forests; in mortals he is a friend. he chooses inspiration as a king an unaging councillor. He is as if our perfect welfare;<sup>1</sup> he is like a happy will just in its thinking and becomes to us our Priest of the call and the bearer of our offerings.

हस्ते दधानो नृम्या विश्वान्यमे देवान् धाद् गुहा निषीदन् ।  
विदन्तीमत्र नरो धियंघा हृदा यत्तष्टान् मन्त्रां अशसन् ॥२॥

2. He holds in his hands all might; sitting in the secret cave he upholds<sup>2</sup> the gods in his strength. Here men who hold in themselves the Thought come to know him when they have uttered the Mantras formed by the heart

अजो न क्षां दाधार पृथिवीं तस्तम्भं चा मन्त्रेभि सत्यै ।  
प्रिया पदानि पश्वो नि पाहि विश्वायुरग्ने गुहा गुह गा ॥३॥

3. As the unborn he has held the wide earth, he has up-pillared heaven with his Mantras of truth. Guard the cherished footprints of the Cow of vision; O Fire, thou art universal life, enter into the secrecy of secrecies.<sup>3</sup>

य ईं चिकेत गुहा भवन्तमा य ससाद धारामृतस्य ।  
वि ये चृतन्यृता सपन्त आदिद् वसूनि प्र ववाचासै ॥४॥

- 4 He who has perceived him when he is in the secret cave, he who has come to the stream of the Truth, those who touch the things of the Truth and kindle him,—to such a one he gives word of the Riches.

वि यो वीरुत्सु रोधन्महित्वोत प्रजा उत प्रसूषन्त ।  
चित्तिरपा दमे विश्वायुः सदेव धीराः समाय चक्रु ॥५॥

5. He who in the growths of earth holds up his greatnesses, both the progeny born and what is in the mothers, he is Knowledge in the house of the Waters, and life universal; the thinkers have measured and constructed him like a mansion.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, SABCL, Vol 11, pp 54-55)

1 Or, a perfecting good, 2 Or, establishes 3 Or, the secrecy of the secret Cave

## DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of June 1997)

*Dear Mother,*

*My task is more difficult now. When H comes to me, he hardly speaks about the work at the Granary But he can freely talk on subjects unnatural to me· the world, its curiosities and many other things I am really puzzled over the matter.*

LET him talk, you need not answer Simply keep living in you the thought of the true consciousness and the will that he should awake to it.

18 October 1934

*My dear and Beloved Mother,*

*I am happy because I am always supported and carried by You So often the workers come to me and play a drama and fall into gloom. But I am happy, my dear Mother, so the gloom passes away from them and happiness and peace pervade.*

Yes It is very good—happiness is as contagious as gloom. And nothing can be more useful than to pass on to people the contagion of a true and deep happiness.

25 October 1934

*My dear Mother,*

*Surely Your Love is unshakable and always You love me Surely I shall advance with You, as fast as Your Love permits I am once more firmly poised on a better plane than ever before After a little shaking and crying my equanimity has become more strong and unshakable—because of Your unshakable Love.*

Your love fully answers to mine.

Yes, my dear child, it has, indeed, been a true and great progress and your feeling of having emerged in a new light is true; rather it is a new light which has descended in some parts of the being still obscure and brought there a Certitude

Love is, in truth, the Victor.

29 October 1934

*My dear Mother,*

*A few days ago L put a demand on me. "Come to Canal House daily." I told her, "It is not possible "*



*Then she said, "Once a week "*  
*I replied, "That too is difficult. All the same I shall try but it will not be regular."*  
*"I want to come to you," she said*  
*"All right, at 11 A M when you come for your flowers "*  
*I have not said, "Do not come to me," but when they try to bind me tight, I always find it very difficult*

She has passed through a difficult time and old movements have come up again trying to drag her back to ancient errors, that is why probably she was wanting to see you  
 But surely she will be all right again after some time.  
 You are right in letting nobody catch hold of you, it would be very bad in all ways.  
 With love and blessings always

7 November 1934

*My dear Mother,*

*M of the bakery came to me this evening and told me "Why do you give us hard bread now? Why do you keep the stock? You can give us fresh bread daily " I explained to him the problem of the rise and fall in consumption each day and the need to keep some stock*

I suppose things can continue as they are now But do you not think it would be fair to give to M and the bakery people a loaf of fresh bread every day? They have all the work and hard work too, they must at least eat their own bread when it is quite good.

9 November 1934

*Dear Mother,*

*L is again badly disturbed. When I am frank, there is difficulty, when I remain silent, there is also difficulty. Give me a middle path, such as Buddha found*

Do not worry—whatever you do will always be criticised So the best is not to pay any attention to what people say and to go on one's own path according to the highest light one can get.

With all love and blessings always.

10 November 1934

*My dear Love,*

*Physically, I am much better; the throat also seems to be better I hope to be quite all right*

Let the light, the force, the consciousness flood your whole being and give you the strength to throw at once the attack on your body.

Always with you

11 November 1934

*(To be continued)*

---

## ONLY THEE

JUST for a bit of poetry  
A small bird tries to fly  
On eager wings of expectancy  
To meet stars in their sky.

It does not think of poetry,  
But only thinks of Thy grace  
It does not crave for fantasy,  
It seeks the sun of Thy face.

And when the bird soars far into skies  
Swift words a garland form  
That does not weigh on its downward flight  
When slowly it circles home

And while a poem receives its shape  
It thinks of nothing but Thee,  
Folds upward its little wings to pray  
O thanks for Thy gift to me

RUTH

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

(Continued from the issue of June 1997)

(b)

In setting forth a negative case, first we may attend to some reports. In early November 1926 we have A B Purani recording Sri Aurobindo's words "I am trying to bring down the Supramental, things will happen; conditions for its descent will be created . . ."<sup>1</sup> On 6 November he notes Sri Aurobindo saying: "I spoke about the world of the Gods because not to speak of it would be dangerous I spoke of it so that the mind might understand the thing if it came down I am trying to bring it down into the physical as it can no longer be delayed, and then things may happen . . ."<sup>2</sup> Taken in conjunction with the other statement, "the world of the Gods" shows itself as a part of the Supermind, a very high part though not necessarily the highest. A basically corresponding version of what Purani has reported is available from the notes of V Chidanandam " . . . For then it was dangerous. Now not to speak of them may be dangerous, for I am pulling down the supramental into the physical ..(which) means the coming of the supramental Purusha, the supramental Principle and also supramental beings and personalities It can be delayed no longer..."<sup>3</sup> The "supramental beings and personalities" appear to be identical with the "Gods" whose world was sought to be brought down.

There are only two points which might raise some misgiving. In *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Purani writes: "From the trend of the evening talks just before and after 15 August 1926 it was becoming clear that the importance of a link between the highest supermind and mind was being emphasised Sri Aurobindo called this link the Overmind"<sup>4</sup> The suggestion is that Sri Aurobindo actually used the designation "Overmind" in that period and demarcated the Overmind plane from the Supramental. But all the quotations Purani gives to elucidate the Overmind world of the Gods are from the revised and enlarged edition of *The Life Divine* (originally a series in the *Arya*) which first appeared in 1939 (pp. 427-8, 431) And nowhere in *Evening Talks* is the designation "Overmind" to be met with Nor anywhere, except for one context, is the "link"—the world of the Gods—divided from the Supermind. This single context, reproduced like all the others from memory and called "Summary of some evening talks about the descent of the Gods in November 1926, i.e., before 24th November 1926", runs:

1 *Evening Talks*, Second Series (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1961), p 293

2 *Ibid*, p 295

3 "Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk", *Mother India* (Pondicherry), July 1970, p 333

4 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Fourth Edition, fully revised (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 1978), p 212

“There is the Supreme beyond description, who manifests himself as Sat, Chit, Ananda, in this Sat is the universal individuality of beings. Then comes the Supermind with its four Maha Shaktis, great powers. In the Supermind unity is the governing principle.

“Then comes the world of the Gods, below the Supermind and behind the manifestation. The Gods of Hindu culture—Shiva, Vishnu, the Gods who represent the Divine Principles governing the manifestation of the universe. There is a hierarchy of these beings.

“Below this is the manifested universe. The purpose of this is to go back to the Ananda.”<sup>1</sup>

The question for us is: Did Sri Aurobindo really put the world of Gods below the Supermind? Purani’s statement in *The Life* speaks of “a link between the highest supermind and mind.” The epithet “highest” (used later by the Master similarly in his remarks on some last writings in the *Arya*) is of crucial moment. It brings up the vision of supramental degrees. Below the Supermind which can be considered “highest”, there can be a lesser range of supramental existence. The “link” can be regarded as such a range. The context which is our sole stumbling-block would stop being obstructive if in the three places where “Supermind” occurs we attached to the noun the epithet “highest”. The world of the Gods would then be subordinate to the highest Supermind without itself ceasing to be supramental. And this is precisely what we can demonstrate to be the case from a close study of the talks before 24 November.

On 17 August Sri Aurobindo speaks of the first condition for ascending to the plane of the Gods: you cannot approach “the true Gods” with “your ego.”<sup>2</sup> Then he says that “Gods” is a very wide term and there are Gods on every plane: e.g., vital Gods.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently he mentions the higher mental plane as the one up to which goes the conception of the Gods worshipped by the Hindus.<sup>4</sup> But about “the true Gods” there are two illuminating snatches of conversation confirming each other. One is in the same talk of 17 August:

DISCIPLE. Can we say that the true Gods are the powers of the Divine?

SRI AUROBINDO. They are the personalities of the Divine.

DISCIPLE. On what plane are they?

SRI AUROBINDO. They are on the Supramental plane and above.<sup>5</sup>

The other snatch comes on 24 August:

DISCIPLE. The world of the true Gods, you said, is the Supramental.

SRI AUROBINDO. Yes, it is somewhere there.

DISCIPLE. Is it *in* the Supramental or does it go even beyond it?

SRI AUROBINDO. It begins in the Supermind and goes further.<sup>6</sup>

1 *Evening Talks*, Second Series, pp 292-3

2 *Ibid* p 283

3 *Ibid*

4 *Ibid*, p 285

5 *Ibid* p 284

6 *Ibid*, p 287

In view of the repeated assertion that the Supermind is the initial *locus* of "the true Gods", the critical query must be Are these Gods the ones whose descent was being emphasized as the needed link between the mind and the highest Supermind? We have to remember that in the obstructive context the Supermind is characterised by "its Four Maha Shaktis" and below it is put "the world of the Gods . behind the manifestation" No Gods are attributed to the plane of the Maha Shaktis May we not conclude that "the true Gods" who are termed "the personalities of the Divine" and are placed "on the Supramental plane" and whose plane "begins in the Supermind and goes further"—may we not conclude that these "true Gods" belong to a Supramental level below the highest which is that of the "four Maha Shaktis"? The answer seems to be a firm "Yes"—and such an affirmative appears to be clinched when we listen to the conversation on 9 November 1926

DISCIPLE: Do you promise that the world of the Gods will descend?

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't promise anything. If the Supramental comes down that is what I say.<sup>1</sup>

Here the coming down of the Supermind is made the condition for the descending of the world of the Gods. Evidently, the Supermind's first touch-down would signalise that the world of the Gods has descended.

The only puzzling feature is Sri Aurobindo's extending the home of the true Gods even beyond the Supermind. If the four Maha Shaktis are the highest Supermind, how can the true Gods continue "above" the Supramental plane? Perhaps what is meant is that there are Gods who are counterparts of these Shaktis and they may be said to belong to a level "further" than the one which is the initial *locus* of the Gods whose world was to descend from the Supermind. Here the reports are not satisfactory.

Whatever the contradiction or confusion, the Supramental nature of the true Gods cannot be doubted from the reports.

With the ground thus cleared, we may move to the second reason for the negative case. There is the exclamation of Datta (Miss Dorothy Hodgson), one of those present on the occasion of the descent of "the world of the Gods". Three testimonies are to hand. Purani makes her cry out by inspiration in the pervading silence "The Lord has descended into the physical today."<sup>2</sup> Rajani Palit writes: "Now Datta came out, inspired, and declared, 'The Master has conquered death, decay, hunger and sleep'."<sup>3</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta tells us, "Datta...suddenly exclaimed at the top of her voice, as though an inspired Prophetess of the old mysteries, 'The Lord has descended. He has conquered death and sorrow. He has brought down immortality'."<sup>4</sup> Obviously, a Supreme Consciousness is indicated, beginning on earth a new life in which the

1 *Ibid*, p. 296

2 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 217

3 "24 November 1926" *Mother India*, December 5, 1962 p. 28

4 "Reminiscences IX", *Ibid*, p. 31

capacities associated by Sri Aurobindo with the Supermind at its highest would in the end be naturally at play. The Overmind at its utmost is specifically said by Sri Aurobindo to bring a great deal of immunity and even a phenomenal longevity but never absolute security and perpetuity as if the physical being's *svadharma*, self-law, were to be immortal. The Mother's observance of 26 November that very year as "the Immortality Day"<sup>1</sup> looks like a further index to the emphatic sense of an all-transformative Power poised at the start of its physical work. The ultimate Dynamic Divinity is understood to have descended into the body of Sri Aurobindo (and therefore also into that of the Mother).

Thirdly, we have to glance at the name given to 24 November 1926. "the Siddhi Day" "Siddhi" means "Perfection", "Fulfilment", "The accomplishment of one's spiritual goal". The day is also known as "The Victory Day". Surely for Sri Aurobindo, the Victory, the Perfection and Fulfilment can only be related to his goal which is nothing else than the descent of the Supermind into the body promising a Divine Life upon earth. Referring to his own Sadhana for the Supermind's descent, Sri Aurobindo says on 15 August 1925, his forty-third birthday: "I am not doing an isolated Yoga ... It is true that my Yoga is not for humanity [it is for the Divine], but it is not for myself either; of course, my attaining to the Siddhi is the preliminary condition to others being able to attain it"<sup>2</sup>. An occasion deserving to be called the Siddhi Day in Sri Aurobindo's sense has to mark a descent considered as the Supermind's.

This seems to be axiomatic also from the letter he wrote to his brother Barin in April 1920. "After these fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when this Siddhi will be complete, then I am absolutely certain that God will through me give to others the Siddhi of the Supermind with less effort. Then my real work will begin."<sup>3</sup>

Not on 24 November but some time later Sri Aurobindo appears to have realised that the Supermind proper had not arrived. What had arrived was distinctly explained by him in several letters in the subsequent period. The one of October 1935 is perhaps the most definite as well as succinct.

"[It] was the descent of Krishna into the physical

"Krishna is not the supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind/Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda."<sup>4</sup>

About the "Immortality Day" a letter of 5 March 1932 elucidated what actually

1 *Mother India*, February 21, 1976

2 *Evening Talks*, Second Series, p. 318

3 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 211

4 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953), p. 208

had been attained: "It was not the immortality *of* the body, but the consciousness of immortality *in* the body, that can come with the descent of Overmind into Matter or even into the physical mind, or with the touch of the modified Supramental Light on the general physical mind-consciousness. These are preliminary openings, but they are not the Supramental fulfilment in Matter."<sup>1</sup>

(*To be continued*)

AMAL KIRAN  
(K D SETHNA)

<sup>1</sup> *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit* (Revised Edition, 1977) by Dr Govindbhai Patel (Gift Publications, Ahmedabad), p 17

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## WAKING EYES

FIVE kindled lamps  
glowed around,  
like twinkling stars.  
One of them is lost,  
another is out;  
the third about to spend itself  
in the advancing night.  
Now a semi-astral darkness  
dances to the tune  
of a strange shadow  
spreading over me  
There are yet two lamps,  
still gleaming.  
One may burn out any moment  
The flames tremble  
in a sudden gust of wind,  
even as I do.  
I can't sleep anyway  
and my eyes are awake,  
unfrightened, beaming.

SUCHISMITA MAJUMDER

# NAGIN

## I

AT 7 20 p m on 9 May 1997 one of the old guard of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga breathed his last. But when I looked intently at his face as he lay in his room for a last look of farewell by his friends, I did not see the proverbial peace as if all work had come to an end. In its place an indrawn aloofness was most evident to me. Nagin seemed still intent on his Sadhana and by giving up his body he appeared merely to concentrate on another way of meeting the Divine and transmitting the Great Presence.

I knew Nagin very intimately and was often in his room collecting and copying Sri Aurobindo's answers to his questions in the notebooks he used to send to his Guru every night. And my constant impression of him was of a spontaneous persistence in the act of both standing back and remembering to offer all one's being to the secret Supreme.

It is also worth observing that while there is in the Ashram no prohibition of Sadhaks and Sadhikas meeting each other, I have not seen Nagin having any relations, however superficial, with a Sadhika. When he met a Sadhika he was never constrained in his dealings, he was quite at ease, but he had no urge to cultivate any friendship with the feminine element in the Ashram. I believe he followed very faithfully the advice Sri Aurobindo had given him when he had asked the Mother what should his attitude be to the other sex. Sri Aurobindo wrote just two simple yet highly significant words "Distant indifference."

Nagin's correspondence has been published, and is of great importance, for certain aspects of the Integral Yoga are brought forward there more strikingly than anywhere else. Looking at Nagin's unassuming appearance, his face always faintly smiling as if to himself and his slightly shuffling gait, one would hardly think that here was an example of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga fully practised with nothing at all of self-importance. He had also a good sense of humour—an indispensable trait for anybody who wished to hobnob with Amal Kiran. And I was happy and proud to find that he had great trust in my judgment.

People have noted that when he was at the Samadhi his body assumed postures of which he was quite unaware. One knew at once that there was no deliberate drama here—but rather one got a glimpse, unintended by the giver—of someone who could swiftly get lost in a dimension superior to our common consciousness. It is not certain how much of this dimension he could bring into contact with the daily course of his life, for his normal life was very simple and unimpressive. Perhaps one is not quite sure that his inner opening to the Mother was as great as it was to his Master, but the latter relationship was quite evident in its absoluteness.

A certain feature of his Yogic life in the Ashram is worth noting. Sri Aurobindo has written about himself that sometimes his active Sadhana used to come to a dead-stop—even for several months. In this period one has to remain calm and mentally



turned to the Divine. Nagin has divulged that he had six long years of Sadhana-stoppage. During this period he started a systematic reading of great literary works. For example, he went through all the plays of Bernard Shaw. One day, when he was standing at the Samadhi, suddenly the Sadhana started on its own. Evidently the stoppage was a period of inner assimilation brought about by the Guru.

A notable experience which his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo reveals is of the Brahmic or Universal Consciousness. No doubt, a very important state realised for a shorter or longer period, but one that has been undergone by a number of Sadhaks. We find it indicated, for instance, in Sahana-devi's correspondence with Sri Aurobindo—but, as far as I remember, never so explicitly featured, as in Nagin's exchange of letters.

To go through the whole bulk of this exchange is to acquire a special insight into Sri Aurobindo's luminous pushing of his disciples onward and upward. Holding in mind its splendid revelations side by side with the memory of its recipient's sweet modesty and all-time geniality we shall be able to do some justice to the nature of our loss when Nagin parted from us

AMAL KIRAN

## II

I could not believe it when I heard that Nagin's age was 82 years. Time loses its meaning when I ask myself how long I had known Nagin-bhai. Because of our common association with Amal Kiran, and some unexplained deeper connection, I had always felt very close to him. It was a sheer quiet joy to see him, exchange a smile and once in a while talk about ourselves.

Amal Kiran once told me that Nagin could raise and station his consciousness above the head with ease. Often, while he was sitting on the cement-bench under the Reading-Room window or on a stool near the Samadhi, I could sense that he was lost to ordinary consciousness; but his expression revealed not a vacuity but the smile of joy and love of one lost in a reverie, lost in the splendour of one's adoration for one's divine beloved.

I remember how excited Nagin was to read in Amal's book *The Mother: Past-Present-Future* about the "Immortality Day" (26 November 1926), a little-known event in the Ashram's spiritual history. Since he was not able to find the book anywhere else, we found it in Amal's book-case; he went ahead photocopying it and distributing it to many Sadhaks, thereby making this divine event much better known. In Amal's words: "Just as November 24 promised with the descent of the delegate consciousness of the supermind the advent of the true Supramental Divinity, November 26 confirmed to the very last particular of supramentalisation what the earlier occasion had betokened in general; the very last particular is the divinisation of the body .. The Immortality

Day was the seed assurance that this 'considerable work' which has been going on ever since will bear flower and fruit on the earth in the time to come''

It may seem odd, but I still feel that I might meet Nagin in or somewhere near the Ashram or at Amal's place one day, any day, and I would experience the same but ever new joy that lights a flower's face at the touch of the first drops of rain on a summer day

DINKAR D PALANDE

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## THE PRIMAL QUEEN

Thy face unveils an epiphany of light,  
 Thy looks disclose the wide worlds of the vast,  
 Thy brow is the firmament infinite,  
 Thy limbs are the flame-passions of holocaust

In thy visage a secret dawn now broods  
 Of mystic significance splendid and fine,  
 In thy eyes the mute all-bearing solitudes,  
 In thy body the noon awaits, divine

The ways of time are lost in thy cosmic breast,  
 The paths of space are dissolved in thy heart,  
 Happy in release, poignant in puissant rest,  
 A tapering moon-shaft of glory thou art

All sun-realms wait in thee to wake and be,  
 O primal queen of immortality

27 1 1959

ROMEN

(From the late poet's unpublished diaries)

## SRI AUROBINDO, SISTER NIVEDITA AND THE BENGAL REVOLUTIONARIES

THE subject-matter chosen for today's discussion is "Sri Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita and the Bengal Revolutionaries". Since Lizelle Reymond's publication of a French biography of Sister Nivedita (Paris, 1945) a good deal of propagandist literature has grown up over the years around the subject, and true to the spirit of historical research, it will be my function here to rescue facts from fiction, history from romance, and evaluate the two great personalities, Sri Aurobindo and Sister Nivedita, against the background of the Bengal revolutionary movement in the early part of the present century. While Sri Aurobindo was a born Indian, intended to be an anglicized Babu by his father, Nivedita, Irish by birth, adopted India as her homeland and gave the best of her services to the cause of Indian resurgence in culture and politics. Few foreigners, even few Indians, can bear comparison with her in this respect. But this does not imply that Nivedita played a leading role in the revolutionary politics of the time as is often advocated nowadays by many scholars. I would like to draw the readers' attention in this connection to Pravrajika Muktiprana's Bengali book entitled *Bhagini Nivedita* (Sister Nivedita, Calcutta, 1959) and Pravrajika Atmaprana's English biography, viz., *Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1967) which are much superior as pieces of historical research to many other works on Nivedita published so far both in Indian and foreign languages.

### I

Sri Aurobindo was a man of amazing versatility. He was a poet, a philosopher, a creative artist, a sage, a seer, a revolutionary all rolled into one. In 1906, he appeared in Bengal politics as the messiah of a new age and infused into it an unforgettable fire, energy and idealism. He raised patriotism or nationalism to the rank of a religion and wrought a mighty revolution both in respect of our political ideals and in respect of the technique of the fight for freedom. He perceived very early and clearly that as a subordinate part of the British Empire, India had no future. His study of history and politics had taught him that foreign rule in a subject country is always self-regarding in character. A foreign rule, however benevolent, he said, could never willingly foster the centres of strength in the life of the subject nation in whose relation it always stands, not as a 'parasite' but as an 'octopus'. This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo wrote about the nature of British imperialism in India. It is only by throwing off the foreign 'octopus' from its body politic that a subject people could ever hope to grow as a separate national entity and realize its destiny.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's supreme service was to rouse the passionate ardour of

patriotism among his countrymen. Another great service rendered by him was to place before the vision of the nation the ideal of *Purna Swaraj* or Complete Independence which meant entire elimination of British rule from the Indian soil. The ideal of Complete Independence which was later enshrined in the Lahore Congress of 1929 was thus envisaged by Sri Aurobindo more than two decades earlier. His articles in the *Bande Mataram* (April-May, 1907) published under the caption 'The New Thought' are the best support and proof of this contention. In his clear-sighted vision, the work of Nationalism in India was twofold: "It has to win Swaraj for India so that the present unhealthy conditions of political life may be entirely and radically cured," and secondly, "It has to ensure that the Swaraj it brings about shall be Swadeshi Swaraj and not an importation of the European article. It is for this reason that the movement for Swaraj found its first expression in an outburst of Swadeshi sentiment which directed itself not merely against foreign goods, but against foreign habits, foreign dress and manners, foreign education, and sought to bring the people back to their own civilization."<sup>2</sup> Again, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The return to ourselves is the cardinal feature of the national movement. It is national not only in the sense of political self-assertion against the domination of foreigners, but also in the sense of a return upon our old national individuality."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the concept of Swaraj was impregnated by Sri Aurobindo with a deeper spiritual import.

Sri Aurobindo not only sketched the ideal of India's Freedom Movement with the greatest fidelity, but also organized properly the Nationalist Party and forged the technique of Passive Resistance or Boycott which aimed at bringing the British bureaucracy to its knees by an organized and relentless refusal of co-operation.<sup>4</sup> But the technique of Boycott was not the only weapon forged by the Bengalis to strike with. The philosophy of the bomb with its concomitant violence and bloodshed, also made its appearance in due course. To the emergence of new Bengal, fiery in energy, passionate in idealism, religiously wedded to the cult of purification by blood and fire, none perhaps has made a greater contribution than Sri Aurobindo. Thus, the political thought of Sri Aurobindo covered in its sweep not only the doctrine of Passive Resistance but also the cult of revolution. The twin methods of non-violence and violence, constitutionalism and revolution which marked India's arduous journey towards *Swaraj*, were first formulated by him in clear and unmistakable terms. Sri Aurobindo was as much a passive resister as a revolutionary. The question of violence and non-violence did not bother him so much as it did many others in the subsequent phases of India's Freedom Movement. He never mixed up ordinary ethics with politics which has its own ethics, the ethics of the Kshatriya, not that of the Brahmin, and he was persistently emphatic in his advocacy that the morality of the Kshatriya must govern our political thinking and action. "To impose in politics the Brahmanical duty of saintly sufferance," said he, "is to preach *varṇa-*

*sankara*” or confusion of duties, which is subversive of the social law and order. He approached the question of violence and non-violence in politics not on ethical grounds, but purely from a pragmatic standpoint, as a matter of policy or expediency only. He was the last man to make a fetish of non-violence or *ahimsa* which he did not consider—and perhaps correctly—to be a speciality of Indian genius.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, he believed that varying doses of violence are not only stimulating but also indispensable for carrying weight with the powers that be and for bringing the legal, pacific or constitutional agitation within the range of realization, “.. even diplomacy,” he said, “must have some compelling force behind it to attain its ends, and that peaceful means can succeed only when these imply the ugly alternative of more troublesome and fearful methods, recourse to which the failure of peaceful attempts must inevitably lead to.”<sup>6</sup> He further observed that constitutional agitation as a form of diplomacy depends for its success not on the force of logic but on the presence of an active force behind it, the show of which alone can convert our prayers into demands. The necessity of creating in the country some kind of physical force so as to make our moral demands audible to the alien autocracy, was, therefore, emphasized by Sri Aurobindo as an essential part of his political programme. Thus, Sri Aurobindo was, in the strictest sense of the term, the true prophet and pathfinder of India’s Freedom Movement. Of all the statesmen Modern India has produced, he had the clearest vision of Indian *Swaraj* in its fulness as well as the practical means to attain it by strenuous and sustained struggle. In the political arena he exhibited two distinct but inwardly allied personalities, those of a passive resister and a revolutionary, and in both the capacities he cast a mighty influence over the future course of India’s Freedom Movement which had its culmination in the transfer of power in August, 1947. His spirit of passive resistance found a veritable incarnation in Mahatma Gandhi, while that of revolution had a living embodiment in Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

## II

A number of writers in recent times have been trying to depict Sister Nivedita also as firebrand revolutionary. Lizelle Reymond first started this theory with her publication of a French biography of Sister Nivedita (Paris, 1945), which was later re-affirmed, although with some modifications, in her English work on Nivedita entitled *The Dedicated* (New York, 1953). It was rendered into Bengali by Narayani Devi and published in 1955. Following Reymond, Girija Sankar Roy Chowdhury and Devajyoti Barman, both well-known scholars in their own fields, have also advocated a similar view. The latest researcher in this field is Sankari Prasad Basu who has surpassed others in making fantastic claims in favour of Nivedita’s title to recognition as the central revolutionary leader of Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. Let us

now examine how far their accounts are historical facts or romantic fictions

First, it has been said that it was Sister Nivedita who had inspired Sri Aurobindo with revolutionary thought and action during her visit to Baroda in 1902. Nivedita set foot on Indian soil in early 1898, but Sri Aurobindo was moving along the revolutionary path as early as 1893 or even earlier still while he had been at Cambridge.<sup>7</sup> On his return to India, the series of articles he published under the caption "New Lamps for the Old" in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay revealed the writer as an advocate of violent revolutionary methods for India's national liberation. The first idea that he delivered through this series was that it was not constitutional England but revolutionary France that was to be adopted as India's political exemplar. A second idea was that the proletariat was "the real key of the situation", and whoever succeeded in understanding and eliciting the strength of the proletariat became by the very fact "master of the future".<sup>8</sup> A third idea preached by him was the cult of 'purification by blood and fire' which was a pre-condition for national liberation. His secret contact with the revolutionary *samitis* in Maharashtra, inspired by Tilak, indicates that Sri Aurobindo was preparing himself as a revolutionary fighter. All these things took place long before Nivedita's advent in India.

Secondly, it has been written that following Vivekananda's death in July 1902, Nivedita undertook a tour through India, that in October 1902 she came into contact with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda in course of that tour, and that she inspired Sri Aurobindo with the ideals of Vivekananda and those of an Indian Revolution. Under Nivedita's impact, it has been further said, Sri Aurobindo next sent out his emissaries from Baroda to Calcutta, first Jatindra Nath Banerjee, Gaiakwad's bodyguard, and then his younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh with the purpose of organizing revolutionary work in Bengal. The whole account is not consistent with Sri Aurobindo's statements and contemporary Intelligence Branch records. Critically viewed, there are two parts of the story. The first part states that Nivedita met Sri Aurobindo at Baroda in October 1902. It is doubtful if Nivedita met Sri Aurobindo at Baroda at that time. From the written notes of Sri Aurobindo it is revealed that their first meeting took place in 1904 when Nivedita was there as a State guest.<sup>9</sup>

The second part of the story, viz., the despatch by Sri Aurobindo of two of his emissaries from Baroda to Bengal after his alleged talk with Nivedita in October 1902, does not stand the test of scrutiny. The I. B. records of the Bengal Government affirm that while Jatin Banerjee was despatched by Sri Aurobindo from Baroda towards the end of 1901, Barindra Kumar Ghosh was sent a few months later in the early part of 1902 and evidently during the lifetime of Vivekananda. They approached, as the official records tell us, Surendra Nath Banerjee, some members of the Tagore family, Swami Vivekananda, Miss Saralabala Ghosal, Messrs. P. Mitter, C. R. Das, Bejoy Chatterjee and many other barristers. The I. B. records state further, "It is not very clear what was the

effect of the early propaganda, but it seems that at about that time many small and independent *samitis* sprang up in the Mufassil and in Calcutta which, though not ostensibly revolutionary, had for their ultimate aims, freedom and independence and the subversion of the British Government " Thus the story of Nivedita inspiring Sri Aurobindo into a course of revolutionary action is untenable in the light of contemporary evidence <sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, we have Girija Sankar Roychowdhury's statement in his book on Nivedita that Nivedita joined the Raja Bazar Akhra or Samiti of Jatin Banerjee (set up in 1902) almost from the very beginning. The fact of her donation of a portion of her personal library to the Akhra does not prove her joining the Akhra <sup>11</sup> The Samiti was at first a physical culture and general culture centre for young men, not an association for revolutionary preaching. Nivedita was a staunch lover of India and there was no difficulty in her donating some books to the Akhra which was on all counts a promising nationalist centre. Revolutionary spirit with necessary training was imparted to it gradually. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharyya, one of the earliest members of the revolutionary group, has informed me and Uma Mukherjee in a signed statement that except for the donation of some books Nivedita was not connected with the Raja Bazar Akhra in any other mentionable way.

Fourthly, Girija Sankar Roychowdhury, following Reymond, has written that the Dawn Society of Calcutta was based on Nivedita's scheme of education and that this was the centre of her preaching of revolutionary terrorism before the students. Reymond has characterised the Dawn Society as 'actively revolutionary'. According to the French biographer of Nivedita, after Vivekananda's death, Sister Nivedita drew up a scheme of establishing a Math where the students would undergo spiritual *sadhana* for six months a year, would undertake tours of the holy places of India for another six months and thereby acquire knowledge. This educational scheme, we are told, was drawn up on 20 January 1903 and, not being approved by Swami Brahmananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was immediately sent by Nivedita to Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the eminent educationist. "This project of Nivedita," Reymond observes, "could not be realized, but at every point it served as the basis of the work which Satish Chandra Mukherjee laid down soon. Mukherjee took it in hand, gave it a shape, a form, an aim, the possibility of offering to all its members a complete political education." Basing his stand on this statement of Reymond, Girija Roychowdhury has observed that Nivedita joined the Dawn Society from the time of its inception. All this is nothing but a manufactured story.<sup>12</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Nivedita inspired Satish Mukherjee in the matter of the foundation of the Dawn Society which was his brain-child. Nivedita had no hand in the foundation of the aforesaid Society. It was Satish Chandra's own creation, bearing on it the stamp of his personality, and he was its General Secretary, supreme guide and director. Nivedita

occasionally visited the Society as an external speaker, and that also not in the initial phase.<sup>13</sup> The Dawn Society was founded in July 1902 just after Vivekananda's death. Its Reports and Proceedings, as published in the *Dawn Magazine*, sufficiently show that the Society came into being long before Nivedita's educational scheme was allegedly communicated to Satish Mukherjee. Nivedita occasionally delivered lectures before the Dawn Society on Indian Nationality, Indian Industries, Indian Culture, etc. and stimulated thereby their patriotic sentiments to a large extent. She did not preach there violence or terrorism. Sankari Prasad Basu's statement that Nivedita preached at the Dawn Society "উগ্র রাজনৈতিক জাতীয়তাবাদ" is totally unwarrantable. His reference to Indra Nath Nandy as a recruit of Nivedita from the Dawn Society is pointless and misleading, for Indra Nath was never a recognized member of the Dawn Society. At best he was a casual visitor who was later rejected by Nivedita for his undependability. Does this incident prove that Nivedita preached at the Dawn Society violent revolutionary doctrines?<sup>14</sup> Its best students like Radha Kumud Mukherjee, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Upendra Nath Ghosal (historian) have repeatedly affirmed that the Dawn Society was "an institute of non-political cultural nationalism" and that Satish Mukherjee was its life and soul. Satish Chandra was a disciple of Bejoy Krishna Goswami and had a natural abhorrence for violence or *himsa*.<sup>15</sup> So Nivedita's biographers from Reymond to Sankari Prasad Basu have made a mess of everything on the issue of Nivedita's role in the Dawn Society.

Fifthly, it has been stated by Nivedita's biographers that Nivedita was a member of the five-man Central Executive Committee which was set up by Sri Aurobindo with Barrister P. Mitter as its President for the co-ordination and direction of the scattered revolutionary *samitis* of Bengal. Sri Aurobindo in *On Himself* has stated that he 'tried' to include Nivedita in the Executive Committee, but there is no hint in Sri Aurobindo's writing about the outcome of his venture. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharyya, who was connected with the revolutionary movement almost from the beginning and who was in the closest company of Sri Aurobindo for years together both in the office and in the mess, is positive in his affirmation that Sri Aurobindo was not successful in drawing Nivedita to the Central Executive Committee.<sup>16</sup> In a lengthy article published as an Appendix to H. and U. Mukherjee's *Swadeshi Andolan O Banglar Navayuga* (Calcutta, April 1961, pp. 248-272) Dr. Bhupendra Nath Datta has regretted that it was Lizelle Reymond who had misled him to write in his earlier books that Nivedita was a member of the Central Revolutionary Council. This earlier view was rejected by him towards the end of his life. His Bengali work on Swami Vivekananda, published many years later by Navabharat Publishers of Calcutta, was actually written at least three years before his death, containing some of his earlier mistaken views on Nivedita and the Bengal revolutionary movement (p. 13). Dr. Datta sent the present writer several times during 1959-60 to commu-



nicate his request to Ranajit Saha, the publisher, either to send back the manuscript to the writer or, after some revision, get the book published without any further delay. Sri Saha is a disciple of Swami Abhedananda and, therefore, a *gurubhai* of the present writer and both are still united together in a common spiritual fraternity

Sixthly, both Reymond and Girija Sankar have upheld the view that Nivedita was directly connected with the publication of the revolutionary Bengali weekly *Yugantar* in March 1906. They state that the articles for the first issue of that paper were written out by Bhupen Datta and Barin Ghosh at the instance of Nivedita at her own residence. Be it noted that the *Yugantar* was the central organ of Revolutionary Bengal at that time. If it can be shown that it was influenced by Nivedita's thinking and direction, her claim to recognition as a revolutionary leader is automatically established. But Bhupen Datta, the Editor, and Abinash Bhattacharyya, the Manager of the paper, have categorically stated that the reported story is completely false, and that Nivedita was not in any way connected with the publication of the *Yugantar* <sup>17</sup>

Again, Nivedita's biographers have written that she had a direct hand in the flight of Sri Aurobindo from Calcutta to Chandernagore in February 1910. At one stage Nivedita had no doubt informed Sri Aurobindo that he might be arrested and advised him to go underground. He did not accept her advice and published instead his famous article *An Open Letter to My Countrymen* on 31 July 1909 in the *Karmayogin* of which he himself was the Editor. After the publication of this apparently inoffensive letter (which was to be treated as his Last Will and Testament in case he was arrested), the question of Sri Aurobindo's arrest and deportation was dropped by the Government.<sup>18</sup> About five months elapsed when the rumour spread again that Sri Aurobindo might be arrested. On this occasion he wrote his second letter *To My Countrymen* and published it in the *Karmayogin* on 25 December 1909.<sup>19</sup> In the eyes of the British bureaucracy, it was Sri Aurobindo, not Nivedita, who was "the head and front" of the whole extremist movement in Bengal. In May 1908 this view was reaffirmed in a Confidential Report of the Bengal Government describing Sri Aurobindo as "the master mind at the back of the whole extremist campaign in Bengal."<sup>20</sup> Be it noted in this connection that the I B. records of the time never mention Nivedita as a leader of the Bengal Revolutionary Group. Her close relations with many British officials in India and England, the alleged communication of official secrets to Nivedita by high officials in the matter of Sri Aurobindo's arrest or deportation, Lady Minto's visit to Nivedita's house at Bag Bazar, her visit to Dakshineswar Temple accompanied by Nivedita and Christine (March 1910), all go to invalidate the assumption that Nivedita was a firebrand revolutionary of the orthodox type, and that she was the driving force behind the revolutionary movement. To sum up, Nivedita's unique contributions to Indian national regeneration lay in other fields, not in the field of revolutionary politics.

Sankar Prasad Basu's approach to Nivedita's political role, particularly in the field of revolutionary politics, is fundamentally wrong. His works, otherwise scholarly, generally suffer from certain preconceived notions and wrong twists of facts or 'overstatements in interpretations' in the fashion of Lizelle Reymond and Girija Sankar Roychowdhury

(To be concluded)

HARIDAS MUKHERJEE

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### Notes and References

1 Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* (Calcutta, 1964), pp 26-27

2 *Ibid* pp 355-356

3 *Ibid* , pp 356-357 Sri Aurobindo observed further in this connection, "If India becomes an intellectual province of Europe she will never attain to her natural greatness or fulfil the possibilities within her *Paradharmo bhayavahah*, to accept the *dharm*a of another is perilous it deprives the man or the nation of its secret of life and vitality and substitutes an unnatural and stunted growth for the free, large and organic development of Nature. The whole world is interested in seeing that India becomes free so that India may become herself

4 Vide Sri Aurobindo's articles on "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance" published in the *Bande Mataram* between April 11, 1907 and April 23, 1907

5 Benoy Kumar Sarkar *The Futurism of Young Asia* (Leipzig 1922) and *Creative India* (Lahore 1937)

6 Vide Sri Aurobindo's article in *Bande Mataram* (April 24 1908) under the caption "The Realism of Indian Nationalistic Policy". This remarkable article has not been included, perhaps through oversight, in the *Bande Mataram* collection of Sri Aurobindo's writings as published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. It is available in H and U Mukherjee's *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* (pp 372-377)

7 *Sri Aurobindo 1893-1993* (Pondicherry 1993, pp 3-4) Sri Aurobindo himself has written that "as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches which as he afterwards learnt had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service

8 H Mukherjee and U Mukherjee *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought (1893-1908)*, Calcutta, 1958, pp 119-120

9 Pravrajika Muktiprana's Bengali biography of Sister Nivedita records on p 292 that Nivedita's diary and letters do not have any reference to Sri Aurobindo. From the diary it is only learnt that in course of her lecture tour she had been to Baroda in October, 1902. Her diary is silent on the question whether she met Sri Aurobindo on that occasion. On the contrary it is revealed in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself* (p 58) that their meeting took place in 1904 when Nivedita was at Baroda as a State guest. While correcting Girija Shankar's article, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "I do not remember Nivedita speaking to me on spiritual subjects or about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We spoke of politics and other subjects." The work of Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993), may be consulted in this connection, although he represents a somewhat different view

10 *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought* pp 56-57

11 H and U Mukherjee's article on 'The Dawn Society and Sister Nivedita', first published in the daily *Basumati* (Nov 24, 1957) was reproduced for the second time in the pages of the same journal on June 6,

1958 It is also available in the joint authors' work on *Jatiya Andolane Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay* (Calcutta 1960, pp 128-146)

12 H and U Mukherjee's Bengali article on "Sister Nivedita and the Revolutionism in Bengal" (the *Yugantar*, October 15, 1961) constitutes a refutation of many unhistorical statements made by Reymond and G S Roychowdhury about Nivedita's role in Bengal's revolutionary movement Sankari Prasad Basu has repeated the same mistakes in his account of Nivedita in relation to the Dawn Society in particular and the revolutionary movement in general in his work on *Nivedita Lokamata* (Vol II, Calcutta 1987, pp 141-149) The valuable review of Reymond's French biography of Nivedita (published in the *Prabuddha Bharat*, October 1946, pp 406-408) by a most competent authority like Benoy Kumar Sarkar has not been utilised by S P Basu in a spirit of scientific detachment or historical objectivity While Mr Basu has conveniently quoted B K Sarkar's appreciative comments on that French biography, he has carefully omitted the inconvenient comments of Sarkar on that work In course of the lengthy review Sarkar has observed that there are many "inaccuracies in facts or overstatements in interpretations In case an Indian edition were attempted the editors would have to introduce quite a number of drastic corrections " On going through Reymond's French work on Nivedita, Sri Aurobindo in a lengthy reply to one of his French disciples observed as follows in the very opening sentence "The account which seems to have been given to X and recorded by her on pages 317-324 of her book is, I am compelled to say, fiction and romance with no foundation in actual facts His concluding comment in the same note runs as follows 'It is best that you should communicate my statement of facts to X so that she may be able to make the necessary corrections or omissions in a future edition and remove this wrong information which would otherwise seriously detract from the value of her life of Nivedita' (13-9-1946) Vide *Sri Aurobindo on Himself* published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry (First Edition, 1972, Fourth Impression, 1985, pp 67-71)

13 H and U Mukherjee, *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (Calcutta, 1957, pp 270-275) for a detailed discussion of Nivedita's contacts with the Dawn Society She delivered her first lecture at the Dawn Society on the subject of "Nationality" the substance of which was faithfully reported in the *Dawn Magazine* in November, 1904

14 *Ibid* , pp 275-276, 279-283 for a discussion of "The Character of the (Dawn) Society Also see S P Basu's *Nivedita Lokamata* (Vol II, pp 142-143)

15 *Jatiya Andolane Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay*, pp 139-140

16 H and U Mukherjee, *Bharater Swadhinata Andolane Yugantar Patrikar Dan* (Calcutta, 1972), pp 199-200

17 *Ibid* , pp 200-201

18 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p 57

19 *Ibid* , p 54

20 *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics*, p xiii, Footnote No 1

## SUNDAY TIMES, SRI AUROBINDO SUPPLEMENT, AUGUST 11, 1940

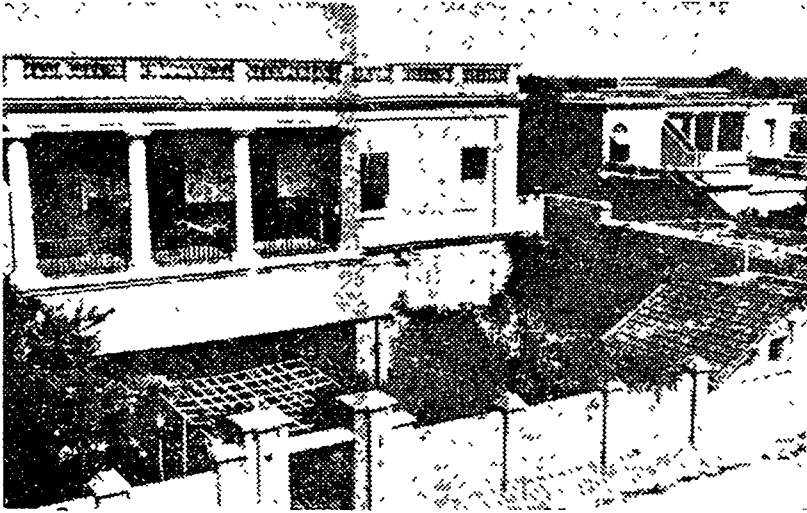
*[A special four-page Supplement on Sri Aurobindo was brought out by the Sunday Times of Madras on 11 August 1940 Besides introductory articles on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the Supplement carried extensive write-ups on his mission and his message to the world Passages from his various writings were excerpted to bring out his contributions in the spiritual, cultural and national fields A significant feature of the Supplement was a good presentation of Sri Aurobindo's The Synthesis of Yoga that was under preparation for publication at that time. There were also a number of photographs of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and the Ashram This was perhaps the first time that such large publicity was given to Sri Aurobindo's work by the Press. Its appearance at the beginning of the Second World War has undoubtedly its own occult meaning. To mark the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo we reproduce in the July and August issues of Mother India the full text of the Supplement ]*

### DIVINE ELEMENT THAT IS HIDDEN IN ALL HUMAN BEINGS

#### Development of the Psychic Individuality

THE psychic is not, by definition, that part which is in direct touch with the supramental plane,—although, once the connection with the supramental is made, it gives to it the readiest response. The psychic part of us is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with the Divine. In its origin it is the nucleus pregnant with divine possibilities that supports this lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. There is this divine element in all living beings, but it stands hidden behind the ordinary consciousness, is not at first developed and, even when developed, is not always or often in the front, it expresses itself, so far as the imperfection of the instruments allows, by their means and under their limitations. It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality, that which we call usually the psychic being. It is always this psychic being that is the real, though often the secret cause of man's turning to the spiritual life and his greatest help in it. It is, therefore, that which we have to bring from behind to the front in the Yoga.

The word 'soul', as also the word 'psychic' is used very vaguely and in many different senses in the English language. More often than not Europeans in their ordinary parlance make no clear distinction between mind and soul and often even confuse the true soul, the psychic being, with the vital being of desire—the false soul or desire-soul. The psychic being is quite different from the mind or vital, it stands behind



Southern view of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, in 1940

them where they meet in the heart. Its central place is there, but behind the heart rather than in the heart, for what men call usually the heart is the seat of emotion, and human emotions are mental-vital impulses, not ordinarily psychic in their nature. This mostly secret power behind, other than the mind and the life force, is the true soul, the psychic being in us. The power of the psychic, however, acts upon the mind and vital and body, purifying thought and perception and emotion (which then becomes psychic feeling) and sensation and action and everything else in us and preparing them to be divine movements

### True Psychic Entity

The psychic being<sup>1</sup> may be described in the Indian language as the Purusha in the heart or the *chaitya purusha*, but the inner or secret heart must be understood, *hridayaguhayam*, not the outer vital-emotional centre. It is the true psychic entity (distinguished from the vital desire-mind)—the psyche—spoken of in the pages of the *Arya*.

Each plane of our being—mental, vital, physical—has its own consciousness, separate though interconnected and interacting, but to our outer mind and sense they are all confused together. The body, for instance, has its own consciousness and acts from it, even without any mental will of our own or even against that will, and our surface mind knows very little about this body-consciousness, feels it only in an imperfect way, sees only its results and has the greatest difficulty in finding out their causes. It is part

<sup>1</sup> The *chitta* and the psychic part are not in the least the same. *Chitta* is a term in a quite different category in which are co-ordinated and put into their place the main functionings of our external consciousness, and to know it we need not go behind our surface or external nature

of the Yoga to become aware of the separate body-consciousness, to see and feel its movements and the forces that act upon it from inside or outside and to learn how to control and direct it even in its most hidden and (to us) sub-conscious processes. But the body-consciousness itself is only part of the individualised physical consciousness in us which we gather and build out of the secretly conscious forces of universal physical Nature

### Physical Consciousness

There is the universal physical consciousness of Nature and there is our own which is a part of it, moved by it, and used by the central being for the support of its expression in the physical world and for a direct dealing with all these external objects and movements and forces. This physical consciousness-plane receives from the other planes their powers and influences and makes formations of them in its own province. Therefore, we have a physical mind as well as a vital mind and the mind proper, we have a vital-physical part in us, the nervous being—as well as the vital proper, and both are largely conditioned by the gross material bodily part which is almost entirely sub-conscious to our experience.

The physical mind is that which is fixed on physical objects and happenings, sees and understands these only, and deals with them according to their own nature, but can with difficulty respond to the higher forces. Left to itself, it is sceptical of the existence of supraphysical things, of which it has no direct experience and to which it can find no clue, even then it has spiritual experiences, it forgets them easily, loses the impression and result and finds it difficult to believe. To enlighten the physical mind by the consciousness of the higher spiritual and supramental planes is the one object of this Yoga, just as to enlighten it by the power of the higher vital and higher mental is the greatest part of human self-development, civilisation and culture.

### Stumbling Block

The vital physical, on the other hand, is the vehicle of the nervous responses of our physical nature, it is the field and instrument of the smaller sensations, desires, reactions of all kinds to the impacts of the outer physical and gross material life. This vital physical part (supported by the lowest part of the vital proper) is therefore the agent of most of the lesser movements of our external life, its reactions and obstinate pettinesses are the chief stumbling block in the way of transformation of the outer consciousness by the Yoga. It is also largely responsible for most of the suffering, the disease of mind or body to which the physical being is subject in nature.

As to the gross material part it is not necessary to specify its place, for that is obvious, but it must be remembered that this too has a consciousness of its own, the obscure consciousness proper to the limbs, cells, tissues, organs. To make this obscurity luminous and directly instrumental to the higher planes and to the divine

movement is what we mean in our Yoga by making the body conscious, that is to say, full of a true, awake and responsive awareness instead of its own obscure, limited half-subconscience

### The Subliminal Self

There is an inner as well as outer consciousness all through our being, upon all its levels. The ordinary man is aware only of his surface self and quite unaware of all that is behind the surface. And yet, what is on the surface, what we know or think we know of ourselves and even believe that that is all we are, is only a small part of our being and by far the larger part of us is below the surface. Or, more accurately, it is behind the frontal consciousness, behind the veil, occult and known only by an occult knowledge. Modern psychology and psychic science have begun to perceive this truth just a little. Materialistic psychology calls this hidden part the Inconscient, although practically admitting that it is far greater, more powerful and profound than the surface conscious-self,—very much as the Upanishads called the super-conscious in us the Sleep-self, although this Sleep-self is said to be an infinitely greater Intelligence, omniscient, omnipotent, Prajna, the Ishwara. Psychic science calls this hidden consciousness the subliminal self, and here too it is seen that this subliminal self has more powers, more knowledge, a freer field of movement than the smaller self that is on the surface.

### Much More Subtle

But the truth is that all this that is behind, this sea of which our waking consciousness is only a wave or series of waves, cannot be described by any one term, for, it is very complex. Part of it is sub-conscious, lower than our waking consciousness, part of it is on a level with it but behind and much larger than it, part is above and superconscious to us. What we call our mind is only an outer mind, a surface mental action, instrumental for the partial expression of a larger mind behind, of which we are not ordinarily aware and can only know by going inside ourselves. So too, what we know of the vital in us is only the outer vital, a surface activity partially expressing a larger secret vital which we can only know by going within. Equally, what we call our physical being is only a visible projection of a greater and subtler invisible physical consciousness which is much more complex, much more aware, much wider in its receptiveness, much more open and plastic and free.

If we understand and experience this truth, then only we will be able to realise what is meant by the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner physical consciousness. But it must be noted that this term inner is used in two different senses. Sometimes it denotes the consciousness behind the veil of the outer being, the mental or vital or physical within, which is in direct touch with the universal mind, the universal life-forces, the universal physical forces. Sometimes, on the other hand, we mean an inmost mental, vital, physical, more specifically called the true mind, the true vital, the true

physical consciousness which is nearer to the soul and can most easily and directly respond to the divine light and power

### Two Examples

There is no real Yoga possible, still less any integral Yoga, if we do not go back from the outer self and become aware of all this inner being and inner nature. For then alone can we break the limitations of the ignorant external self which receives only the outer touches and knows things indirectly through the outer mind and senses, and become directly aware of the universal consciousness and the universal forces that play through us and around us.

As for instances of the difference there are two from the opposite poles of experience, one from the most external phenomena showing how the inward opens to the awareness of the universal forces, one of spiritual experience indicating how the inward opens to the Divine, like illness. If we live only in the outward physical consciousness, we do not usually know that we are going to be ill until the symptoms of the malady declare themselves in the body. But if we develop the inward physical consciousness, we become aware of a subtle, environmental physical atmosphere and can feel the forces of illness coming towards us through it, feel that even at a distance and, if we have learned how to do it, we can stop them by the will or otherwise.

### Subtle Physical Sheath

We sense too around us a vital physical or nervous envelope which radiates from the body and protects it, and we can feel the adverse forces trying to break through it and can interfere, stop them or reinforce the nervous envelope. Or, we can feel the symptoms of illness, fever or cold for instance, in the subtle physical sheath before they are manifest in the gross body and destroy them there, preventing them from manifesting in the body. Take now the call for the Divine Power, Light, Ananda. If we live only in the outward physical consciousness, it may descend and work behind the veil, but we shall feel nothing and only see certain results after a long time. Or at most, we feel a certain clarity and peace in the mind, a joy in the vital, a happy state in the physical and infer the touch of the Divine. But if we are awake in the inward physical, we shall feel the light, power of Ananda flowing through the body, the limbs, nerves, blood, breath and, through the subtle body, affecting the most material cells and making them conscious and blissful and we shall sense directly the Divine Power and Presence. These are only two instances out of a thousand that are possible and can be constantly experienced by the Sadhaka.



## SECRET OF SUCCESS IN YOGA

All Yoga is in its nature a new birth, it is a birth out of the ordinary, the mentalised material life of man into a higher spiritual consciousness and a greater and diviner being. No Yoga can be successfully undertaken and followed unless there is a strong awakening to the necessity of that larger spiritual existence. The soul that is called to this deep and vast change, may arrive in different ways to the initial departure. It may come to it by its own natural development which has been leading it unconsciously towards the awakening; it may reach it through the influence of a religion or the attraction of a philosophy, it may approach it by a slow illumination or leap to it by a sudden touch or shock, it may be pushed or led to it by the pressure of the outward circumstances or by an inward necessity, by a single word that breaks the seals of the mind or by long reflection, by the distant example of one who has trod the path or by contact and daily influence. According to the nature and the circumstances the call will come.

But in whatever way it comes, there must be a decision of the mind and the will and, as its result, a complete and effective self-consecration. The acceptance of a new spiritual idea-force and upward orientation in the being, an illumination, a turning or conversion seized on by the will and the heart's aspiration, this is the momentous act which contains as in a seed all the results that the Yoga has to give. The mere idea or intellectual seeking of something higher beyond, however strongly grasped by the mind's interest, is ineffective unless it is seized on by the heart as the one thing desirable and by the will as the one thing to be done. For truth of the Spirit has not to be merely thought but to be lived, and to live it demands a unified single-mindedness of the being, so great a change as is contemplated by the Yoga is not to be effected by a divided will or by a small portion of the energy or by a hesitating mind. He who seeks the Divine, must consecrate himself to God and to God only.

If the change comes suddenly and decisively by an overpowering influence, there is no farther essential or lasting difficulty. The choice follows upon the thought, or simultaneous with it, and self-consecration follows upon the choice. The feet are already set upon the path, even if they seem at first to wander uncertainly and even though the path itself may be only obscurely seen and the knowledge of the goal may be imperfect. The secret Teacher, the inner guide is already at work, though he may not yet manifest himself or may not yet appear in the person of his human representative. Whatever difficulties and hesitations may ensue, they cannot eventually prevail against the power of the experience that has turned the current of the life. The call, once decisive, stands; the thing that has been born, cannot eventually be stifled. Even if the force of circumstances prevents a regular pursuit or a full practical self-consecration from the first, still the mind has taken its bent and persists and returns with an ever-increasing effect upon its leading pre-occupation. There is an ineluctable persistence of the inner being, and against it circumstances are in the end powerless and no weakness in the nature can for long be an obstacle.

But this is not always the manner of the commencement. The Sadhaka is often led gradually and there is a long space between the first turning of the mind and the full assent of the nature to the thing towards which it turns. There may at first be only a vivid intellectual interest, a forcible attraction towards the idea and some imperfect form of practice. Or, perhaps there is an effort not favoured by the whole nature, a decision or a turn imposed by an intellectual influence or dictated by personal affection and admiration for someone who is himself consecrated and devoted to the Highest. In such cases, a long period of preparation may be necessary before there comes the irrevocable consecration, and in some instances it may not come. There may be some advance, there may be a strong effort, even much purification and many experiences other than those that are central or supreme, but the life will either be spent in preparation or, a certain stage having been reached, the mind pushed by an insufficient driving force may rest content at the limit of the effort possible to it.

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Or there may even be a recoil to the lower life,—what is called in the ordinary parlance of Yoga, a fall from the path. This lapse happens because there is a defect at the very centre. The intellect has been interested, the heart attracted, the will has strung itself to the effort, but the whole nature has not been taken captive by the Divine. It has only acquiesced in the interest, the attraction or the endeavour. There has been an experiment, perhaps even an eager experiment, but not a total self-giving to an imperative need of the soul or to an unforsakable ideal. Even such imperfect Yoga has not been wasted, for no upward effort is made in vain. Even if it fails in the present or arrives only at some preparatory stage or preliminary realisation, it has yet determined the soul's future.

But if we desire to make the most of the opportunity that this life gives us, if we wish to respond adequately to the call we have received and to attain to the goal we have glimpsed, not merely advance a little towards it, it is essential that there should be an entire self-giving. The secret of success in Yoga is to regard it not as one of the aims to be pursued in life, but as the whole of life.

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And since Yoga is in its essence a turning away from the ordinary material and animal life led by most men or from the more mental but still limited way of living followed by the few to a greater spiritual life, to the way divine, every part of our energies that is given to the lower existence in the spirit of that existence is a contradiction of our aim and our self-dedication. On the other hand, every energy or activity that we can convert from its allegiance to the lower and dedicate to the service of the higher is so much gained on our road, so much taken from the powers that oppose our progress. It is the difficulty of this wholesale conversion that is the source of all the

stumbings in the path of Yoga For our entire nature and its environment, all our personal and all our universal self, are full of habits and of influences that are opposed to our spiritual rebirth and work against the whole-heartedness of our endeavour. In a certain sense, we are nothing but a complex mass of mental, nervous and physical habits held together by a few ruling ideas, desires and associations, an amalgam of many small self-repeating forces with a few major vibrations. What we propose in our Yoga is nothing less than to break up the whole formation of our past and present which makes up the ordinary material and mental man and to create a new centre of vision.

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The first necessity is to dissolve that central faith and vision in the mind which concentrates it on its development and satisfaction and interests in the old externalised order of things It is imperative to exchange this surface orientation for the deeper faith and vision which sees only the Divine and seeks only after the Divine. The next need is to compel all our lower being to pay homage to this new faith and greater vision. All our nature must make an integral surrender; it must offer itself in every part and every movement to that which seems to the unregenerated sense-mind so much less real than the material world and its objects. Our whole being, soul, mind, sense, heart, will, life, body must consecrate all its energies so entirely and in such a way that it shall become a fit vehicle for the Divine. This is no easy task; for everything in the world follows the fixed habit which is to it a law and resists a radical change. And no change can be more radical than the revolution attempted in the integral Yoga. Everything in us has constantly to be called back to the central faith and will and vision.

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Every thought and impulse has to be reminded in the language of the Upanishad that *That is the divine Brahman and not this which men here adore*. Every vital fibre has to be persuaded to accept an entire renunciation of all that hitherto represented to it its own existence. Mind has to cease to be mind and become brilliant with something beyond it. Life has to change into a thing vast and calm and intense and powerful that can no longer recognise the old blind eager narrow self or petty impulse and desire. Even the body has to submit to a mutation and be no longer the clamorous animal or the impeding clod it now is, but become instead a conscious servant and radiant instrument and living form of the spirit.

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The difficulty of the task has led naturally to the pursuit of easy and trenchant solutions; it has generated and fixed deeply the tendency of religions and of schools of Yoga to separate the life of the world from the inner life. The powers of this world and

their actual activities, it is felt, either do not belong to God at all or are, for some obscure and puzzling cause, Maya or another, a dark contradiction of the divine truth. And on their own opposite side, the powers of the Truth and their ideal activities are seen to belong to quite another plane of consciousness than that obscure, ignorant and perverse in its impulses and forces, on which the life of the earth is founded. There appears at once the antimony of a bright and pure Kingdom of God and a dark and impure kingdom of the devil, we feel the opposition of our crawling earthly birth and life to an exalted spiritual God-consciousness, we become readily convinced of the incompatibility of life's subjection to Maya with the soul's concentration in pure Brahman existence.

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The easiest way is to turn away from all that belongs to the one and to retreat by a naked and precipitous ascent into the other. Thus arises the attraction and, it would seem, the necessity of the principle of exclusive concentration which plays so prominent a part in the specialised schools of Yoga, for, by that concentration we can arrive through an uncompromising renunciation of the world at an entire self-consecration to the One on whom we concentrate. It is no longer incumbent on us to compel all the lower activities to the difficult recognition of a new and higher spiritualised life and train them to be its agents or executive powers. It is enough to kill or quiet them and keep at most the few energies necessary on one side for the maintenance of the body and on the other for communion with the Divine.

The very aim and conception of an integral Yoga debars us from adopting this simple and strenuous high-pitched process. The hope of an integral transformation forbids us to take a short-cut or to make ourselves light for the race by throwing away our impediments. For, we have set out to conquer all ourselves and the world for God; we are determined to give Him our becoming as well as our being and not merely to bring the pure and naked spirit as a bare offering to a remote and secret Divinity in a distant heaven or abolish all we are in a holocaust to an immobile Absolute. The Divine that we adore is not only a remote extra-cosmic Reality, but a half veiled Manifestation present and near to us here in the universe. Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body, *thaiva*, as the Upanishads insist, we have to unveil the Godhead, here, we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it. Life then we must accept in our Yoga in order utterly to transmute it; we are forbidden to shrink from the difficulties that this acceptance may add to our struggle.

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Our compensation is that even if the path is more rugged, the effort more complex and bafflingly arduous, yet after a point we gain an immense advantage. For once our

minds are reasonably fixed in the central vision and our wills are on the whole converted to the single pursuit, Life becomes our helper. Intent, vigilant, integrally conscious, we can take every detail of its forms and every incident of its movements as food for the sacrificial Fire within us. Victorious in the struggle, we can compel Earth herself to be an aid toward our perfection and can enrich our realisation with the booty torn from the powers that oppose us

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Concentration is indeed the first condition of any Yoga, but it is an all-receiving concentration that is the very nature of the integral Yoga. A separate strong fixing of the thought, of the emotions or of the will on a single idea, object, state, inner movement or principle is no doubt a frequent need here also; but this is only a subsidiary helpful process. A wide massive opening, a harmonised concentration of the whole being in all its parts and through all its powers upon the One who is the all, is the larger action of this Yoga without which one cannot achieve its purpose. For, it is the consciousness that rests in the One and that acts in the All to which we aspire; it is this that we seek to impose on every element of our being and on every movement of our nature. This wide and concentrated totality is the essential character of the Sadhana and its character must determine its practice. ..

But on that which as yet we know not, how shall we concentrate? And yet we cannot know the Divine unless we have achieved this concentration of our being upon Him. A concentration which culminates in a living realisation and the constant sense of the presence of the One in ourselves and in all of which we are aware, is what we mean in Yoga by knowledge and the effort after knowledge. It is not enough to devote ourselves by the reading of scriptures or by the stress of philosophical reasoning to an intellectual understanding of the Divine, for at the end of our long mental labour we might know all that has been said of the Eternal, possess all that can be thought about the Infinite and yet we might not know Him at all. This intellectual preparation can indeed be the first stage in a powerful Yoga, but it is not indispensable; it is not a step which all need or can be called upon to take.

Yoga would be impossible, except for a very few, if the intellectual figure or knowledge arrived at by the speculative or meditative Reason were its indispensable condition or a binding preliminary. All that the light from above asks of us that it may begin its work, is a call from the soul and a sufficient point of support in the mind. This support can be reached through an insistent idea of the Divine in the thought, a corresponding will in the dynamic parts, an aspiration, a faith, a need in the heart.

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Any one of these may lead or predominate, if all cannot move in unison or in an equal rhythm. The idea may be and must in the beginning be inadequate, the aspiration

may be narrow and imperfect, the faith poorly illumined or even, as not surely founded on the rock of knowledge, fluctuating, uncertain, easily diminished; often even it may be extinguished and need to be lit again with difficulty like a torch in a windy pass. But if once there is a resolute self-consecration from deep within, if there is an awakening to the soul's call, these inadequate things can be a sufficient instrument for the divine purpose. Therefore the wise have always been unwilling to limit man's avenues towards God; they would not shut against his entry even the narrowest portal, the lowest and darkest postern, the humblest wicket-gate. Any name, any form, any symbol, any offering has been held to be sufficient if there is the consecration along with it; for the Divine knows Himself in the heart of the seeker and accepts the sacrifice.

(Extracts from Sri Aurobindo's revised version of *The Synthesis of Yoga* in preparation [in 1940] )

The Divine is concealed behind a thick veil of his Maya and does not answer at once or at any early stage to our call. He gives only a glimpse uncertain and passing and then withdraws and waits for us to be ready

SRI AUROBINDO

## SRI AUROBINDO'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

*Cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore, I am—is the single dictum that rules the world of science, the systematic body of knowledge which proceeds from speculative reasoning, based on the body-mind duality that is necessary in every field of the modern activity of man. It is Descartes (1596-1650) who thought so and laid the foundation for modern philosophy and science. As he began to philosophize, he gave up totally all that he had ever learnt about God and the world to establish truth through a rigorous method. Consequently, he rejected all that was in the world, images of sense knowledge, one's own body and its parts, and after a great deal of striving, he 'clearly and distinctly' hit upon the one simple and 'indubitable' truth, that is, the existence of one's own self, no matter howsoever one may try to deny this truth one would only confirm it further. For the fact that I doubt, implying that I think, is only proof of an existing subject who performs such an activity.

Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), a great philosopher in the idealist tradition, went further and said: *Esse est percipi*—to be is to be perceived. It is the principle that governs our contemporary scientific world that has been explained by the theory of relativity. Berkeley analyzed that it is meaningless to say that something exists even though it is not perceived by a subject. Albert Einstein strengthened this belief in his theory of relativity by proving that space and time are relative to a perceiving subject, it would be non-sense—logically unsound—to speak of time or space independent of a subject who is the point of reference in any calculation such as velocity and the time elapsed.

It appears that to make this world significant, it is necessary that the subject thinks and what he thinks has a reference in the extra-mental world. What happens if we stop thinking? The world comes to a standstill. Sri Aurobindo would say that it is precisely at this point, where one ceases to think, when one is still, that one becomes totally conscious of himself. What Descartes, unwittingly, did not realize was the fact that the moment that he rejected what he had learnt thus far, and wanted to find out the first indubitable truth for himself as he set himself to his *meditations*, the moment that he stopped *thinking*, there dawned on him the truth, the existence of his own self, he became self-conscious. That one moment of *thoughtlessness*, the total mental silence, procured one of the greatest truths that mankind searched for, it not only changed Descartes's life, but proved to be a turning point in history, in the way man would think and work.

Our thinking mind is like our seeing eye, it cannot but think just as the eye cannot but see. The eye, however, cannot revert on itself to see itself, but our mind can, in a way, look inward, shutting out all the sensual and mental images presented to it, thus letting no temporary thought disturb it. It is here that the light of one's consciousness begins to illuminate and one sees clearly and distinctly one's own self without depending on his sense perception, images and memories to reflect it. Thoughts and memories are merely a mirror that indicate the existence of a self, but this standing still

and inversion of the mind is the self-consciousness of a person that is singularly unique. This, I believe, is what Sri Aurobindo calls the *yogic* experience. In our ordinary self we are a bundle of feelings, thoughts, actions and reactions, from birth to death there is immense activity, may it be learning, working and conducting daily affairs. Our life is cluttered with habits, customs, desires and personal or social forces. But in our reflected self, where we know ourselves as ourselves, where we are self-conscious, we can trace the stages of consciousness or knowledge

### **The Supramental Instruments—Thought-Process<sup>1</sup>**

From the mundane to the *yogic* state there are three stages of mental life. Like every empirical philosopher, Sri Aurobindo clearly recognizes the importance of sense perception as the beginning of our knowledge; the second is the thinking activity, and the third is pure ideation. His exposition of the stages of the theory of knowledge is refreshingly new in description and devoid of the usual epistemological jargon, e.g., comprehension, phantasms, sense-data, abstraction, abstract ideas, etc.

First and lowest and most necessary to the mental being in the body is the habitual thought mind that founds its ideas upon the data given by the senses and by the surface experiences of the nervous and emotional being and on the customary motions formed by the education and the outward life and environment.<sup>2</sup>

This “habitual mind” functions in two ways: a) “constant undercurrent of mechanically recurring thought”, and b) “intellectual notion and experience”.

The second stage consists of “pragmatic idea”, a logical conceptualization, drawing its character from our experience and building upon it, making it dynamic. It is also able to receive mental experiences from its own mental plane and turn them into powerful ideas. The thrust of the pragmatic idea is towards “action and experience, inward as well as outward”. This thought is of interest to the soul as a means of larger action and experience that is yet to come.<sup>3</sup>

The very complex epistemological process, for instance, as analyzed by David Hume in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as simple ideas, complex ideas, association of ideas, has thus been quite simply described as pragmatic ideas. These include not only the empirical knowledge but also the abstract ideas. Empirical knowledge is generated through simple perception by our senses, the abstract knowledge consists of the relations between the concepts which do not necessarily represent an outer world. While empirical knowledge is sense knowledge, the abstract knowledge is pure conception.

The third and final stage consists of the “pure ideative mind”, it is the highest form of knowledge, the truth. Its aim is “to have the delight of ideation, the search for truth, the effort to know itself and the world and all that may lie behind its own action and the world action.”<sup>4</sup> The knowledge from the first stage, i.e., the data of the senses



and the pragmatic knowledge from the second stage are merely means to find the truth

Sri Aurobindo comes here very close to Plato (428-348 B C ) and St Augustine (354-430) While for the former truth is the knowledge of pure forms, for the latter it is the divinely illumined knowledge Plato seeks the truth for its own sake, St. Augustine for God's sake and Sri Aurobindo for "delight" or *ānanda*, and as one grows in this knowledge one has the fullness of being *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*—existence, consciousness and bliss

The Cartesian division of knowledge, like that of Sri Aurobindo, is also threefold The single criterion that Descartes used to find out the veracity of knowledge was the *clearness and distinctness* of the idea in question which would render it self-evident He distinguished three kinds of ideas a) innate ideas which consist of our ability to think things or thoughts, b) adventitious ideas which come from the external world, c) fictitious ideas which are produced within one's own mind Through this method, in the first place, he was able to discover his own self clearly and distinctly, another such idea was of God But, howsoever he would try, he could not furnish such a self-evident or clear and distinct idea about the extra-mental world Although one could suspect its existence, yet it required a logical demonstration if one were to have confidence in the knowledge about the world Nevertheless, he furnished an indirect proof; God, who created the world, would be a deceiver if it were true that the external world was merely an illusion. thus convincing himself that God created in his own self others like him and the world Further, he divided substance into three categories: a) the uncreated spirit, that is, God himself, the creator of the world through whom all things come and find their end—he is the first mover and the final cause; b) created spirits, the souls which are created by God and have been put in our bodies; they are in essence not bodies but thought, c) bodies, the substances whose essence consists in extension, i e., extended bodies in space and time and bound by motion The cause of all these was, of course, God But Descartes spent the rest of his life trying to reconcile how the soul interacts with the body if they are altogether different.

Cartesian ideas about the extended substances gave rise to the advancement of modern physics which studies substances according to mass, space, time and motion However, his ideas about the innate perception of one's soul and God were already prevalent in the confines of Christian monasteries where they followed not Descartes but St Augustine St Augustine pursued not indubitable and self-evident knowledge, as Descartes was supposed to have done, but clearly made way for error in knowledge His theory consisted in an inward-looking empiricism, i e., proceeding from external things to the self and from self to God. To do this one needs divine or spiritual illumination In order to know the metaphysical structure of things ontological illumination is required, to know the truth of judgments noetic illumination, and to know the moral order illumination of our will So too are other illuminations required for theology, mysticism, aesthetics, etc Augustine clearly recognized the *action* of the object on our body and its *passion* in response This activity of action and passion may be called sensation He held that sensation alone is inadequate for true knowledge Like

Plato, he advocated the universals through which we are able to recognize the external world and are able to work out a rigorous form of knowledge

### **Intuition**

The one term that I have spared in my delineation of the theory of knowledge above is intuition, that *something* which provides to us the source of certain, indubitable, clear and distinct knowledge. All the philosophers whom we have considered—Plato, Augustine, Descartes and Sri Aurobindo—find their source of knowledge in intuition. It is the direct and immediate knowledge that one has of oneself, one's conscious states, of others, of the extra-mental world and of the universals. We describe it when we say. "Truth dawned on him"; of Buddha "He was enlightened"; of Christ "He was transfigured". Plato describes his liberation from ignorance in the story of the myth of the cave where one sees things as shadows thrown up on the wall due to the fire that burns in the background. It is only when one comes out of the cave that one is able to see the sun directly and know the truth of the world. Augustine found it in divine illumination, Descartes found it in clear and distinct ideas. Sri Aurobindo describes his experience as follows:

One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, from That to which one aspires or an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind's absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had its actual experience.<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of questions that arise at the mention of intuition: Is intuition a human faculty? where does it reside and how does it function? Although we may not be able to pinpoint the faculty as, for instance, our mental activity situated in the brain, yet one can describe it as an *immediate* comprehension that is devoid of sense knowledge, rational knowledge or inference and symbols, but one that causes thought itself. Speaking positively, we may characterize it as the immediate, certain, self-evident, and undemonstrated knowledge of truth. There is no way of proving what is given in our intuition, what is given in it to us is nothing but true. It has been considered as a valid source of knowledge, and a hypothesis rooted in it is bound to produce true results. Such is the sphere of ideative knowledge in Sri Aurobindo's theory of knowledge. He characterizes it as that which "lives disinterestedly in truth of the idea apart from any necessary dependence on its value for action and experience"<sup>6</sup>. Truth does not have to seek its goal, for truth is the goal, the fulfilment in itself.

### **Transition to the Supramental Knowledge**

In St. Augustine's doctrine of illumination we find that our knowledge of an object depends on the light in which we see it. Our bodily eyes see the physical objects in the

light of day and sense them; our intelligence is able to see the mental images in the intellectual light; so also, we may see objects in divine light. Our minds must transcend themselves to see the divine reality, our minds must be illumined by the divine grace to understand the heavenly manifestations. However, it is not his intention to propose that we are, at a certain stage, able to find God, experience the truth, beauty and goodness in this life. It is a long process of achievement and one is able to know and experience God only when one attains bliss or beatitude after one's death.

On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo believes in the descent of the divine spirit in the conscious mind that transforms us and thus we experience the life divine:

...this higher or Divine Force from above can descend and work in us. It descends usually first into the head and liberates the inner mind centres, then into the heart centre...navel and other vital centres...the Muladhara and below. . It works at the same time for perfection as well as liberation, it takes up the whole nature part by part and deals with it, rejecting what has to be rejected, sublimating what has to be sublimated, creating what has to be created. It integrates, harmonises, establishes a new rhythm in the nature.<sup>7</sup>

There are certain conditions required to enable the divine descent. peace, silence and, above all, a deep and undivided aspiration to accept the Divine. However, the peace and the silence that are spoken about are not the absence of noise and distraction, rather the concentration of the mind; it is where our mind is oblivious to the hustle-bustle of the world around us and is singularly centred on the Divine. Once this condition is fulfilled there is a void created in us which needs to be filled. It is here, in the spiritual nature of the void, in the silence and stillness of the mental activity that the divine force descends, it fills our entire being. It is at this stage that we are awakened to the Truth—the truth of our own selves, the world and the Divine—the knowledge *par excellence*.

It goes without saying that whoever achieves this great luminous transition has arrived at a new mode of knowledge; and, a new knowledge employs an action that properly corresponds to it. Our old ways of thinking and acting are replaced by new ones: we become more and more inattentive to our old form of thinking and behaviour; instead we constantly witness ourselves as someone behind us or above us doing our work; our words do not seem to be any more ours, nor our actions. However, the wisdom and foresight in these can startle our old selves, we understand, as never before, that our thoughts have depth. Knowledge by intuition, unblurred and unhindered by our mental processes, becomes a normal affair. Our mind loses its importance as a source of knowledge, it is stilled. Sri Aurobindo describes his experience of silencing the mind in the following words:

..I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside, I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three

days I was free From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire <sup>8</sup>

One of the important points to know from the above delineation of Sri Aurobindo's theory of knowledge is that when we attain true knowledge our mind becomes free This has enormous implications for the theory of knowledge. No epistemological theory in Western philosophy promises mental freedom; for if one exists, it is because one thinks, one does not have the option not to think and yet exist. In the Western way of thinking our mind is conditioned and confined by the sensual and the logical world, we are bound by sense images and the laws of reasoning But Sri Aurobindo promises that only if we could shut our minds to these two realms where we are nothing short of being enslaved, we would be free to gain knowledge from scores of realms and be a universal mind

### **Consciousness-Force and Consciousness-Joy**

The operation that we have used to pass over to this superior phase, the mental and physical discipline, the attainment of silent mind, is called, in a word, *yoga* The *yogi*, the practitioner of *yoga* or the seeker, when he has attained this transition to spiritual knowledge, when the divine force has descended into him, becomes conscious of the reality that is his own self, the world and God Sri Aurobindo vouches that this force is not vague but concrete and tangible He says that consciousness is such a force that we can surround ourselves with an impregnable wall of it, direct our thoughts forcefully and influence people and events at a distance This force is the force of true knowledge and not some obscure force of the occultists or *tantrics* used in black magic, it is a force that is the source of joy and well-being Great Rishis and mystics of India were people who experienced great joy and celestial happiness; the same joy is also expressed among the Western mystics like St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila In the Indian tradition the three great truths—existence, consciousness or knowledge and bliss—are expressed in one word. *Sachchidānanda* (*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*—Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) However, all our knowledge and striving for it would be of no use if it lacked equally a noble purpose or an objective. The proper object of Consciousness-Force is Bliss, *Ānanda*.

### **Conclusion**

The rigorous reasoning of the West, although extremely useful in scientific development, is limited to our critical intellect, only that is accepted as truth which is logically defensible It does not accept the non-propositional knowledge, i.e., the

validity of the intuitive knowledge. Sri Aurobindo in line with the long Indian tradition stands up for *darśana*, insight, we possess the ability within ourselves to know the truth intuitively. The speculative reasoning of the Western tradition is only about the discernibles, the validity of which lasts until a superior argument disproves it, on the other hand, the Indian tradition of depending on intuition makes it possible to know the truth. Our mind is gradually freed not only from the effects of the external world and our own senses, but also from our speculative reasoning, our mind is cleared of all thoughts. It is when at this point the *sum*—"I am", self-realization occurs that we become self-conscious, we become aware of the Truth. The knowledge of this Truth is power and we can control our destiny with this power. The intuitive wisdom becomes personified as the first principle of the universe; our individual minds, upon realization of the truth, become the universal mind<sup>9</sup>

With the true knowledge that one receives from intuition we not only share in the Divine Wisdom, but in a more definite way become divine. To know God is to become divine, free from any external influence that causes ignorance and misery. It is only when we totally empty ourselves of worldliness that wisdom fills us, it is only when our minds are free that truth engulfs us, it is by abandoning ourselves that we know ourselves, it is by surrendering ourselves to the Divine that He dwells in us.

DANIEL ALBUQUERQUE

### *References*

- 1 *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol 21 p 810 (Title)
- 2 *Ibid* , p 811
- 3 *Ibid* p 812
- 4 *Ibid*
- 5 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, p 85
- 6 *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol 21, p 812
- 7 *Letters on Yoga* SABCL, Vol 24, pp 1166-67
- 8 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, p 84
- 9 For further reading on intellect-intuition contrast see S Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), Chapter IV pp 100-137

# THE WAGER OF AMBROSIA

(Continued from the issue of June 1997)

## IV. THE EXORDIUM

ॐ नमोजी आद्या । वेद प्रतिपाद्या । जय जय स्वसवेद्या । आत्मरूपा ॥

*Om namojī | āddyā | veda pratpāddyā | jaya jaya swasamveddyā | ātmarūpā ||*

Om! Salutations to the venerable Foremost; the Veda-propounded, the Pre-eminent; glory be to the Self-Aware, in the nature of Being. Victory! Victory!

WITH this invocation to the Supreme Jnaneshwar begins his poetic composition. The greatness of the Gita is its subject; the leader on the path is none other than Rishi Vyasa himself; the grace of his Guru Nivritti gives him the necessary confidence, and capacity, to undertake the daunting task; the rapt and attentive audience of saints and simple people encourages him and makes him speak what he is going to speak. The dimensions of the poem thus perspicuously extend into all the three regions, into the terrestrial, the universal, and the transcendental; at the same time, their unifying relationship creates a harmony whose basis is the delightful Brahmic consciousness itself. Matters pertaining to the divinities, *ādhidaivic*, to the entities and beings, *ādhibhautic*, and to the manifest spirit's supremacy, *ādhyātmic*, find their natural place in it, as does the sunshine in wideness of the unclouded day. The watermark—or, shall we say, the honey-mark?—of the Yogi-Poet is present on every page; the gleaming sweetness of the speech speaks well of its authenticity. In it the Ineffable finds expression and acquires features with all their vibrant qualities. The Unapproachable comes nearer and takes a recognisable shape; to him we can offer our worship and obeisances and we can receive from him gifts of benedictive riches.

The Bright One is now in the aspect of Ganesha who illumines every meaning in the light of his understanding. Word the Eternal, all-potent and inexhaustible, outside of which there is nothing, *śabdabrahma aśeṣa* as Jnaneshwar says, gets beautifully iconified in that deity. Vedic hymns and the Scriptures define, in their orthographic exquisiteness, the shape of the God. The easy flow of the poetic verses is the movement of his limbs and the deep esoteric sense of these stanzaic delineations gives to his poise a comeliness. Eighteen Puranas bejewelled with fundamental propositions of things adorn his shining godhood. Literature and poetry and art, in their spontaneous fondness, are indeed the jingling bells of the silken belt around his waist. Carrying the simile further, Jnaneshwar says that the quiet musical sound, or *arthdhwani*, of these

little silvery jingling bells is in the nature of nuances and shades, the delicate expository details, that in their import and signification revealingly tell of his many-glowing attributes. The Six Systems of Philosophy, *ṣaḍdarśana*—Patanjala, Sankhya, Vaiśhshikha, Nyaya, Mimansa, and Vedanta in its profound and joyous contents—are the weapons in the hands of this Ganesha. It is the followers of the Nyaya School who attacked and demolished the Buddhistic Doctrines and established the Ancient Wisdom once again. The two parts of the Science of Vedic Interpretation, the Ritualistic and Theological parts, Karmakanda and Jnanakanda of Mimansa, the introductory and the culminating texts, are the two ears of this God of universal knowledge. Around him swarm, like bees, the wise and the learned to gather the honeyful essence of the exegetic principles and affirmations. The discussion in which the final differences vanish is the white tusk of this God with the elephant's head. Reinstitution of the concept of Absolute Brahman in the Metaphysical Debate and the assertion of the Good of Religion, *dharmapratīṣṭhā*, are indeed the boons extended to us by him. He is the one who removes all obstacles and grants us the great fortune of happiness, *mahāsukha*. In the glint of his eyes is the exultant lustre of subtle perceptive sight and his two temples merge into each other, indicating that duality and non-duality in the end arrive at the same conclusion. The ten Upanishads look beautiful in his crown, like lotuses fresh and fragrant and full of splendid lore, *udārjñānamakaranda*. So is his wide forehead scripting the entire vastness of Thought. The One who is beyond descriptive enumeration is now in the seed-state from which sprouts all that is. The Self of Knowledge is in the Image of Ganesha. In the manifest creation it has assumed the form of the Word, the primal syllable, the creative syllableless syllable Om, that gives rise to a thrilled manifoldness of the spoken speech, soft as well as of gorgeous colours, and harmonious sounds, and joyous sensibilities, with sense carrying and tying them together in the manner of the soul of aesthetic delight. The incomprehensible Divinity is present now as Omkār and it is to him that the hymning obeisances are offered.

Jnaneshwar next proceeds to worship Sharada, the Goddess of Learning, the expressive dynamism of the manifest Word:

आता अभिनव वाग्विलासिनी । जे चातुर्यार्थकलाकामिनी । ते श्रीशारदाविश्वमोहिनी । नमिली मिया ॥

*ātā abhinava vāgvilāsini | je chāturyārthakalākāminī | te  
śrīśāradāvīśvamohinī | namilī miyām ||*

Now to the one who enjoys variously the eloquence of the tongue, beautiful, and endowed with sagacity and connotative sense, and artistic skill in expression, to her, that Sharada, the enchantress of the World, I bow.

The supplication of the poet to the Goddess is not just a formality or mannerism of the mediaeval age or a mere *façon de parler*, in it there is a certain spiritual spontaneity that makes it meaningful as much as appealingly true. There is in it an occult element which puts one directly in contact with the source of inspiration itself. This we can perhaps better appreciate if we compare *Jnaneshwari* with, say, *Paradise Lost*. The Celestial Patroness used to visit Milton in the night, or when "Morn purples the East", and it is she who gave him the easy "unpremeditated Verse", she made him see and tell "Of things invisible to mortal sight." But, after a while, her visits started becoming infrequent and thought-stuff and thought-strain greatly burdened his poetry. What we notice in *Jnaneshwar*, on the other hand, is the uninterrupted flow of what Sri Aurobindo would call the "Overhead" expression, the language that comes with the power of word-sense and sound-sense native to some high spiritual plane above the mental. There is in it thought; there is in it the image, but the soul of its melody belongs to another world giving new values to thought and image; it is that soul who has taken birth here to sing his exceptional song. Being a *Yogi par excellence*, *Jnaneshwar* was in intimate contact with Sharada to receive her gifts which he could transcribe into our language without disfiguring or spoiling them in the process. The sustained level of expression bears ample witness to the poetry's genuine quality. Everywhere is present the delight of the spirit. It enables us also to live in its bright and wondrous presence. In contrast to this, a theological theme which is developed in intellectual terms can hardly attain such a stature or touch at this grandeur. But in *Jnaneshwari* with its tranquil sublimity we understand what spiritual poetry can really be.

What is the method by which spiritual poetry can be written? Is there a mechanism, a technique, a guiding principle of aesthetic creation which can be summoned by the writer to help him in this respect? And is not that demand as wrong as suggesting that Kalidasa or Shakespeare follow classroom texts for writing a poetic composition or drama? A poet with great art at his command has to be either a rich and ready instrument to receive genuine inspiration, or he must be himself a denizen of the overhead world where spiritual poetry is born. *Jnaneshwar* avowedly belongs to this latter class. He could move with quick and luminous ease in these realms of gold, and savour the fragrance of flowers of the Edenic garden, and ride the rhythmic melody of a crystalline stream in the fields of calm. "There is a profound intrinsic delight and beauty," says Sri Aurobindo, "in all things and behind all experience...which makes to a spirit housed within us...a revelation of the truth and power and delight of being and our feeling of it a form of universal Ananda...the calm yet moved ecstasy with which the spirit of existence regards itself and its creation. This deeper spiritual feeling, this Ananda is the fountain of poetic delight and beauty." *Jnaneshwar* drank freely of that fountain of poetic wonder and joy.

But how has this come about? It does not come as a surprise to *Jnaneshwar*.



His gracious preceptor Nivrīti is seated in his heart and it is indeed he who has wrought the miracle. It is like possessing a great treasure, *mahānudhī*, or discovering the heavenly stone *chintāmaṇī* which brings to fruition all noble longings; such is the alchemic power of the Guru. Now the worthy disciple has found the Guru and the Guru has accepted the disciple. Jnaneshwar bows to Nivrīti and turns his attention to the greatness of the tale narrated by Vyasa in his vast epic of the Bharatas.

This is a tale from which issues out every happiness; all the propositions of existence are present in its splendid formulations; the ocean of its nectarine utterance is filled with the nine felicities of aesthetic delight. Here resides the Goddess of Word-Fortune, *śabdāsī*, who has established for our benefit scriptural codes and texts. Wisdom has by it acquired adulthood and maturity, and the demonstrated theorems and conclusions their taste, and prosperity her excellence and appeal. By it the sweet has sweetness, and the sensuous beauty and pleasing elegance and shapeliness, and the worthy things of propriety and dignity:

माधुर्यी मधुरता । शृंगारी सुरेखता । रूढपण उचिता । दिसले भले ॥

*mādhuryī madhuratā | śrngarī surekhatā | rūdhapana uchitā | disale bhale | |*

Every quality there possesses the capacity and authority of the one who is All-quality, *guṇā saguṇapanāche bik*. By the brilliance of Vyasa's verses knowledge in the consciousness of the society has acquired right discernment and sharp perceptive sense, a working intuition in the dynamics of the day-to-day. As a person acquires manners and urbanity when he lives in a city, or as youthful beauty is visible in the bright flush of a maiden, so has human life acquired wondrous merit from this remarkable tale given to us by Vyasa. The Poet acknowledges the gift of the Rishi

Now, as if zooming his camera, Jnaneshwar comes to the Gīta proper, which is a part of the Bhīshma Parva of the Mahabharata. Churned from the ocean of eternal literature, *śabdabrahmābdhi*, by the genius of Vyasa, it is the cream of spiritual experiences which the ascetics long to have, the saints perceive and get, and those who are established in the oneness of the Infinite ever enjoy. This is the song that has been well-appreciated in the three worlds, a song that has been praised even by Brahma and Shiva.

Therefore, in order to understand and grasp the Gīta, one has to be very alert and sensitive to its beauty and sweetness, to its evocative sense and to its truth. A right kind of listener is needed for its poetry, one who is with a sober and calm heart, steady, but driven by the passion of a seeker, who appreciates the subtleties and profundities of expression; to that effect Jnaneshwar draws the attention of his audience and makes it aware of it. Here are words which convey

the contents even without their being uttered, of which the refined senses seize the implications much before they reach them. In order to embrace the sky one has to grow vaster than the sky. "But I know," says Jnaneshwar, "I have made myself very audacious, if not impudent. I know it is like a lapwing who ventures to sound the depth of the sea with the measure of its beak. The glory of the Gita is so dazzling that Shiva compared it with the wondrous beauty of Bhawani herself, *devī jaise kā swarūp tujhe*. Even the Vedas are puzzled or are at a loss to comprehend and describe it." But Jnaneshwar feels confident; for, he has been touched by the fabled stone which can transform a base metal into lustrous gold. There is no doubt that by the favour of Saraswati the dumb gets the siddhi of speech. And, in the same way, does not ambrosia bring back the dead to life? Such is the power of the Guru's grace and hence he need not harbour apprehension, argues the devout saint-poet.

Finally, Jnaneshwar pleads for the indulgence of the respectable listeners attending the sessions. If there are defects, remove them—requests he. Nay, he goes a step farther and proclaims that it is from them that he is going to derive courage and strength to rise to the exceptional occasion; whatever they are going to make him speak it is that he is going to speak—*tumhī bolawilā mī bolena*. This is how he considers himself favoured and blessed by the knowledgeable and competent elders in the gathering.

But now the benedictory command has come: "It is indeed not very necessary for you to speak all this. Hurry up and concentrate on the composition; please proceed without any apologies." Jnaneshwar is extremely happy with this patronising as well as inspiring approbation of Nivrīti and requests everyone in the Mhālasā Temple to listen attentively to his words that are aflame like little lamps in the adoration of the Gita.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

# “SUNDERING OF THE HEART-STRINGS”

## PART I

“SUNDERING of the heart-strings” is one of the most essential steps in yoga, and an experiential phenomenon, not very uncommon even in ordinary life. Every sadhak comes across it. The first jolt to the heart strings may be purely circumstantial, for example as a response to an emotional estrangement or to a personal bereavement. It may be an intellectual understanding after hearing or reading about it. Eventually everyone in sadhana experiences it sooner or later. The Upanishads have stressed this experience as of the utmost importance stating that one cannot see, taste and realise Brahman unless the “heart-strings” and “knots of the heart” are permanently cut asunder. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given us some guidelines and maps of the journey before and beyond this step.

But what are these “knots of the heart” and “heart-strings”? What do they signify? How to cut them asunder? And what happens during the process? Do they rejoin after they are sundered? Is it really such a long-drawn-out process that this cutting, this rending or sundering has to be done again and again?

In the first part I propose to elucidate some answers to these questions by quoting from the Upanishads and reflecting on the same in the light of my discussions with Amal Kiran. In the second part of this series I shall quote from Amal Kiran’s letters while in the third I will be quoting from Krishnaprem’s commentary on the relevant verses from the Kathopanishad. In the fourth part I shall present four passages from *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo writes about “the heart-strings” followed by Amal Kiran’s comments on these passages.

## UPANISHADS

We find reference to “sundering of the heart-strings [or] knots”, in two Upanishads, the Katha and the Mundaka. In the Katha Upanishad we find it in two Verses, 14 and 15 in the Second Cycle, Chapter 3. In the Mundaka Upanishad it occurs twice, in Chapter 2, Section II, Verse 9, and in Chapter 3, Section II, Verse 9. It is interesting to note that all these references, like the last few concluding verses of the Gita, occur near the end, verses that sum up the teachings of the respective Upanishads.

### Kathopanishad

I quote the translation of three verses, namely 13, 14 and 15, from the Kathopanishad, Second Cycle, Chapter 3, as done by Sri Aurobindo (SABCL, Vol 12, pp 264-265). I include Verse 13 because therein is the first essential step in the Sadhana of the Upanishad.

Verse 13 One must apprehend God in the concept 'He Is' and also in His essential but when he has grasped Him as the 'Is', then the essential of God dawns upon a man

Verse 14 When every desire that finds lodging in the heart of man, has been loosened from its moorings, then this mortal puts on immortality even here he tastes God, in this human body

Verse 15 Yea, when all the strings of the heart are rent asunder, even here, in this human birth, then the mortal becomes immortal This is the whole teaching of the Scriptures

### The Mundaka Upanishad

Sri Aurobindo translates the relevant verses from the Mundaka Upanishad as follows

Chapter 2, Section II, Verse 9 (SABCL, Vol 12, p 280)

The knot of the heart strings is rent, cut away are all doubts, and a man's works are spent and perish, when is seen That which is at once the being below and the Supreme

Chapter 3, Section II, Verse 9 (*Ibid* , p 286)

He, verily, who knows that Supreme Brahman becomes himself Brahman, in his lineage none is born who knows not the Brahman He crosses beyond sorrow, he crosses beyond sin, he is delivered from the knotted cord of the secret heart and becomes immortal

See how the last line in this verse echoes what has been said in Verse 13 cited earlier from the Kathopanishad, that the deliverance from the knot of the heart-strings—which results in realisation of his essential being—is a gift, a grace from Him One could paraphrase Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by saying that, it is not by our unaided effort but only by the Divine taking up our sadhana that true realisations are achieved

We all want to be free from life's miseries and pleasures, not only because the miseries outweigh the pleasures and the pleasures are transient and never deeply satisfying but also because something in us does not like to be bound to anything And unless free we cannot fly and soar in inner skies as and when we want, leave aside permanently making there our home This freedom a sadhak of course wants and aspires for

Once a human being has experienced conscious entry into the inner being and felt the nearness of the Divine within, he pines for that experience which is indescribable in ordinary terms of joy and peace but which far exceeds any experience of the ordinary world. And one very much wants that. The way to it is in freedom from the bonds of the world. The way to freedom is not opened until "the heart-strings are rent asunder"

It is only when the heart-strings are rent asunder that the door of the heart opens and love and aspiration pour out unhindered. This opening of the heart, once it has occurred, has to be maintained by conscious effort. Often, like the heart-strings which keep on re-forming again and again and have to be rent repeatedly, the opening in the heart, like a spring door, closes. But a chink is left. The process of "remembering and offering" slowly widens this little opening. When one forgets to "remember and offer" the door closes fully again. This closure causes a darkness, a chaos in the external being, the intensity of which increases with the ever-increasing experience of opening in the heart. But because a chink is left in the nearly closed door the darkness though intense is luminous. The state is indeed quite uncomfortable but before it could reach beyond bearing the heart opens. All this is because of the veil on veil that covers different portions of our being. Many things that constitute these veils have to be removed.

Amal Kiran recounts that for a long time he kept on telling and praying to the Mother again and again to open his heart. Often he would place the Mother's hand on his heart and plead to Her. Finally, after about six months, it happened. Since then, as he tells us, "All the time there is a constant flow of love from the heart, from the front of the chest towards Them. I feel a constant warmth in my heart region and to maintain it is my sadhana."

Finally, it is important to stress that this experience of the "rending asunder of the heart-strings" relates not only to the dear people to whom one is attached but to everything connected with feeling. As Amal Kiran says, this happening marks a passage "from the finely and profoundly psychological into the sheer spiritual" A prominent aspect of it is shown in these lines of Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*, p. 36)

A poised serenity of tranquil strength,  
A wide unshaken look on Time's unrest  
Faced all experience with unaltered peace

Another aspect comes out in the following lines (*Jivanmukta in Collected Poems*, p. 576)

He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills  
Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,  
Unrolls the form and sign of being,  
Seated above in the omniscient Silence

(*To be continued*)

# INDIAN VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## MAN-MAKING PROCESS OF NATURE

THE term “human development” has become one of the buzz-words of the emerging developments in thought. Swami Vivekananda used a much more striking word for human development. Man-making. In fact the entire evolutionary history of humanity is nothing but the man-making process of Nature. This article examines some of the Indian insights into this process, in a futuristic perspective. These insights emerge from the ancient Indian theory of social cycles based on the principles of Chaturvarna which we discussed in our previous articles.

According to the Indian theory of society, every society passes through four stages of evolution in which Brahmins or the thinking and religious elite, Kshatriyas or the political and military aristocracy, Vaishyas or the commercial and business class and the Shudras or the working class and the masses successively rule over the society in each stage of evolution. As Swami Vivekananda explains this Indian theory of society.

“According to the prevalence, in greater or lesser degree, of the three qualities of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas in Man, the four castes, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are everywhere present at all times in all civilised societies. By the mighty hand of time their number and power also vary at different times in regard to different countries. In some countries the numerical strength or influence of one of these castes may preponderate over another, at some period one of the classes may be more powerful than the others. But from a careful study of the history of the world, it appears that in conformity to the law of nature the four castes, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, do, in every society, one after another in succession, govern the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of the modern theories and researches in history confirm this Indian perception. When we look at the evolutionary cycle in human society, we mark that it has moved from the early theocracy of the Brahmin—the sage, priest, religious thinker and scholar—to the feudalism of the Kshatriya class—the king or the lord or the baron—to the present industrial commercialism of the Vaishya, the entrepreneurial, executive and the professional class. The Indian theory predicts that the ruling class of the last and coming cycle will be the Shudra, the Labour and Proletariat. When this evolution is viewed from the point of view of progression of values it is a movement from the knowledge-values—religion, morality, intellectual and cultural development—of the Brahmin—to the power-values of the Kshatriya—empire-building, expansion, mastery, justice, honour, conquest, domination—and to the present economic, commercial and utilitarian values—efficiency, productivity and quality—of the Vaishya. If we follow this evolutionary logic of Nature, the dominant values of the next and last phase of this cycle of evolution will be the work and service values of the Shudra. But there is a deeper truth behind this Indian theory of social evolution; it reveals the method and process of Nature in collective human development. Sri Aurobindo brings out this deeper purpose of Nature behind the evolutionary law.

“The perfection of the individual in a perfected society or eventually in a perfected humanity—understanding perfection always in a relative and progressive sense—is the inevitable aim of Nature. But the progress of all the individuals in a society does not proceed *pari passu* with an equal and equable march. Some advance, others remain stationary,—absolutely or relatively,—others fall back. Consequently the emergence of a dominant class is inevitable within the aggregate itself, just as in the constant clash between the aggregates the emergence of dominant nations is inevitable. That class will predominate which develops most perfectly the type Nature needs at the time for her progress or, it may be, for her retrogression. If she demands power and strength of character, a dominant aristocracy emerges, if knowledge and science, a dominant literary or savant class; if practical ability, ingenuity, economy and efficient organisation, a dominant bourgeoisie or Vaishya class, usually with the lawyer at the head; if diffusion rather than concentration of general well-being and a close organisation of toil, then even the domination of an artisan class is not impossible.”<sup>2</sup>

Both Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda foresaw the possibility of the emergence of the Shudra as the dominant class of the future. Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Ideal of Human Unity*

“The phenomenon of modern social development is the decline of the Brahmin and Kshatriya, of the Church, the military aristocracy and the aristocracy of letters and culture, and the rise to power or predominance of the commercial and industrial classes, Vaishya and Shudra, Capital and Labour. Together they have swallowed up or cast out their rivals and are now engaged in a fratricidal conflict for sole possession in which the completion of the downward force of social gravitation, the ultimate triumph of Labour and the remodelling of all social conceptions and institutions with Labour as the first, the most dignified term which will give its value to all others seem to be the visible writing of Fate.”<sup>3</sup>

And Swami Vivekananda prophesied in the beginning of this century

“Yet a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra, with their shudra-hood, not like that at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic quality of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya, but time will come when the Shudras of every country with their inborn Shudra nature and habits—not becoming in essence Vaishya or Kshatriya, but remaining as Shudra—will gain absolute supremacy in every society.”<sup>4</sup>

The above passages of the great patriot-sages of modern India reveal another important truth of the Indian theory of social evolution. The dominance of a particular class does not necessarily mean that that class will sit on the thrones of power and rule the society, but the values of that section of the society or a specific human type will shape the collective life and progress of the society in that phase of evolution.

The modern society is predominantly the civilisation of the Vaishya and shaped by the values of the Vaishya. But the reign of the Vaishya is fast coming to an end and according to the Indian theory it is likely to be followed by the Age of the Shudra; it means, in the future, there will be an increasing dominance of the values of the Shudra

replacing the values of the Vaishya. The Shudra represents the Labour-force and the masses. The emergence of Shudra-power means the predominance of Shudra values like service, craftsmanship, dignity of labour and the devolution of knowledge, power, wealth and culture to the grass-root level and the masses. The signs of this trend are visible everywhere. The emergence of Japan as an economic superpower is a clear indication of this trend. For modern Japan with its emphasis on the progressive enhancement of the quality of work-force by continuous education, training and development as the major plank of her national and organisational strategy is the typical example of a higher Shudra culture. This is one of the important facts behind the astounding success of the much-acclaimed "Japanese Management". As a Japanese diplomat points out, "If a most important feature (of Japanese management) is to be singled out, it should be the continuous training of labour with considerable information on his firm's operations—in other words, well-informed quality labour."<sup>5</sup>

The other significant trends which herald the rise of Shudra power is the strong emergence of organised labour-force, increasing stress on shop-floor innovation in industries, the advent of mass-communication technology and the emergence of mass-media as a major social force, the new concept of distant and continuing education which with the aid of modern technological aids like satellite communication and TV, aims at bringing the light of education to every section of the society and to the remotest villages of the world, the growing trend towards decentralisation and local autonomy, the increasing recognition of the need for the participation of local people in development programmes and the triumphant emergence of democratic ideals and forces and people's movements toppling autocratic governments all over the world. All these trends give a very clear indication of the drift of evolutionary Nature's drive in the emerging phase of the human cycle which is not for concentration of energies in an elite theocracy, aristocracy or bourgeoisie but for the diffusion of knowledge, power, wealth and culture to the masses.

Thus Nature's intention in the emerging phase of evolution is for a massive and enlightened resurgence of Shudra-power in society or, in other words, for the enlightenment, empowerment and enrichment of the labour-force and the masses. Any section, class, society or Nation which recognises this Law of Nature and acts accordingly progresses triumphantly towards the future. But that which resists and clings to its gains and privileges is likely to be destroyed by mass-upheavals or slowly die out without any support from Nature. One of the major reasons for the decline of India is that the Brahmin-Kshatriya aristocracy in medieval India failed to recognise this Law in time and clung to their position and privileges. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

"...the perfect counsel for a dominant minority is always to recognise in good time the right hour for its abdication and for the imparting of its ideals, qualities, culture, experience to the rest of the aggregate or to as much of it as is prepared for that progress. Where this is done, the social aggregate advances normally and without disruption or serious wound or malady, otherwise a disordered progress is imposed upon it, for Nature will not suffer human egoism to baffle for ever her fixed intention



and necessity. Where the dominant classes successfully avoid her demand upon them, the worst of destinies is likely to overtake the social aggregate,—as in India where the final refusal of the Brahmin and other privileged classes to call up the bulk of the nation as far as possible to their level, their fixing of an unbridgeable gulf of superiority between themselves and the rest of society, has been a main cause of eventual decline and degeneracy. For where her aims are frustrated, Nature inevitably withdraws her force from the offending unit till she has brought in and used other and external means to reduce the obstacle to a nullity.”<sup>6</sup>

This is the vision of the evolution of human civilisation and its immediate future possibilities viewed from the Indian theory of human cycles. But Sri Aurobindo in one of his writings talks about a secret and occult tradition which teaches that this four-fold cycle repeats itself in each phase of evolution as sub-cycles. This brings to light another truth of the evolutionary process of Nature, it reveals the process by which the ideas, ideals and values are diffused into the society. Every new cycle of social evolution begins with some new ideals and values revealed by the thinking sections of the society, the Brahmins. In the next stage, if these ideals are able to catch the interest of the masses or influence the top decision-makers in governments and society, the Kshatriyas, it becomes the motive-force of social development. In the third stage the idea begins to diffuse into the masses by mobilising the organising, technical and commercial skill and the economic resources of the Vaishya and the work-force of the Shudra. In the fourth stage the idea becomes a generalised possession of the society as a whole. In this process the original purity of the ideal may get very much diluted or may even get distorted. But at the same time the idea no longer remains an exclusive preserve of a small elite but something which is accessible to all the sections of the society. Thus grows the Soul of Humanity in the School of Nature.

When we examine the evolution of human civilisation in the light of this Indian theory of society we can see that there is a grand plan and design of human development behind the flow of apparently disconnected events. Each phase of evolution has established certain values and developed some new faculties in the human consciousness. The ministry of the Brahmin has opened the religious, moral and philosophic mind of Man and established the moral and spiritual values in human consciousness, the reign of the Kshatriya has opened the social sense and the dynamic and organising mind of man and fixed the values of empire-building, nationalism, social justice, liberty, equality, fraternity in the collective consciousness of humanity; the rule of the Vaishya has opened the pragmatic, technical and commercial mind of man and planted the values of utility, economy, efficiency and productivity in the human mind.

The emerging phase of the social cycle will bring the reign of the Shudra and his values into prominence. The Shudra values of perfection in work, craftsmanship, attention to details and service will be firmly established in the consciousness of the race, there will also be a widespread diffusion of culture into the masses through the modern educational, communication and information technology, the reign of the

Shudra will consolidate the gains of the previous cycles in a broad diffused scale in the society so that the higher mental culture is not confined to a few elite sections of the society but becomes a common property accessible to all. By the end of this fourth cycle of evolution, the consciousness of humanity will have attained a rounded development rich with many potentialities. But is this all? Is this the aim of Nature in Man? When we look at this evolutionary development of humanity in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision, we will find that there is still some incompleteness and this cannot be the ultimate aim of nature. There was only an evolution and development of the instruments of consciousness without any radical change and transformation in the essence of consciousness. But this transformation of consciousness is the ultimate aim of Nature.

The emergence of the Shudra is only the immediate future possibility but not the ultimate intention of Nature. It is only the final stage of preparation for a new cycle of evolution, a new Satya-yuga based on a spiritual and supramental consciousness. In fact this entire cycle of evolution is a preparation, training and development of the instruments of human consciousness to become a fit vehicle for the manifestation of a higher consciousness in Humanity. So we can say that the man-making process of Nature is coming to an end. Nature is already preparing to manifest the Super-man. The intention of Nature in the new and emerging cycle of evolution will not be man-making but "god-making". In this new cycle, Nature may probably repeat—or may not—the earlier process of concentration, consolidation and diffusion of this New Consciousness.

So in any design and planning for a future society these two factors, the emergence of the Shudra Dharma and its values and the purpose of it in the evolutionary scheme of Nature and the ultimate aim of Nature towards a spiritualisation of Mankind, have to be kept in mind. We in India, while retaining the essential Vedantic principles and values of our ancient social order, have to evolve a new social structure which reflects the needs and tendencies of the modern age and can accommodate itself flexibly to the changing conditions and the emerging possibilities.

M S SRINIVASAN

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- 2 *SABCL*, Vol 15, p 269
- 3 *Ibid*, p 464
- 4 "Modern India" by Swami Vivekananda (Advaita Ashram) p 64
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## WHERE ARE THE WEAPONS OF THE PANDAVAS?

PRAISE be given where it is due at the moment and at the same time, let us bring to mind the number of great thinkers and scientists of yore. They dedicated their lives to make a better life for their fellowmen and, in the pursuit of it, even laid down their lives if they happened to oppose the beliefs of the prevailing authorities.

Shall we not remember the great Socrates (469-399 B C ) who was given the ‘‘Cup’’ for teaching the youth of Athens his philosophy? And that was in an enlightened democratic society!

Centuries later the Polish-born Copernicus (1473-1543), who studied and lived in Rome, put the Sun at the centre of the heavens and finally published his mathematical description called *The Revolution of the Heavenly Orb*. He was then nearly 70, an old, sick, dying man. In fact, the published book was put into his hand on his death-bed. Yes, death clutched him away from the jaws of the Inquisition.

And what to say about Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) who was burnt at the stake by the Holy Inquisition for his scientific calculations and convictions? This was at the order of Cardinal Barberini, who later played his evil part in Galileo’s travails.

And Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who was of German origin but later worked in Prague, and had slipped out of the reach of danger? He also discovered that the Earth and the planets travel round the Sun in elliptical orbits. Whilst in Linz, he published his two principles of planetary orbit, entitled *Epitome of Copernicus*.

But should we not speak in hushed tones of Galilei Galileo—round the same century (1564-1642)—who was scared into retracting from his scientific calculations? In fact, he rushed to Rome from Florence where he would have been out of reach of the Inquisition. But he wanted to discuss Copernicus with Cardinal Barberini, whom he thought to be his friend and who had become the newly elected Pope. An educated man, versed in scientific knowledge, Barberini also knew that it was the Earth that moved and not the Sun round it, as Galileo upheld, but he betrayed him. It seems that there were reports filed against Galileo in 1613, 1614 and 1617. Barberini had him brought before the Inquisition. Questions were put to him the replies to which could not prove his innocence in knowing Copernicus’s findings. To urge him to retract from his scientific calculations, he was shown the horrid instruments of torture of the inquisitors. At the sight of them, Galileo chose his freedom, but muttered to himself. ‘‘Yet the Earth moves’’.

He was placed under strict house arrest in which he remained for the rest of his life—now well into his fifties, a broken man. His publications and papers were seized and burnt but, fortunately, some copies of them were smuggled out by his disciples and were taken from Italy to Holland, a neutral country.

O, alleged custodians of God’s Truth! You have always obliterated the Light of God and spread your dark cloak over it for centuries. Alas! India also had its share in the dark acts, in ordering sati and drowning the first-born to please God—and the slaughter of hundreds of goats to propitiate him.

Orthodoxy is a curse, no matter where we find it

You will say, that was a long time ago and that we have developed our culture since—Have we? To this day mass-graves of the recently slain are unearthed at many places

And of course there was profit to be made in all these acts. Whilst the Roman Catholic Church sold “indulgences” to absolve the people of their sins—and made them part with their money—today great Banks and Governments do no less to relieve the trusting ignorants of their life’s savings. Money is still in the hands of Darkness and not in the service of Light

Yet, there is no doubt at all of the great improvement and convenience that science has brought to the lives of the so-called developed world. But alas! the lives of untold millions that constitute probably two-thirds of the world’s population have remained unchanged

My mind asks the question. Has the advent of science brought with it more happiness than an impending danger, a looming curse waiting to have its way? And finally, and most importantly, has it made us a happier lot, more civilised, as the saying goes?

Yes, science stole the knowledge of the Gods, it has split the atom, learnt to manipulate the genes and with it to manipulate the development pattern in human beings—even of the unborn in the womb,—and create a race of mindless slaves, a controlled army, and a super-race for whatever ill-begotten end it may be

Here we have benevolence versus destructive force. Lethal weapons are brought into use—but these are not weapons given by the Gods to the Pandavas,—rather these have come out of greed for power and money-lust

Atom bombs for sale, devastating missiles and plutonium are given in bargain to any organisation or government who can pay for them. But what to do with the queer stuff? Where to place its residue? Ironically, wind and sea-currents can bring it back to where it came from—and to hell with the consequences when it goes off

So far, so good. But India knows of the beings of Suras and Asuras and understands also that now it is the Kali Yuga at its worst or, better said, it is nearing its climactic end. The great show of forces is on, but the battle is not yet won.

Where do we stand now? Which side are we on is of permanent importance. The Divine Force is there and is behind those who are able to receive it, providing inspiration to those whose concern is the development of mankind in whatever field of action be it—science or the arts

But those whose minds the Forces of Darkness are occupying, those whose only pursuit is to cause harm and destruction, who enjoy torturing their unfortunate victims, can no longer be called men. They are possessed instruments of the Darkness that has entered into them

Ultimately, at this “Hour of God” we put our faith entirely in the Divine and await His “Transfiguring Hour”. And with a torrent of prayers we call down its arrival!

Therefore, instead of parleying trivia that are so current in our daily life, we will no longer intellectualize, but rather spiritualize the trend of our thoughts

GEORGETTE COTY

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## SUPER-DANTE

WE need not abandon Hope who are here  
We glimpse the Multi-foliated Rose  
Even amidst Infernal pains  
Or agonizing Purgatorial fires;  
We often see It drawing very near,  
Whispering to us, "Forsake all fear "

Complex and complicated is the Vision  
The Super-Dante brings before our lives  
Puzzled, perplexed, we yet live thrilled,  
Even despair being divine here,  
Smile hidden behind a bitter tear

K B SITARAMAYYA

## MAHEERUHA

It reminded me always of the Tree Beard of the Fangorn Forest, witnessing generation after generation pass by. The Ashwattha tree was looked upon as a symbol of immortality, till the fateful day came and crushed our belief as the tree crashed down.

On the 19th of September 1996 in the afternoon, the mighty majestic Ashwattha lay spent up, crumbled on the road. The death of an Emperor. The day was stuffy—and not even a breeze blew, but the tree fell. How very strange and sad indeed! The leaves still sparkling in the fading autumnal sunlight lit a spark of hope in us. It is not dead, it will recover again. We went to investigate the cause of such a calamity.

Its main trunk was split in the middle as if struck by lightning. One portion lay in the courtyard of the building called Nanteuil. The other covered the Law de Lauriston Street and the Saint Louis Street. A giant of a tree indeed! What a blow! While we thought that even the sword of King Arthur would have been unable to split it into halves, our attention was caught by the rotten roots and the inside of the trunk black with fungus. It was not only split but uprooted. Death had overpowered it.

The tree was an embodiment of solidarity, of firmness and grandeur, a growth in the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It must have been thrilled to witness Sri Aurobindo touching the shores of Pondicherry and the Mother passing by it so very often. Sri Aurobindo too must have noticed it when occasionally he paid a visit to the Mother in Bayoud House in those old days in the twenties.

It watched in joy the Mother come to the Playground every day. It observed fondly the children growing up. It was one of us—a witness to the history of the Ashram and to the enlightenment of mankind. Maybe that's why, in peak group-hour with members coming and going out of the Playground, even in its fall it took care not to hurt a single soul. It was majestic and magnanimous to the end.

The fallen tree was an eye-opener and revealed a new track for thought and introspection. It was full of vigour, the branches held high, the leaves glistening with life-energy and one branch even had soft green leaves—as of rebirth in the same body defying decay and death. How and since when had the insects made their abode inside, eating and corroding slowly but surely? Is this the way the ancient Harappan Civilization died or the Alexandrian empire fell? In its vigour for growth it spread far and wide neglecting to consolidate itself or restrict its stride. In its delight to branch out further and further it forgot its aim, its inner spirit and strength. The roots were not strong enough for such wideness. And thus a tiny crack of disharmony, disorder, imbalance appeared. A timely action to find the cause of the crack and heal it with care would have most probably prevented the fissure from getting bigger. But in its aspiration for expansion it neglected vigilance. Thus the crack of dissension widened. And the insects were all too ready to creep inside such a well-built body. The civilization or the empire showed tolerance under the guise of magnanimity and allowed them to be. After all what harm could the tiny creatures do? And the insects created a haven for themselves—well protected by the healthy body—meticulously and

methodically they feasted on the very body that they inhabited and grew in number. Slowly they ate away the roots, the inside of the trunk—the backbone. And when the backbone is brittle no outside force in the form of a cyclone or even a gentle breeze is needed to break it. The crack widened. The crows felt the calamity coming and hovered and cawed the night before. The division was total, it broke and fell and as a result the insects too lost their abode. The crows and other birds were also ready to feast on them.

What lesson did the fallen Ashwattha teach?

Is not the ostentatious display of expansion without consolidation superficial and does it not only deceive others but is a self-deceit also and thus the prime cause of any downfall?

Is the show of magnanimity to harmful elements a virtue or a weakness?

Is it not better to promptly amputate a few bleeding parts however painful it may be?

The old wisdom came to my mind:

Divided one cannot stand. The Divisor and the Dividend both will fall and the Quotient will only be death.

The Maheeruha lay prostrate in pranam and kissed the dust which still quivers and guards zealously the sacred and cherished memory of the footfalls of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

A gentle sea breeze blew cooling and rejuvenating the earth. The ever-glistening leaves of the Ashwattha danced their last parting dance and as if whispered softly those lines of Sri Aurobindo

Even should a hostile force cling to its reign  
And claim its right's perpetual sovereignty  
And man refuse his spiritual fate,  
Yet shall the secret Truth in things prevail.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

# THE EMERGENCE OF BIG SCIENCE

*(Continued from the issue of June 1997)*

## 3. THE ROAD TO THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

TOWARDS the end of 1938 Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann discovered that experiments involving bombardment of uranium with neutrons lead to its breaking into heavy fragments, they detected barium as one of the reaction products. But as nothing similar was observed by the earlier researchers, they hesitated to announce their results. Instead, Otto Hahn despatched a copy of his report to Lise Meitner who was his former collaborator but who had fled from Nazi Germany and taken refuge in Stockholm. She along with Otto Frisch suggested in a paper, published in January 1939, that the uranium nucleus in this reaction splits roughly into two halves. They explained the process in terms of what they called the Liquid Drop Model. This model essentially considers the balance of the two forces that are simultaneously present in a nucleus. One is the well-known electrostatic force of repulsion between the positive charges or the protons inside the nucleus, the other is the strong nuclear force which overpowers the electrostatic force and holds the constituents of the nucleus together. The strong force, discovered only a few years before, in 1935, acts at short distances, this means that any stretching of the nucleus could lead to instability with the weakening of the nuclear binding force at such distances. Meitner and Frisch reasoned that this precisely is what happens in the case of the Hahn-Strassmann reaction. In it the uranium nucleus is already in a state of unstable equilibrium which gets disturbed by the capture of another neutron. If the conditions are right then nuclear fission can occur. This is similar to a large drop of water breaking up when another small drop is added to it. The dynamical conditions of the large drop and the size and energy brought by the small drop will determine the whole process. Using the ideas of the binding energy of the nucleus and the critical energy required for the fission to take place, Bohr and Wheeler soon put the Liquid Drop Model on a firmer theoretical footing.

In January 1939 Bohr was preparing for his trip to the U.S. to attend a conference of physicists. But just before his departure he happened to know Meitner and Frisch's findings which were not until then published by them. Bohr rescheduled his travel plans with a brief halt at Cambridge to consult Rutherford. Sensing the importance of the fission reaction, he shared the news with his American counterparts. At a meeting of the American Physical Society in Washington, held on 26 January 1939, he announced the conclusions of uranium fission reported to him by Meitner and Frisch. No sooner than Bohr disclosed these results experiments were planned to confirm them. "Almost as soon as he had finished his remarks," say Holton and Roller, "confirmatory experiments were started. It occurred to many that when a few uranium nuclei were made to undergo fission they could release neutrons which could in turn trigger the reaction in many more neighbouring uranium atoms. Once started, a 'chain reaction'



would spread through a sample of uranium, setting free a large amount of energy in each nuclear fission. Here was the promise of a practical source of nuclear energy—and thus was born the nuclear age, with an unprecedented explosion of research interest.” The discovery of fission just at the beginning of the Second World War is significant in several respects. In fact, it does not seem to be a mere coincidence. The meaning of the discovery made by science and the moulding of history have several dimensions and they need to be fully explored.

During his visit to the U.S. Bohr surmised that it is only a tiny fraction of natural uranium which is responsible for the observed fission. Based on the Bohr-Wheeler model he showed that such nuclei are the less abundant isotope of uranium,  $U^{235}$ , less than 1% in natural uranium.

Theoretical calculations concerning the balance between the surface tension of the liquid drop and the electrostatic force in the nuclei of different elements led to an important conclusion. While the surface tension, the force that holds the drop together, predominates in the nuclei of all elements in the first half of the Periodic Table, it is the electrostatic force in the second half. Hence all nuclei of mass number greater than 110 are potentially unstable; as a result, these can break up into two or more fragments with the least disturbance possible. The process is accompanied by the liberation of a considerable amount of energy. These predictions of the Liquid Drop Model were soon verified by several experiments.

Bohr and Wheeler further noted that the occurrence of fission depends on a parameter called the critical energy. This energy is the difference between the energy of unstable deformation of the nucleus and the excitation energy which is connected with the binding energy of the added neutron. As an extension of the theory, they also discovered that a nucleus with an odd mass number would undergo fission more easily than one with an even mass number.  $U^{235}$  is hence expected to fission by absorbing a low energy or slow neutron, while  $U^{238}$  by a fast or energetic neutron.

The second crucial discovery made by two independent groups was that, during the process of fission, several neutrons are also released. These secondary neutrons could therefore induce fission in other nuclei and thus initiate a chain reaction. The implications of these discoveries were already seen by the researchers of the time.

To these was added the dimension of the Second World War. After Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the fission discovery made about a year earlier suddenly assumed the form of a possible war weapon. The question was whether the energy released in a nuclear reaction of this kind could be used in place of chemical explosives to produce bombs with unprecedented destructive capacity. Nuclear fission suddenly appeared on the chessboard of world powers.

From a scientific point of view, this meant that technologies based on uranium fission would first require the isolation of the more fissile isotope  $U^{235}$ . But the production of this isotope by the chemical process—the only method of separation then known—is inefficient as well as extremely difficult. This is because chemical reactions are insensitive to isotopic differences. Any technique based on this then becomes less

than affordable. Initially this caused great scepticism as far as the future application of uranium fission was concerned. In fact, Bohr was very much convinced about the non-feasibility of the isotopic separation process. In one of his lectures he asserted: "With the present technical means it is impossible to purify the rare uranium isotope in sufficient quantity to realise the chain reaction." But there were the imperatives of the time and the nations which would take part in the War knew well that the 'chain reaction' had to be achieved. It was immediately recognised that if a chain reaction multiplied indefinitely it would lead to an enormous explosion. Controlled process of course meant tapping power from the nuclear source. Therefore, despite the absence of the vital technology for the separation of the more fissile isotope of uranium, methods had to be devised to accomplish it. There was also the fear that Germany might forge ahead and produce weapons based on this discovery. German scientists had played so outstanding a role in the development of modern physics that the fear was quite understandable, in fact, Werner Heisenberg himself was the head of such a programme in the Nazi team set up to carry out the research.

Therefore, leaving these reservations aside and with a sense of War-pragmatism, were initiated the British and American explorative efforts. "The American nuclear weapons programme began modestly in 1940 with a \$ 6000 Government grant to Enrico Fermi and other scientists, many of them refugees from Europe. Their first project was to produce a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction in natural uranium ore despite its very small content of fissionable uranium-235 (seven-tenths of a per cent). Fermi finally succeeded in December 1942 in Chicago."

But there was another possible route to the nuclear bomb. Nuclear scientists in Germany, Russia, and America predicted independently, and in secret, that the abundant isotope of uranium could transform into a new element—later on called plutonium—and it is this element which would readily undergo neutron-induced fission. As plutonium is a distinct chemical element, it can be separated by chemical methods from the uranium in which it has been produced. The problem of separation of the two isotopes of uranium,  $U^{235}$  and  $U^{238}$ , was thus bypassed.

A nuclear reactor with a controlled chain reaction served two purposes: it produced nuclear energy and a more easily fissile element in sufficient quantities. But translation of these scientific discoveries into military devices was another major step. A larger organised effort was essential. There were wartime contingencies also in the entire programme. The seeds of the Manhattan Project were sown in these great moments.

*(To be continued)*

ANIRBAN DEB

## SING TO ME, MUSE\*

SING to me, Muse, of the wrath of Achilles Pelidean,  
Murderous, bringing a million woes on the men of Achaea;  
Many the mighty<sup>1</sup> souls whom it drove down headlong to Hades,  
Souls of heroes and made of their bodies booty for vultures,  
Dogs and all birds; so the will of Zeus was wholly accomplished<sup>2</sup>  
Even from the moment when they two parted in strife and in anger,  
Peleus' glorious son and the monarch of men Agamemnon.  
Which of the gods was it set them to conflict and quarrel disastrous?<sup>3</sup>  
Leto's son from the seed of Zeus; he wroth with their monarch  
Roused in the ranks an evil pest and the peoples perished,  
For he insulted Chryses, priest and master of prayer,  
Atreus' son, when he came to the swift ships of the Achaeans,  
Hoping release for his daughter, bringing a limitless ransom,  
While in his hands were the chaplets of great far-hurling Apollo  
Twined on a sceptre of gold and entreated all the Achaeans:  
"Atreus' son and all you high-greaved armèd Achaeans,  
You may the gods grant, they who dwell in your lofty Olympus,  
Priam's city to sack and safely to reach your firesides;  
Only my child beloved may you loose to me, taking this ransom,  
Holding in awe great Zeus' son far-hurling Apollo."  
Then all they there rumoured approval, the other Achaeans,  
Deeming the priest to revere and take that glorious ransom,  
But Agamemnon it pleased not; the heart<sup>3</sup> of him angered,  
Evilly rather he sent him and hard was his word upon him  
"Let me not find thee again, old man, by our ships of the Ocean,  
Either lingering now or afterwards ever returning,  
Lest the sceptre avail thee not, no nor the great God's chaplets.  
Her will I not release, before that age shall o'ertake her  
There in our dwelling in Argos far from the land of her fathers  
Going about her loom, ascending my couch at nightfall.  
Hence with thee, rouse me not, safer shalt thou return then homeward."  
So he spake and the old man feared him and heeded his bidding.  
Voiceless along the shore by the myriad cry of the waters  
Slowly he went; but deeply he prayed as he paced to the distance,  
Prayed to the Lord Apollo, child of Leto the golden

SRI AUROBINDO

\* Opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* Sri Aurobindo's translation into English hexameters belongs to the Baroda period. The accompanying version (see the next page) in prose is from *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse*

—Associate Editor

1 Or, puissant      2 Or, so was the will of the Father accomplished      3 Or, soul

Sing, goddess, of the cursed wrath of Achilles, Peleus's son, that brought to the Achaeans immeasurable suffering, and hurled away to Hades many mighty souls of heroes, making their bodies carrion for the dogs and every bird of prey; so the will of Zeus was accomplished [Sing] from the day when first the son of Atreus [Agamemnon], king of men, and godly Achilles quarrelled and parted

Which of the gods set them to fight against one another? [It was Apollo] the son of Leto and Zeus, in his anger with the king he sent an evil plague to the army, and the soldiers died, for the son of Atreus had slighted Chryses the priest. For he [Chryses] had come to the swift ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, bringing a vast ransom and holding in his hands the fillet of far-shafting Apollo on a golden staff; he made this plea to all the Achaeans, and especially to the two sons of Atreus, marshals of men: "Sons of Atreus, and the other finely greaved Achaeans, may the gods that live in halls of Olympus grant you the sack of the city of Priam, and a safe homecoming; but set my dear child free, and accept the ransom, in reverence of the son of Zeus, far-shafting Apollo.

Then all the other Achaeans cried out that he should respect the priest and accept the splendid ransom, but this did not please the heart of Agamemnon, son of Atreus. He sent him away roughly, with harsh words: "Do not let me catch you, old man, lingering any longer near the hollow ships now, or coming back again later, or the staff and fillet of the god may be of no use to you. I will not set her free before old age comes upon her in my house, in Argos, far from her native land. There shall she weave at her loom and be in my bed my companion. Go, do not provoke me if you wish to leave unhurt."

So he spoke, and the old man was afraid and obeyed his words, and he walked silently along the shore of the loud-roaring sea. But when he was well away, the old man prayed fervently to king Apollo, whom Leto with the lovely tresses bore.

CONSTANTINE A TRYPANIS



*Sri Aurobindo's Comments:*

- 1 "As" carries on the rest into the simile; but a shell does not bloom nor a star, so "like" is better; besides it sounds more natural
2. I prefer the simplicity of the original to the literary and not very living "creative" but "got" is too colloquial.
3. Since you bring in the assonance "trance" "dancing", I would prefer to have it boldly as an internal rhyme
4. Neither "ebb" nor "flow" are needed: it sounds and reads better without them.
- 5 The inversion is better avoided; the natural order of the words is more graceful and effective.
- 6 An identical rhyme like "light" "delight" favoured in French and called there a "rich rhyme" was forbidden in orthodox English prosody and perhaps still is; but so many such rules have been kicked overboard today that there is no such reason why one should cling to this veto. However, this form is perhaps the best though N's original version makes a very good line

*Revised Form*

Like a star in the sky, like a flower in May  
 You bloom, O my heart, in the deep,  
 Like a shell which bears the pure pearl play  
 In an ocean of vigilant sleep

You have your colours, you have your brush  
 And a canvas eternally wide;  
 In a trance you dance with the luminous hush  
 Bearing Time's silent tide.

You are moulding the clay to an angel's eye,  
 And moving the thorn as a pen,  
 You change the black veil with a golden dye  
 And break the blind dark den.

Consciousness grows in the Mother divine,  
 You laugh on her lap in your dream;  
 Your thoughts are bright with her red sun-wine  
 And your words in her silver moonbeam

Sleep, sleep, O my bird, in your glorious nest  
 Like a pearl in the deep's delight,  
 Like a star of the sky in its radiant rest,  
 Like a flower on a timeless height

## MIRACLE

Thou hast made my life as full as a river,  
As full as a river that flows to the sea,  
Filling its tides, O Rhythm-Giver!  
With a wide wonderful rhythm of Thee  
Morning and evening, early and late,  
The river goes seeking its ocean-mate,  
Singing one only song, "Can I wait  
When the Ocean, my Lover, is calling to me?"

Thou hast flooded the heart with a never-dwindling  
Splendour of dawn that is sweet beyond words  
Deep in the bosom Thy Silence is kindling  
The magical light that glimmers and girds  
Some distant horizon unseen and afar  
Caught up to a point in Thee, Morning Star!  
The moments of time dripping into me are  
The warbled notes of angelic birds

I am tingling forever with innermost glory  
That blooms like a roseal vision of fire,—  
Thou art working each atom of me to a story  
Of some high-born experience seeking a higher  
Thou dwellest within me, a-striking inside  
But visions that matter, and dreams that abide  
Already I feel that my being is dyed  
In Thy hues of the deathless, O Deathless Dyer!

Around me the shades of the earth go changing,  
The colours of sky, brief-blossoming, fade  
On heights of the Spirit my thoughts go ranging  
Like eagles of gold, untouched, unafraid.  
See how the whole world glitters and gleams  
With the reflexed effulgence of my lone dreams!  
After all, my Beloved! it clearly seems  
That my soul for high summits alone was made

They come and they go, the earth's dim creatures,  
Mere shadows of fate that pass me by  
With pain in their footfalls and death in their features,—  
I move like a silence twixt cry and cry

For this body of mine, once sorrowful earth,  
Through Thy touch has undergone a re-birth;  
The flowers of its moods have assumed a worth  
That only Thy Grace can grant, O Sky!

Thou hast emptied my life of its death and flooded  
Its waiting hollows with Life new-sown  
Which here, in the midst of decays, hath budded  
To starry ecstasies of the Unknown  
Thou hast made me so silent, so wondrous mute,  
That now Thou canst play on my flesh like a flute,  
The tune of the One and the Absolute  
Whose each tone echoes Thy master-tone

15 after 10, morning  
8-4-1934

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

Sri Aurobindo's Comment: A magnificent lyric



## RECEDING HORIZON

THERE was a time when the earth looked green,  
The sky blue and the sunlight bright,  
When the call of the cuckoo lured the tiny feet tottering  
And wonder filled the heart.  
The aura of innocence excused the ignorance  
And a sense of marvel lay scattered  
In every nook of life  
Life flowed—lucid, clear and sparkling—  
Pure as the first trickle of melted ice  
High up on the snow-clad peaks  
From every direction a call for adventure  
Beckoned the restless spirit,  
Restrained only by the hands of caution  
Of others more aged, who seemed wiser  
And could offer an explanation  
To all things perceived by the senses

Now, with the gathering of years  
The surroundings look more natural  
Fantasies of the past faded like mist,  
Eternity lost to tailored slices of time.  
Branded with various labels, the tenderness lost,  
The thing most sought for then—growing up, acquired

But the call of the spirit beacons on—  
Even as a lone lighthouse  
Glimmering in the depth of the night  
Beside the dark tumultuous waters—  
From the supernatural to the physical  
And still to realms unknown

The horizon beheld from childhood to death  
Changes hue and form as one travels on,  
Softly calling, challenging and aiding,  
But receding with the advance of life  
In darkness and light, in happiness and strife  
The path leads on—towards the horizon!

D L

## TO BE A POEM FOR ME

A POEM must be a window  
through which I may deftly see  
A large or small object  
which I may clutch  
or softly feel

A poem must be audible  
through thunder,  
hail, or rain,  
it must be knowledgeable  
to spark or nourish the brain

A poem must give pleasure  
through softness,  
rants, or rages,  
it must have beauty,  
physical or aesthetic  
The beauty may fill  
Or garnish the eyes  
or brighten or charm the mind  
or else, in rareness,  
may subtly reside  
in the ugliness or gloominess  
of things

A poem must be felt  
by heart, blood, soul  
It must weep, grieve, or laugh,  
scoff, hate, or love;  
roar, dance, repose;  
or simply be indifferent,  
To be a poem for me,  
whatever the nature,  
it must be all of these things,  
or some, or several, or one

NAOMI F FAUST

(Courtesy POET)

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of June 1997)

IN the eighteenth century, both the western and Indian scholars attempted to interpret the Veda. But they took the advantage of Sayana's interpretation and arrived at new conclusions.

In the new light the Vedic hymnology has come to be interpreted as a half superstitious, half poetic allegory of Nature with an astronomical element. The rest is partly contemporary history, partly primitive superstitions

“ the whole problem of the interpretation of Veda still remains an open field in which any contribution that can throw light upon the problem should be welcome. Three such contributions have proceeded from Indian scholars. Two of them follow the lines or the methods of European research, while opening up new theories which if established, would considerably alter our view of the external sense of the hymns. Mr. Tilak in his *Arctic Home in the Vedas* has accepted the general conclusions of European scholarship, but by a fresh examination of the Vedic Dawn, the figure of the Vedic cows and the astronomical data of the hymns, has established at least a strong probability that the Aryan races descended originally from the Arctic regions in the glacial period. Mr. T. Paramasiva Aiyar by a still bolder departure has attempted to prove that the whole of the Rig-veda is a figurative representation of the geological phenomena belonging to the new birth of our planet after its long-continued glacial death in the same period of terrestrial evolution. It is difficult to accept in their mass, Mr. Aiyar's reasonings and conclusions, but he has at least thrown a new light on the great Vedic mythus of Ahī Vritra and the release of the seven rivers. His interpretation is far more consistent and probable than the current theory which is not borne out by the language of the hymns. Taken in conjunction with Mr. Tilak's work it may serve as the starting-point for a new external interpretation of the old Scripture which will explain much that is now inexplicable and recreate for us the physical origins if not the actual physical environment of the old Aryan world.

“The third Indian contribution is older in date, but nearer to my present purpose. It is the remarkable attempt by Swami Dayananda, the founder of the Arya Samaj, to re-establish the Veda as a living religious Scripture. Dayananda took as his basis a free use of the old Indian philology which he found in the Nirukta. Himself a great Sanskrit scholar, he handled his materials with remarkable power and independence. Especially creative was his use of that peculiar feature of the old Sanskrit tongue which is best expressed by a phrase of Sayana's,—the “multi-significance of roots”. We shall see that the right following of this clue is of capital importance for understanding the peculiar method of the Vedic Rishis.

“Dayananda's interpretation of the hymns is governed by the idea that the Vedas are a plenary revelation of religious, ethical and scientific truth. Its religious teaching is monotheistic and the Vedic gods are different descriptive names of the one Deity; they

are at the same time indications of His powers as we see them working in Nature and by a true understanding of the sense of the Vedas we could arrive at all the scientific truths which have been discovered by modern research.

“Such a theory is, obviously, difficult to establish. The Rīg-veda itself, indeed, asserts that the gods are only different names and expressions of one universal Being who in His own reality transcends the universe, but from the language of the hymns we are compelled to perceive in the gods not only different names, but also different forms, powers and personalities of the one Deva. The monotheism of the Veda includes in itself also the monistic, pantheistic and even polytheistic views of the cosmos and is by no means the trenchant and simple creed of modern theism. It is only by a violent struggle with the text that we can force on it a less complex aspect.

“That the ancient races were far more advanced in the physical sciences than is as yet recognised, may also be admitted. The Egyptians and Chaldeans, we now know, had discovered much that has since been rediscovered by modern Science and much also that has not been rediscovered. The ancient Indians were, at least, no mean astronomers and were always skilful physicians, nor do Hindu medicine and chemistry seem to have been of a foreign origin. It is possible that in other branches also of physical knowledge they were advanced even in early times. But the absolute completeness of scientific revelation asserted by Swami Dayananda will take a great deal of proving.

“The hypothesis on which I shall conduct my own enquiry is that the Veda has a double aspect and that the two, though closely related, must be kept apart. The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature, and they managed the expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and coherent than the physical. The Veda is primarily intended to serve for spiritual enlightenment and self-culture. It is, therefore, this sense which has first to be restored.

“To this task each of the ancient and modern systems of interpretation brings an indispensable assistance. Sayana and Yaska apply the ritualistic framework of outward symbols and their large store of traditional significances and explanations. The Upanishads give their clue to the psychological and philosophical ideas of the earlier Rishis and hand down to us their method of spiritual experience and intuition. European scholarship supplies a critical method of comparative research, yet to be perfected, but capable of immensely increasing the materials available and sure eventually to give a scientific certainty and firm intellectual basis which has hitherto been lacking. Dayananda has given the clue to the linguistic secret of the Rishis and re-emphasised one central idea of the Vedic religion, the idea of the One Being with the Devas expressing in numerous names and forms the many-sidedness of His unity.

“With so much help from the intermediate past we may yet succeed in reconstituting this remoter antiquity and enter by the gate of the Veda into the thoughts and realities of a prehistoric wisdom.”

“Dayananda accepted the Veda as his rock of firm foundation, he took it for his guiding view of life, his rule of inner existence and his inspiration for external work, but he regarded it as even more, the word of eternal truth on which man’s knowledge of God and his relation with the Divine Being and with his fellows can be rightly and securely founded. This everlasting rock of the Veda, many assert, has no existence, there is nothing there but the commonest mud and sand. It is only a hymnal of primitive barbarians, only a rude worship of personified natural phenomena, or even less than that, a liturgy of ceremonial sacrifice, half religion, half magic, by which superstitious animal men of yore hoped to get themselves gold and food and cattle, slaughter pitilessly their enemies, protect themselves from disease, calamity and demoniac influences and enjoy the coarse pleasures of a material Paradise. To that we must add a third view, the orthodox, or at least that which arises from Sayana’s commentary, this view admits, practically, the ignobler interpretation of the substance of Veda and yet—or is it therefore?—exalts this primitive farrago as a holy Scripture and a Book of Sacred Works.

“Now this matter is no mere scholastic question, but has a living importance, not only for a just estimate of Dayananda’s work but for our consciousness of our past and for the determination of the influences that shall mould our future.”<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo admitted the various interpretations that have been made by different scholars. But all maintain that spirituality is their central theme. Sri Aurobindo has revealed the esoteric meaning of numberless Riks and also the Rīgveda as a whole. Always Light, Truth and Immortality are the Vedic hymnistic quarry.

It needs to be added that the Vedic imagery and the chains of parallelism between the cosmic and microcosmic universes were constantly in Sri Aurobindo’s mind when he wrote *The Life Divine* and the “Divine Comedy” *Savitri*.

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

#### *References*

- 1 *SABCL* Vol 10, pp 28-31
- 2 *Ibid*, Vol 17 p 336

## K. D. SETHNA: THE PROSE WRITER

(Continued from the issue of June 1997)

### II: His Early Prose

SOME of the earliest samples of Sethna's mature prose were included in a book entitled *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*. The book came out in 1953, although the articles had come out even earlier, in *Mother India*, "either openly avowed or under the pen-name Libra".

The problem with these articles is that they are extremely assertive. But if you are a careful reader, you are sure to see the logic, the scholarship and the novelty, daring and substantial, at every page. Committed to Sri Aurobindo and his own individual self at the same time, Sethna confirms the base of Aurobindoiana which was started by Nolini Kanta Gupta with the opposite manner, that is, the apophthegmatic style.

For, the usual Sethna is a master of exposition. And this love for weaving the net of argument is traceable even in his prose of the 40s. In *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, we have a Sethna who is continuing Sri Aurobindo's task of a nation-builder. Many things which Sri Aurobindo had left as clues are expanded here, like the four types of Nationalism in India, our ancient wisdom and its genuine revival and many others. Sethna sheds new light on our national flag, our national anthem, boldly favours Bankim's and criticises Tagore's because of the lack of the mother-image in *Jana Gana Mana*.

Those who are a little bit initiated into Sethna's prose know well his powerful art of *refutatio*. This power is quite visible in *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, especially in his counter-arguments with C.R.M. and P. Lal. His historic letter-battle with P. Lal has not only immortalised his reputation but also P. Lal's. Because without the intelligent counter-views of Lal, Sethna would not have opened up his *refutatio* with that inspired force of language. The debate centred round a pair of lines from *Savitri*:

Life was not there but an impassioned force,  
Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps

Let us have a look at Sethna's grand *refutatio* set against Lal's criticism of these lines.

The second line is an echo of a turn we find at times in some Upanishads, it is a sort of paradoxical pointing of extremes and is not devoid of attractiveness or effectiveness. Here it is particularly apt because the soul, in yogic realisation, is the inmost entity of the inner world and the subtlest of all subtle forces. The first line is deemed by Mr. Lal an attempt at Miltonese which succeeds in being mere wind. He is mistaken in both respects. Miltonese is more grandiose in language

and less direct in suggestion. This is a straightforward style and statement expressing the truth that, on the occult “plane” where soul is the determining principle, there is a pure essence of vitality in both its ardent and its dynamic aspects, rather than what we know as Life Force

The decency maintained by the two writers in this historic letter-battle should be a lesson for many recent artists and journalists. That was our literary climate in the 50s, which degenerated in the 70s, when Adil Jussawalla equated Sri Aurobindo’s cosmic epic with “Sari” and “Onion” (*Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, William Walsh (ed), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973)

I am sure Sethna would not be interested in fighting out indecent comments on Sri Aurobindo. But, throughout his life, he has earnestly tried to clarify misunderstandings relating to his Master’s art. All his refutations have been to throw the right light on Sri Aurobindo’s face that itself gives light

The early prose of Sethna exhibits, here and there, traces of that rhythmic style of Sri Aurobindo, in which Prof. Iyengar has seen the combination of “sinuosity and balance”. Writing on the significance of Sri Aurobindo’s passing, Sethna has rediscovered that style in the heat of inspiration:

The Master had been busy with his *Savitri* for several years, revising the text he had composed earlier and constantly adding to it, amplifying the significances, enriching the story, extending the symbolism, catching more and more intensely the vision of the superhuman planes of existence and consciousness to which he had access, breathing with an ever-truer thrill the last rhythms of the movements of the Gods with which he had grown familiar. Out of some unfathomable silence he would draw out golden phrase and apocalyptic line—wait as if he had eternities to throw away—proceed with splendid bursts of occult imagery and revealing description—hark back to expand or amend, with an eye to the tiniest detail of punctuation or sequence, and again press forward with a comprehensive yet meticulous inspiration

In a personal conversation with Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, I had raised the question of influence of this typical Aurobindonian style on the Aurobindonian moderns. I remember distinctly Prof. Iyengar’s judgement. “Sethna is the best in this regard.” Prof. Iyengar himself has used this mode remarkably, and quite frequently, and yet he chose to leave the chair to Sethna. This could be his proverbial humility, his well-known *sattwic* attitude of criticism, but the passage cited above surely places Sethna in a double-seated chair with Prof. Iyengar

(*To be continued*)

## SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM

VERY often the problem of the Indian people is over-simplified and hurried solutions offered. The emphasised religious differences, real and unreal, are only one symptom of a larger issue that needs and deserves serious consideration. The minority problem, for instance, cannot be solved by mere tolerance of one group by another. Still less can it be solved by the present policies of appeasements, reservation, etc. These will only create a deeper psychological gulf and a reactionary wave in the groups which may feel isolated.

A greater reconciliatory truth is needed. And a greater truth demands a profounder study of the national psyche. Watching the parliamentary drama unfold itself over the past few weeks, one is likely to conclude that there is lack of a sincere political will in the nation. It is rather more likely that an Indian resurgence will take place in spite of the politicians rather than because of them. First, because barring a few rays of light here and there, the representation in the Parliament as a whole is of a dark and mediocre India. Such men, chosen by the average mind of the nation, which is gullible to propaganda and motivated by lure of personal gains, are truly not fit to lead India into the greatness that she ought to be. True, they may make tall claims and sell colourful dreams without knowing how to translate them into realities. Even the few straying lamps of light seen here and there in different parties are more like candle flares that melt away too soon under the pressure of the engulfing darkness. And their half-lit ignorance only serves to make the mire and dirt of Indian politics more prominent rather than destroying the darkness. But this in itself is no solution; at best only a promise, at worst a false ideal, valid for the moment in the laws of the night.

### THE NEED OF THE HOUR

For while we talk of systems of governance and policies, we are merely repeating by rote the ABC of collectivism. A stronger foundation of a true social order needs a more complete understanding of both individual and collective human psychology. And for that one needs a penetrating insight into human nature. This is where we primarily err. The systems we follow today cannot solve our problem because these do not comprise what man is or what he can become. How can the politicians claim that they will effectively govern and rule the nation when they cannot even govern their own unruly nature? How can they claim to clean a nation free of all ills when they have neither the will nor the capacity to keep their hearts and minds free of the shadow and taint of ambition, greed, pride, vanity and desire?

If that be so, the need of the hour is an Indian kind of Spiritual Nationalism. A spiritual nationalism! We may cry our lungs out that it is a taboo. But the truth of things and of man is not based upon our lung-power or even the rigid logic of our grey cells. Today or tomorrow India will have to wake up to this deep possibility. And this will be India's gift to the world. For the key problem of man, whether as an individual or a



social being, is the problem of harmony. And it is doubtful if economics, law, bureaucracy can solve this tangle that has ever belied man's hopes of an ideal world. A semblance of order is not harmony as we are only beginning to learn in the west and east alike. For while order is an external thing, a frontage and often a façade, harmony is intrinsic, ingrained as the most fundamental need of the psyche. And there is no need in nature to which it does not provide the means of fulfilment. Today, we see a humanity suffering with an excess of money and an excess of science, even as it suffered in the past with poverty and a lack of material control. All problems, whether of health, unity, disparity, law, commerce, cultural diversity, religious fanaticism arise from a single fundamental issue. In one word, man's pathology can be termed 'disharmony'.

#### THE DHARMA OF THE NATION

What then is spiritual nationalism and how would it work to solve the problem that mankind faces as a race? Let us attempt to strike a few notes of the music of Nationalism.

A fundamental thing to understand is that harmony is not possible unless there is a central aim. Merely grouping diverse elements together without a common purpose and goal is to create a confusion and a crowd. A corollary to this is that an aim which is not wide enough to integrate the diverse strands of human aspiration will not be able to create a lasting harmony. To unite people for a common economic interest is to reduce the nation to a market-place. Similarly to exclude the best and the highest that a nation can conceive and realise is to be satisfied with the crumbs and leave out the loaf that would nourish. The highest and the widest that a nation has ever conceived, or is potentially capable of, is then the aim of Nationalism. Let such an ideal be placed before the nation and the harmony will follow. And what is the highest and the widest that man in his awakened conception of life has ever envisaged? Freedom, yes, but not merely economic freedom, nor merely a freedom of speech and expression. For there is even that dangerous idea of freedom to follow one's own whims and fancies of desire; the freedom to roll in the mud and the mire and the freedom to die even under the slavery of an ignorant impulse and perverted thought. Such a freedom is not freedom but an extreme form of slavery to one's lowest self. *Svādhīn*, the Indian word rich with possibilities, comes to help us. To be subject to one's highest Self (*sva*) is freedom. To have mastery and governance over oneself is freedom (*svarāja*). To see the nation live and grow for the sake of the Self is freedom (*svadeśa*).

If freedom is one strain of human aspiration, equality is another. But equality is not merely economic parity even as it is not mechanical uniformity. It is childish to believe that mankind will develop equality without developing simultaneously the sense of fraternity. Similarly, to raise one group forcibly at the expense of others is not social justice. It is as if two wrongs made a right. To correct a wrong, one has to go to the source of it. The evil of social and other inequality arises not because of religion as

we have hastily presumed. It arises rather because of man's greed for money and lust for power on one hand and inertia on the other. It arises also because of a fundamental misidentification of man with his limited circle of religion, caste, friends, status, nation, race, party and other forms of ego. As long as this misidentification lasts, the gospel of equality will only be a vain chimera. And certainly equality is not a blotting out of the variation and diversity that is the boon of nature to all life. There again, the Sanskrit word *samatā* helps us. *Samatā* is a balance of the whole, a balance where each thing has its just and rightful place in the total scheme of life. And this *samatā* itself is a function of the Self—for only one who can see the Self in all and all in and for the Self can truly realise oneness and equality. It is only such a one who can administer true justice and not that which passes today under its name. To force a mental idea of oneness and equality without the experience of its reality may well be disastrous.

As with freedom, unity and equality, so with science, arts, crafts, music, architecture, management, medicine and all the rest. All these can only be a varied form of manifestation of the one Self that takes delight in throwing itself out in a myriad forms. Science would not be science if it confined itself to merely a few laws and processes of matter and missed out the vast domain of a deeper functioning that true knowledge can offer. Art would not be art if it merely captured figures and forms without being able to breathe the life of the Spirit into it. Music too would be a lifeless and degrading amusement if it did not manifest the Beauty of the Unseen and the harmonies of the Unknown. Medicine, dealing with doctors, drugs and diseases on a Cartesian mechanistic model, would not heal unless it rooted the sick again into the Self (*svāsthya*). For it is the Self that is the source of health, and free from all diseases. A nation too would not be a nation if we looked upon it merely as a geography of rivers and mountains or a history of rulers and states. Rather we must see and worship it as a living presence, a spiritual reality—a mother whose body and mind has framed our body and mind, a giver of our needs, a nourisher of our weak and struggling souls, a protector and a guide ever willing to lead us.

As within the Nation, so beyond it. Internationalism is not merely a clash of national egos. It is the spirit of variation found in Nature based on the essence of oneness. Nature itself works along these lines—a common unit—the electron, atom, cell, gene—and an infinite variation coming out of it. A durable unity and a lasting harmony with its infinite richness of variation can arise only around a centre that can integrate all. Where is such a centre? If there is none such then surely there is no point in hoping for a harmony. But, apart from a limited logic based on the little-known, our heart, the heart of the race, seeks precisely such a centre. And which other nation than India can better provide an example and show to the world its true centre? Yes, the centre of the earth, of a nation or of man is not the ego, not the external man, not science, not economics, not philosophy, but the Self, the Spirit, God.

## THE IDEAL TO BE FOLLOWED

But how are we going to apply this knowledge? Certainly not by force, nor by legislation, not even by propaganda and the cult of the Church, of the creed, of theologians. The first necessity of course is to want it. How can we give to others what we do not have? To give a doctrine to the world without making a sincere effort to live it often ends in a fiasco, grand though it may be. But to shun it as impossible is to shut the only door of wisdom and say No in our hearts even while our lips mumble the slogans of 'unity in diversity', 'secularism', 'world peace', etc., etc. We may fool man's mind but not his heart, least of all man's soul, for this is the demand of the Time-Spirit, this the mandate of the hour. We may gloat over victories but let us not forget that the greatness of an ideal is not judged by the numbers accepting it nor even by its apparent failures. All these only work to purify and strengthen the ideal. So the first thing is to keep our ideal straight and clean. At the turn of this century, Sri Aurobindo, speaking of Nationalism, observed.

"To recover Indian thought, Indian character, Indian perceptions, Indian energy, Indian greatness, and to solve the problems that perplex the world in an Indian spirit and from the Indian standpoint, this in our view is the mission of Nationalism."

And what has been the Indian spirit, its dharma, the law of its evolution since India was born? Certainly not the illusionism of the ascetic, nor the blind materialism of the atheist. It is the conquest of life by the spirit, it is the expression of the Eternal in time. This insistence upon the spiritual change is the keynote of India. And the long history of India has been a witness to it; to divorce it from polity in the garb of secularism is to cripple the nation. But we have expelled spirituality by the Constitutional Law, replaced the ancient Veda by the so-called modernist's holy book and bartered the gods, exchanging them for lesser men, projecting their larger-than-life image upon the screen of our human ignorance. Let us remember, lest we forget, that India, the true India, is reflected in Bharata and Janaka, in Vyasa and Valmiki, in Bankim and Dayananda, in the countless sages and Vibhutis and Avatars who have been the founders and silent builders of this unique and mighty civilisation. It is the India of Sri Aurobindo. To ignore this fact is to ignore the very fount and source of the Indian ethos and its indomitable spirit. Such a blindness can only lead to a fall of character and the aims and ideals that hold a nation together. It is this that is reflected in the corruption, nepotism and goondism that are rampant today. And no constitution, no assembly bill, can help us administer this. For mere science or mere economy can build structures but not man. And what we need is to build man. For if man grows, then the nation grows, the world grows. This is the secret that India possesses and must recover so that it may deliver it to the world. Not in isolated individuals, for that it has always done, but as a race. Let us then replace the false ideals set before the nation by the true ones—ideals which symbolise "Indianness". This certainly does not mean religious fanaticism, for religion is a thing of ordinary life seeking the Spirit in ignorance. It means to lay the foundations of a spiritual life, not a spirituality that runs away from life out of fear or

disgust but a spirituality that is courageous enough to admit and conquer life. This is *Sanatana Dharma*. Call it by any name, but the Truth is Eternal and even returns and prevails in the cycles of its self-manifestation and self-fulfilment.

It means a reorientation of the national life by the spiritual principles and truths that govern all life. It means a reorientation of education so as to provide a strong basis in our mind, feelings and body for the manifestation of the spiritual truths, not conversion and baptism, but a spiritual foundation and outlook in man. It means a redistribution of wealth so that all may have a simple but reasonable richness of life commensurate with richness of thought and feeling, not luxury that impoverishes by abundance. It means a sociology that does not treat the saint and the sinner on a par as outcasts and abnormal freaks but as souls evolved or evolving or trapped in the meshes of their own nature. It means an art not pursued for a career but as a spontaneous means of our inner being to express the All-Beautiful. It means a science not confined to material truths alone, but diving deep to bring out greater and higher truths of the spirit with matter itself to provide a greater control and mastery over earthly life. It means an industry that is eco-friendly and uses technology for relieving human suffering rather than entering into a blind commercialism. And such a spiritual approach will not shirk war either, if that be necessary as an inevitable interlude for the larger interests of peace and human dignity, freedom and sovereignty.

In such a Nationalism, there will be a place for everybody, even for the many who criticise and do not accept the ideal. But the nation and its policies will certainly not play to the tune of those who turn to meaner and narrower aims and lesser goals. Politically, it would mean the coming together of parties not out of common group-interest or common group-aims as they do today, but out of a common national aim. The first step will need a rethinking of our national objective and ideology; maybe even a re-look at the constitution involving not only the Members of Parliament but also the Members outside the Parliament, all who would care for Indian resurgence and feel its spirit and have tried to imbibe and absorb it; not only the elect but also the select few.

Thus alone can the nation begin to become one cohesive unit. Such an effort, even if it meets a setback or a failure because of the resistance of human stupidity and inertia unwilling to change, would yet lay the concrete basis for the superstructure of Indian Nationalism. For the foundation and the pillars and the raw material are already there. And there is also the call. We have only to open our hearts and hear.

What better moment can there be to start such a process of national resurgence, reviving the spirit of Indian Nationalism, calling a sincere nation-wide dialogue of the best in the country, above all considerations of party and politics, than the coming 50th year of India's rebirth coinciding with the 125th birth anniversary of the Prophet of Indian Nationalism, Sri Aurobindo? The call given by Sri Aurobindo to all who would care to listen still stands valid and fresh, beckoning India to peaks of true glory and horizons of genuine splendour.

“Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new

world, not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the west as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a complete truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity."

ALOK PANDEY

# A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

## 106. THE SELLER OF GRASS

ON the Southern bank of the Vellar was situated a prosperous and populous town called Irukku Velur. The town housed the hero of our story. He was born in an immensely rich family and was allowed to spend freely in any manner he liked.

But our hero was a very reasonable man and he never wasted even the smallest coin on the pleasures of the world which the youths of his time loved. He, being a devotee of Lord Siva, loved to spend his time in the temple and his money on the proper maintenance of the temple.

Lord Siva, as we all know, very much liked to put his devotees to severe tests before He took them to His abode. And so bad days were awaiting our hero.

Coins, be they gold or silver, are usually round in shape and wise men say that it is because they are destined to run from one coffer to another. And all the gold and silver coins from our hero's coffer rolled into the coffers of oil and ghee merchants, for he took upon himself the lighting service in the temples of God.

Days passed. In the service of the Lord, he lost all his wealth and became a pauper. All those who had bowed before him once, now began to look down upon him. Unable to bear their insulting looks, our hero moved to Chidambaram, where he worshipped Lord Natarajar.

Our hero's wallet was no doubt very thin, but his will was very strong.

He was unable to resist the temptation of lighting the lamps in the temples. But where was the money?

"Where is the money? All that I can do is beg," he said to himself.

"Beg? Aren't you ashamed?" something in him reprimanded.

"Well! I can't think of any other source to keep the lamps burning."

"Be prepared to toil and sweat and earn the money you need," suggested the something in him.

Our hero decided not to beg, but to earn the money. From that day on he went out to the woods to cut *kanampul*<sup>1</sup> and sell the same.

With the money so earned, he happily fulfilled his heart's desire.

And our hero came to be known as Kanampullar, the grass cutter.

Kanampullar's joy of lighting the lamps in the temple didn't last long.

One evening with a load of grass weighing heavily on his head, Kanampullar was hawking in the streets for several hours. His throat went dry but he couldn't sell even a blade of grass.

Kanampullar didn't lose hope. What if he had no money? He had the will to do service to the Lord.

He made several small torches out of the heavy load of grass and began to burn

1 A variety of thick grass used as roofing instead of coconut fronds

them He was happy to drive darkness from the temple, though for a short while

By midnight, not a blade of grass was left and even the last torch that was burning seemed to tell him that it might die out any moment

Kanampullar was in a fix He was sure that in another few seconds darkness would engulf the temple All the struggles to drive darkness away from the temple would end in a fiasco and thereby defeat him

The flame in the last torch was slowly dying out All of a sudden his face glowed with an idea. He was sure to keep darkness away for some more time

Kanampullar thought of the living thread on his head. It was customary of him to keep his long hair rolled into a bun. He untied the knot that held his hair and his long hair unrolled itself

He held his hair against the flickering flame and set it ablaze

Lord Siva was quite satisfied with his devotee, indeed no one would like to burn away one's hair as it would amount to burning all one's affinities with the world

Kanampullar found his place in the abode of Lord Siva

### 107. A NOSE FOR A FLOWER

Sanga, the Queen, was squealing like a stuck pig and wriggling on the floor of the temple in pain and shame She had just lost her beautiful nose and blood was profusely flowing from the wound

The queen's cry attracted the attention of several bhaktas going round the sanctum sanctorum and curiosity drove them towards her

While the bhaktas stood helplessly watching the suffering queen, a guard said in a hurried tone "Give way. Give way... It's the king."

As the bhaktas moved back on either side and gave way, King Kazhar Chingar walked into the crowd Filled with anxiety, he squatted beside the queen and was horrified to see his noseless wife

For a minute the king stared dumbly into space He then howled "Who did it?"

Out stood a man from the crowd and said, "I, your majesty!"

The man was Seruthunaiyar, adored and respected by everyone in Thiruvavur He was a great devotee of Lord Siva and spent every waking hour in the service of the Lord

King Kazhar Chingar couldn't believe his eyes for Seruthunaiyar stood with a pruning knife in his hand

"You! Is it you? .. You mean you have cut off the queen's nose?" asked the king

"Yes Your majesty. It was me . I punished the queen for committing a sin in the temple," said Seruthunaiyar.

The king looked at him inquiringly.

"Your majesty! I saw the queen walk towards the room where we store flowers for the Lord. As you can see from here, we keep them in large wicker baskets And only

the cleanest of women are allowed to enter the room to string the flowers together into garlands for the Lord ''

''You mean my queen is not as clean as you expected?'' interrupted the king.

''No Not at all, your majesty,'' continued Seruthunaiyar, ''I am not unaware of the fact that women rarely enter the temple premises when they are not clean. But as my eyes followed the queen, she bent down to pick up a flower that had fallen out of a basket. I thought that she was picking it up only to drop it back into the basket. But to my great surprise and shock I saw her taking the flower to her nose and sniff . To smell the flower meant for the Lord is an unpardonable sin. And so I dragged her by her hair from the room to this place and punished the sinner by cutting off her nose with this pruning knife

King Kazhar Chingar's hand quickly moved towards the hilt of his sword Seruthunaiyar was not at all daunted by the movement of the king's hand He saw the king pull out his sword.

''The sinner must not go unpunished.... True!'' so saying the king held the right hand of his wife and gave a sharp blow on her wrist The hand fell to the ground as the queen winced Her golden bangles rolled away as if frightened by the gruesome action of the king.

The king continued: ''You should have cut off her hand first for picking up a flower meant for the Lord, before you cut off her nose for smelling it.''

Seruthunaiyar bowed before the king and said in all humility, ''You are the best of devotees, your majesty! the best.''

''Lord Siva is my first love I can't bear to see anyone insult my first love in any manner,'' said King Kazhar Chingar looking at his ailing wife

*(More legends on the way)*

P RAJA



## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

*Vyasa's Savitri*, by R. Y. Deshpande. Published by Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry Price Rs. 60. Pp. 133.

SRI AUROBINDO'S epic *Savitri* has the subtitle *A Legend and a Symbol*. Hence in order to understand the symbol it is necessary to know the legend, especially when the legend is a part of the Mahabharata of the great poet Vyasa. It has been found meaningful enough by Sri Aurobindo to be a poetic vehicle for his spiritual odyssey. It is in this context that the present book, the third on the subject by the author, comes as a valuable contribution to the true appreciation of *Savitri* which, in the words of Yogi Krishnaprem, is "neither subjective fantasy nor yet mere philosophical thought but vision and revelation of the actual inner structure of the cosmos and of the pilgrim of life within the sphere Bhu, Bhuvah, Swah. the stairway of worlds reveals itself to our gaze—worlds of Light above, worlds of Darkness beneath—and we see also ever-circling life ascending and descending that stair under the calm unwinking gaze of the cosmic Gods who shine forth now as of old."

The main part of the book is taken up by the translation of the tale of Savitri as narrated in Sanskrit by Vyasa in the Mahabharata. And this is no easy task since the style of the original has the austere beauty and majestic grandeur of mountain peaks. But the author is a poet too, and he rises to meet the challenge with a remarkable measure of success. His prose translation is smooth and limpid, chaste and easy-flowing, and quite often achieves the sonorous rhythm of compositions in Sanskrit, the language of the gods. He never forces a pedantic meaning from a word to suit his purpose: even when one disagrees with his translations of some words or phrases—and this is very rare—one admires the easy ingenuity which has gone into it. I may quote an instance: the word 'bhrahmanya' occurs thrice in the poem but each time in a different context and he is conscious enough of the difference and hence gives a different meaning each time. Or the way in which he has translated 'satyasandha' सत्यसन्ध comes as a happy departure from its conventional meaning: the conventional meaning is 'one true to his word', while the author translates it as 'one who is united with the truth'. Sanskrit is an incredibly plastic language and a single word can lend itself to many meanings without violating the spirit of the language. However, it may be mentioned in passing that at times the translation of a word or a phrase fails to convey the sense faithfully, as when he translates स्वशक्त्या (in stanza 7 of Canto 2) as 'within the means at his disposal'; or गुरु as 'preceptor' (in stanza 32 of Canto 5). These could have been better translated as 'equal in strength' and 'elder', respectively.

So much for the translation, which purports to be the more important part of the work *Perspectives*, the second section of the book, is a sort of appendix

containing the author's comments on the text. But this section is truly illuminating; it is full of deep erudition, scintillating insights, profound views on the function of poetry, the destiny of man and the spirituality of the future—all steeped in the light of the Aurobindonian vision, and hence a fruitful preparation to the understanding of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. As a result, the comments leave as strong an impression on the mind of the reader as the text, and perhaps a wider world-view, since it is a flame lit from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* itself.

The first few pages relate the story of *Savitri* in a simple and dignified style, a style which is deliberately not exactly King's English but no less chaste and possessed of a quaint beauty, it is evocative of the Sanskrit style of narration. This portion acquires an added value and interest because it is richly interspersed with thoughtful and luminous observations on the poetic style and vision of Vyasa. The author, moreover, brings it within the easy grasp of the reader by bringing before him a comparative view of the story of Vyasa as given by others, such as an unnamed writer in the children's section of a daily, Kamala Subramaniam, McDowell in *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, and Dowson's entry under 'Savitri' in *Hindu Mythology and Religion*. At the end of this brief study, the unrivalled greatness of Vyasa in narrating the tale emerges with convincing clarity. He quotes from Sri Aurobindo to point out that the tale of *Savitri* is "one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle" and yet it "is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces." Sri Aurobindo further asserts "that originally the Mahabharata story was also symbolic." The author rightly concludes from Sri Aurobindo's remarks that "the legend has therefore a certain historical basis as well.. ."

In the section *Perspectives* the author discusses the concept of the poet as a seer and a hearer of the truth-word. It is in the light of this ideal that the author offers us a most impressive criticism of the tale by Vyasa in a style which rises to epigrammatic clarity and pith clothed in enchanting beauty of poetry, e.g. "the ends and means fuse in one gleamingly suggestive manner", or "its substance is spirit and its ethereality is material", or "life and death move in one fulfilment"

In the course of his criticism, the author discusses the source of the poetic inspiration of Vyasa. While presenting salient characteristics of his style, including his wonderful sense of detachment, he compares this detachment with another kind of detachment, in Shakespeare. The author's elaboration of how Vyasa's *Savitri* is written on three levels—"a piece of poetic composition narrating a tale, the tale used to illustrate and establish truth-values in life, the legend and the myth taken on an occult-cosmic scale"—is an original interpretation. It successfully restores *Savitri* from being a romantic story of conjugal devotion and its power over death to a symbolic legend of cosmic connotation belonging to the Vedic cycle. This has, after a lapse of many thousand years, reincarnated in all its splendour in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. *Vyasa's Savitri* is truly

a book to be read and meditated upon, as Bacon would say, to be chewed and digested; to go through it is a rewarding experience.

The book is neatly printed, reasonably priced and attractively got up. The beauty of the get-up is much enhanced by the exquisite cover photograph of a bunch of Palasha flowers by Gangaram Malawade, an Ashram photographer. These flowers, according to the Mother, signify the 'Beginning of Supramental Realisation' In the story, Satyavan has just undergone the experience of death and is revived by the boon of Yama. While Satyavan and Savitri are preparing to return from the forest to the hermitage, he tells her to take the path near the group of Palasha trees, turning towards the north. *Uttara* conventionally means north but the author, with a flash of insight, correctly interprets it as "upward, superior, surpassing. .." Thus it perhaps signifies the Vedic spiritual path of the "Everlasting Yes". *Savitri* is a symbol of this realisation. What can be more apt than that the book should have these flowers on its cover?

USHA and DHANANJAY DESAI

## *Students' Section*

### **LAKSHMI**

HER whole future stretched untrodden in front of her as she lay on her back and dreamily looked around the room

She had been awakened a few minutes earlier by the tinkling of the puja bells. Her grandmother was very particular about performing the rituals for the sacred hours of the day. The sun had risen half an hour back but the puja continued! Warm sunlight flooded in through the huge windows. As the sweet fragrance of agarbathis and jasmine floated in through a short silence, the melodious chantings began.

She rolled to one side and smiled suddenly. She was looking at her father's coat that hung from the rack. Mr. Ayar, her father, had agreed to work for the East India Company and only after long arguments with his wife had he bought this European coat.

The bells were heard again while the chantings continued. As the puja entered its final stages, the sound of conches resounded through the house. The puja completed, the air was filled with the buzzing of household activities.

She yawned lazily and stretched her arms. Still drowsy, her eyes fell on the picture of Lakshmi. Having consulted several astrologers, her parents had finally named her after this Goddess of Wealth hoping that she would bring prosperity to their house.

At her birth everyone had been greatly disappointed. During the pregnancy, Lakshmi's mother had gone to the Vishnu temple regularly to pray for a son—someone who would one day inherit his father's property and bring honour and glory to the family name.

Instead SHE was born.

Lakshmi's mother had cursed herself silently wondering whether she had been insincere. Now the entire burden of finding a suitable husband, of paying a handsome dowry lay heavily on the family.

This was the topic of discussion at the breakfast table this morning. A few visiting relatives eagerly offered their suggestions on this matter. An aunt had first voiced the question on everybody's mind. "Have you already fixed a bridegroom for your daughter?" she asked expectantly. Her son was a young man and it was a common practise to marry within the family.

Lakshmi's father diplomatically tried to side-step the issue but an elderly uncle persisted, "You know well enough the laws of marriage in our custom." He didn't repeat it but everyone present knew what he was referring to—a girl was supposed to marry her mother's brother. Irritated by this reminder, her father thought, "This rascal has always eyed my money, now he wants it through my daughter's dowry." But aloud he said, "Yes, yes I remember it well enough."

Though they had not yet chosen their prospective son-in-law, Lakshmi's parents had already decided one night how much gold they would keep in reserve for their

daughter's marriage. The family gold, kept safely in the almīrah, was not sufficient for the growing standards of the Brahmin class.

At the dining table, they were still discussing Lakshmi's marriage proposals when breakfast was carried in by the ammas. Plates of fuming idlis, dosas and fresh coconut chutney were laid out on the table. The delicious aroma of hot sambar filled the room and gave everyone an immediate appetite.

Lakshmi was becoming restless. The delicious smell of sambar had drifted into her room and she was beginning to get hungry.

Just then the door opened. Her mother, as if reading her thoughts, entered carrying breakfast.

She approached the bed and Lakshmi gurgled gleefully as she was lifted out of the cradle.

ANURADHA  
(Age 19)

(The story was written as an assignment for the first year English Class  
of the Higher Course at Knowledge.)