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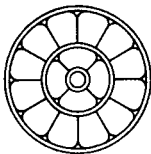
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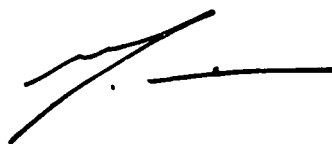


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

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. LI

No. 10

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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WELL HAST THOU DONE...

BUT Narad answered not, silent he sat,
Knowing that words are vain and Fate is lord
He looked into the unseen with seeing eyes,
Then, dallying with the mortal's ignorance
Like one who knows not, questioning, he cried:
"On what high mission went her hastening wheels?
Whence came she with this glory in her heart
And Paradise made visible in her eyes?
What sudden God has met, what face supreme?"
To whom the king, "The red asoca watched
Her going forth which now sees her return
Arisen into an air of flaming dawn
Like a bright bird tired of her lonely branch
To find her own lord, since to her on earth
He came not yet, this sweetness wandered forth
Cleaving her way with the beat of her rapid wings
Led by a distant call her vague swift flight
Threaded the summer morns and sunlit lands.
The happy rest her burdened lashes keep
And these charmed guardian lips hold treasured still.
Virgin who comest perfected by joy,
Reveal the name thy sudden heart-beats learned
Whom hast thou chosen kingliest among men?"
And Savitri answered with her still calm voice
As one who speaks beneath the eyes of Fate
"Father and king, I have carried out thy will,
One whom I sought I found in distant lands,
I have obeyed my heart, I have heard its call.
On the borders of a dreaming wilderness
Mid Shalwa's giant hills and brooding woods,
In his thatched hermitage Dyumathsena dwells,
Blind, exiled, outcast, once a mighty king.
The son of Dyumathsena, Satyavan
I have met on the wild forest's lonely verge
My father, I have chosen. This is done."
Astonished, all sat silent for a space
Then Aswapati looked within and saw
A heavy shadow float above the name
Chased by a sudden and stupendous light,
He looked into his daughter's eyes and spoke.

"Well hast thou done and I approve thy choice
 If this is all, then all is surely well;
 If there is more, then all can still be well.
 Whether it seem good or evil to men's eyes,
 Only for good the secret Will can work.
 Our destiny is written in double terms
 Through Nature's contraries we draw near God,
 Out of the darkness we still grow to light.
 Death is our road to immortality
 'Cry woe, cry woe,' the world's lost voices wail,
 Yet conquers the eternal Good at last."
 Then might the sage have spoken, but the king
 In haste broke out and stayed the dangerous word
 "O singer of the ultimate ecstasy,
 Lend not a dangerous vision to the blind,
 Because by native right thou hast seen clear.
 Impose not on the mortal's tremulous breast
 The dire ordeal that foreknowledge brings;
 Demand not now the godhead in our acts...
 To light one step in front is all his hope
 And only for a little strength he asks
 To meet the riddle of his shrouded fate
 Awaited by a vague and half-seen force,
 Aware of danger to his uncertain hours
 He guards his flickering yearnings from her breath;
 He feels not when the dreadful fingers close
 Around him with the grasp none can elude
 If thou canst loose her grip then only speak,
 Perhaps from the iron snare there is escape:
 Our mind perhaps deceives us with its words
 And gives the name of doom to our own choice,
 Perhaps the blindness of our will is Fate.'"

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, Revised Edition, 1993, pp 423-25)

NB We have been putting *Savitri*-passages at the beginning of each issue of *Mother India* since October 1996
 Perceptive readers must have noticed the sequence unfolding through these pages, about *Savitri* as presented to us by Sri
 Aurobindo It is actually her spiritual biography given to us by the poet in his epic The titles for the selections have been
 provided by us —Editor

WORSHIP YE OM

ओमित्येतदक्षरमुद्गीथमुपासोत । ओपिति ह्युद्गायति तस्योपव्याख्यानम् ॥१॥

1. Worship ye OM, the eternal syllable, OM is Udgitha, the chant of Sama-veda; for with OM they begin the chant of Sama And this is the exposition of OM.

एषा भूताना पृथिवी रस पृथिव्या आपो रस ।
अपामोषधयो रस ओषधीना पुरुषो रस पुरुषस्य वाग्रसो वाच
ऋग्रस ऋच साम रस साम्न उद्गीथो रस ॥२॥

- 2 Earth is the substantial essence of all these creatures and the waters are the essence of earth; herbs of the field are the essence of the waters, man is the essence of the herbs Speech is the essence of man, Rig-veda the essence of Speech, Sama the essence of Rik Of Sama OM is the essence

स एष रसानां रसतमं परमं परार्थोऽष्टमो यदुद्गीथः ॥३॥

3. This is the eighth essence of the essences and the really essential, the highest and it belongs to the upper hemisphere of things.

कतमा कतमर्कं कतमत् कतमत्साम कतमं कतमं उद्गीथ इति विमृष्टं भवति ॥४॥

4. Which among things and which again is Rik; which among things and which again is Sama, which among things and which again is OM of the Udgitha—this is now pondered.

वागेवर्कं प्राणं सामोमित्येतदक्षरमुद्गीथः । तद्वा एतन्मिथुनं यद्वाक्च प्राणश्चर्कं च सामं च ॥५॥

- 5 Speech is Rik, Breath is Sama; the Imperishable is OM of Udgitha. These are the divine lovers, Speech and Breath, Rik and Sama

तदेतन्मिथुनमोमित्येतस्मिन्नक्षरे ससृज्यते यदा वै मिथुनौ समागच्छत आपयतो वै तावन्योन्यस्य कामम् ॥६॥

6. As a pair of lovers are these and they cling together in OM the eternal syllable; but now when the beloved and her lover meet, verily, they gratify each the desire of the other

आपयिता ह वै कामानां भवति य एतदेवं विद्वानक्षरमुद्गीथमुपास्ते ॥७॥

- 7 He becomes a gratifier of the desires of men who with this knowledge worships OM the eternal syllable

तद्वा एतदनुज्ञाक्षर यद्वि किं चानुजानात्योमित्येव तदाह एषा एव समृद्धिर्यदनुज्ञा ।
समर्धयिता ह वै कामाना भवति य एतदेव विद्वानक्षरमुद्गीथमुपास्ते ॥८॥

- 8 Now this OM is the syllable of Assent; for to whatsoever one assents, one says OM, and assent is blessing of increase Verily he becomes a blesser and increaser of the desires of men who with this knowledge worships OM the eternal syllable

तेनेय त्रयी विद्या वर्तत ओमित्याश्रावयत्योमिति शसत्योमित्युद्गायत्येतस्यैवाक्षरस्यापचित्यै महिम्ना रसेन ॥९॥

- 9 By OM the triple knowledge proceeds; with OM the priest recites the Rik, with OM he pronounces the Yajur, with OM he chants the Sama And all this is for the heaping up of the Imperishable and by the greatness of It and the Delightfulness

तेनोभौ कुरुतो यश्चैतदेव वेद यश्च न वेद ।
नाना तु विद्या चाविद्या च यदेव विद्यया करोति श्रद्धयोपनिषदा
तदेव वीर्यवत्तर भवतीति खल्वेतस्यैवाक्षरस्योपव्याख्यान भवति ॥१०॥

- 10 He does works by OM who has the knowledge, and he also who has it not, but these are diverse, the Knowledge and the Ignorance Whatsoever work one does with knowledge, with faith and with the secret of Veda, it becomes to him more virile and mighty This is the exposition of the Eternal letters

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol 12. pp 385-87)

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of September 1998)

My dear Mother,

I shall not be in a hurry for harmony, but it is not pleasant to remain in conflict, inner or outer, with someone, it brings so many difficulties into the work

SURELY we must always want the peace and the harmony and work for it as much as we can—but for that the best field of action is always inside ourselves.

Love and blessings to my dear child.

6 October 1935

My dear Mother,

Let the play of the ego disappear completely In my case, I know very well that there is pride, arrogance, likes and dislikes There is also a part of me that wants to be big and great—it is ambition

My dear Mother, may I become a humble doer of Thy Work

Yes, my dear child, in truth, sincere humility is our safeguard—it is the surest way to the indispensable dissolution of the ego

Always with you on the way

6 October 1935

My dear Mother,

The other day when I wrote to You about saving expenses if there is war in Europe, I meant this.

Milk. one cup instead of three Not three plantains but one No washerman at all—we can wash our own clothes. No servants. No pocket money—people may not go to the theatre or cinema or buy all sorts of things for pleasure

Surely if France or England entered the war we would be obliged to do that For the moment it is not yet necessary

9 October 1935

My dear Mother,

Confidence in the Guru is the key to Victory Lack of confidence brings complete failure Confidence, confidence, may an utter confidence in the Divine increase in the Ashram

Yes, it is so absurd to ask for help and yet to have no trust! On the contrary with confidence everything becomes so easy

Always with you, my dear child

12 October 1935

My dear Mother,

I am quietly happy, yet the fire in me is becoming more and more intense every day. May a deep quietness and Peace remain behind the intensity of the fire

Yes, the true Agni always burns in deep Peace, it is the fire of an all-conquering will.

Let it grow in you, in deep equanimity.

Always with you, my dear child

13 October 1935

My dear Mother,

May the Divine Patience grow in me True patience can grow only in the true knowledge and consciousness and in full confidence in the Divine.

If the mind remains more quiet in front of circumstances and happenings the patience will be more easily increased

All love and blessings to you, my dear child

15 October 1935

My dear Mother,

May peace and confidence come into the exterior being, may the mind be filled with quietness and trust in You, in Your words and actions.

It is only love that can understand and get at the secrets of the Divine Working. The mind, the physical mind especially, is incapable of seeing correctly and yet it always wants to judge. It is only a true sincere humility in the mind allowing the psychic to rule the being, that can save human beings from ignorance and obscurity

Always with you, my dear child.

16 October 1938

My dear Mother,

In these monsoon rains and winds, the cart goes for food distribution thrice a day. The servants give more service than their due time (9 hours), get drenched three times a day and yet not a murmur from them. I feel a happy relation with them.

Yes, it is very good. The servants may be given a tip after the rain is over. You might give it to them yourself as an encouragement.

Recently F is getting very troubled by what people say about her. Often the idea enters her head. "I am bad, I am unfit," etc.

Yes, I will tell her not to mind what people say. In fact I do not know why she is attaching so much importance to all that—so long as we are pleased with her, it ought to be sufficient

18 October 1935

My dear Mother,

I have always observed that whenever there is some heavy work or extra work to do, somebody or the other falls into a bad depression and it increases the work. The attack of depression comes either directly or through others. I have to remain firm, quiet, unshaken and full of confidence in the Divine.

Yes, when there is an attack it is general and always the blows come on all sides. But the more it strikes the more we must remain calm and undisturbed.

22 October 1935

My dear Mother,

About the present conflict in the Dining Room. As far as I understand it, the reason is this: the workers want to have freedom of action and they feel suffocated under my pressure

It is not under *your* pressure, it is under the pressure of discipline. These people refuse to be disciplined and that is why there is such a confusion.

Forgive me for the wrongs done by me in the D R and the Ashram

I see no wrongs to be forgiven.

26 October 1935

(To be continued)

OMNI-REALISM

SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS A KEY TO THE PROBLEM OF PERCEPTION

(Continued from the issue of September 1998)

A VARIANT of the circular reasoning we have exposed is a group of arguments often adduced in modern books on epistemology to show that our senses break up and distort the impression which external objects make on them, so that when “the mind reconstructs their impressions into an object”, the latter in no way resembles the object external to us “All these arguments,” Cohen justly remarks, “rest on the assumption that we know that there are objects, what they are, and how they act on the other physical objects that we call sense-organs. If these assumptions are true we have true knowledge of the external (*i.e.*, physical) world to begin with, as conditions of our knowledge of the facts of perception. If these assumptions are false, the whole argument about the nature of sense-perception loses its basis and therefore its conclusiveness.”

If we talk in terms of sense-organs, the objectivity of none of the qualities can be gainsaid. But let us beware of superficialising this statement into a commonsense conclusion. When we understand that qualities of each kind are perceived differently in different circumstances, we are led far beyond commonsense. At a distance, a hill is seen to be purple, at a closer range, it turns out to be green. A coin, seen from one angle, has an oval shape, from another it appears round. A minar appears to have various heights according as it is observed from this place or that. When, then, is the real quality of a thing or object? Why should one distance, angle or place be considered privileged to yield the real quality? Evidently, on its own merits it cannot. Besides, to consider it privileged is in itself an illegitimate procedure. Suppose we say that the real height of a minar is obtained by putting a tape-measure pressed against the minar's surface. Immediately the query becomes pertinent. How do we know that the length which we attribute to the tape-measure and which we take to be the true criterion of the minar's height is the tape-measure's real length? Obviously, it is the length got by putting another tape-measure pressed against the first one's surface. If that is so, we have already taken for granted what we have to prove—namely, that the true height is obtained by pressing a means of measurement against the surface of a thing! This will never do. And if no distance, angle or place can be considered privileged, an object must be regarded as possessing all the qualities, however contradictory among themselves, which in different circumstances are observed. A hill is not really green and merely observed as purple—it is purple as well as green. Similarly, a coin is oval no less than round, a minar is both five feet and fifty feet high. If we grant that objects must be possessing the different qualities we perceive under different circumstances, this omni-qualified character of objects cannot be denied.

To escape, even while conceding this character, the utter objectivity of all qualities observed on any particular occasion, the reader may suggest that in perception we have something or other of the actual qualities of an object and the rest is a construct due to the nature of our consciousness. Such a suggestion, however, is meaningless. What is the proof that the something or other which is said to be revealed of an object's actual qualities is not also a construct? If we speak of a construct, there is no possibility of logically drawing a line and saying "Here and here in the qualities the construct begins" All that a quality is is equally a part of perception: within perception there is nothing intrinsic to demarcate the construct from the non-construct. Everything, inasmuch as it is a part of perception, can be taken as a construct and every dividing line we draw is, from the viewpoint of strict logic, quite gratuitous. A quality, in its state of fourfold relation, cannot be split up: it is one whole and either all of it is a non-construct or all of it is a construct. The gratuitousness of splitting it up is analogous to that which was pointed out by Berkeley in connection with the supposed difference of status between primary and secondary qualities. There is as much reason to consider all parts of perception to be a construct as to consider any one part of it to be such. We may plead that commonsense demands that the construct should begin somewhere and not cover the whole of perception. But commonsense is not philosophical logic. If we are to be strict philosophers we must either be construct-"wallahs" all through or throw construction completely into the dustbin.

Is there any escape by holding that, though it would be illegitimate to privilege any particular colour or shape or size as the something or other which is an object's actual quality, we can at least pronounce the object to be possessing colour or shape or size as the basis on which we make constructs? There is certainly no escape. If an object has colour or shape or size, the colour must be purple or green or yellow or some other specific shade, the shape must be oval or round or square or some other specific form, the size must be five feet or fifty feet or five hundred feet or some other specific measurement. Whenever an object has a quality it is never without a particular aspect. An object may seem purple to you, green to me, blue to a third party, but if it has colour it must have for any party at a particular time and place a particular colour or mixed. Hence we may asseverate that it has a different colour in different circumstances or that it is omni-coloured and different circumstances reveal purple or green or blue or anything else, but we can never say that it is neither purple nor green nor blue nor anything else and has simply nothing except colour.

As long as we talk in terms of sense-organs we can never refuse to any quality an utter objectiveness uncrossed by even the shadow of a construct. When we stop talking thus, two types of arguments confront us. But before tackling them we must face one that is an intermediate type and has the air of being scientific. The scientific argument runs: "Science has reduced everything to a play of energy. Our sense-organs as well as the objects stimulating them are parts of a whole which is a network of energies. When the energy-formation which is an object gets into contact with the energy-formation which is a sense-organ a message is sent to our consciousness and this message is

interpreted by our consciousness as a quality of what we call matter—say, the quality of being hard. Hardness and, in fact, all that we call materiality—is neither of the two energy-formations: it comes into being only when owing to the contact of the two formations a message reaches our consciousness. There is certainly something in the object which results in this particular quality and not any other, and in this respect hardness is not purely a mental construct but only the mind's interpretation of some characteristic 'out there'. Yet hardness as such is just a term of experience and what is 'out there' is merely some characteristic of energy-formation and not of what we call matter. If this consciousness could make a different response, the quality would not be hardness, though the characteristic or energy-formation may remain the same."

Is this description logically sound? First of all, to say that science has reduced everything to a play of energy is misleading. If science has found energy to be the ultimate constituent of matter, matter does not cease to exist as an objective reality. Even if all matter could be transformed into energy, its apparent annihilation would not imply that previously it did not have an objective existence. It is only by analysing matter that science can even arrive at energy as matter's ultimate constituent. Without the objective existence of matter with qualities which are usually ascribed to it and out of which "hardness" is one, energy which is said to constitute matter would never be objective. If matter is no more than an "interpretation" by the mind, its constituent can be nothing except a subtler term of "interpretation"! Science starts with qualities and must accept the hard, the red, the round, etc., as objective before it tries to discover the constituents of the "stuff", so to speak, of what is hard or red or round or anything else. If the ultimate constituent is discovered to be energy, qualities like hardness remain as objective as energy: only a different level or layer or phase of objective reality is studied. Hardness can never be deemed the mind's interpretation of something "out there" characterising an energy-formation and not a matter-formation. Both the sense-organ and the object stimulating it must be taken to be parts of a world of objective matter and of qualities like hardness or redness or hotness or sweetness. And if the consciousness could make a different response, the perceived quality, even if it were no longer hardness, would not *ipso facto* become the mind's interpretation of some characteristic of mere energy-formation outside. Whatever the quality, it would still be objective and it would be the characteristic not of mere energy-formation but of that whose constituent is energy. The difference in the quality can easily be accounted for, once we accept the omni-qualifiedness. Of course, this does not imply that the mind has no constitution and activity determinative of its range and type of perception: it must have, and we shall discuss the constitution and activity at a later stage, but its having a constitution and activity cannot be used as an argument against our conclusion that all qualities are objectively real.

(To be continued)

AMAL KIRAN
(K D SETHNA)

“INSPIRATIONS FOR PROGRESS”

(Continued from the issue of September 1998)

MAKE all things light and easy, simple and straight and happy.

Establish in all things the Right Order of Truth and avoid all useless complications that create disorder and confusion

See all things in the Light of Truth, have true perception Act in all things with a firm resolute will, have true mastery.

Constantly throw away all dark suggestions that create obscurity, weakness, confusion, disorder, unhappiness

Simply and wholly open more and more to His Light, His Power, His Laughter in all things.

Depending on Him, cast away all fear and grief

Be absolutely carefree He is with you, very close, very intensely working to remove the obstruction.

Be absolutely sure. He will set you free. He will grant you New Birth and New Life. Be cheerful and confident.

2-10-1967

*

No regret for the past

No anxiety for the future

No worry for the present.

Not to be troubled because of the defects and the difficulties, the incapacities and the failures.

Only to surrender to Him more and more with love and trust, and leave all things to Him. Always to say: “Lord, let Thy will be done!”

11-10 1967

*

To find Him and utterly to give everything to Him with love is the only important thing now.

Nothing else matters now but closeness with Him in love.

Turn to Him more and more, remember Him, love Him, serve Him more and more and simply and absolutely give up everything to Him.

Remember that He too loves you and wants you to be close and united with Him

Have no shame or guilt for any wrongs done or any defects. His Love is All-Kind, All-Forgiving, All-Understanding Expose yourself completely to Him, lay before Him all your darknesses and weaknesses, your incapacities and failures. all defects and

deficiencies and wrongs, open out completely before Him with entire trust and let Him set everything right

His Love is All-Powerful, All-Victorious—yield to It with absolute confidence, take entire refuge in It and cast away all fear and trouble and doubt and despair and guilt

Do not fold upon yourself, always turn to Him more and more and open more and more to His Love

Struggle not with your difficulties and defects in your blindness and incapacity
Simply and absolutely give them to Him with entire confidence and let Him set you free

Oh be very sure that He will set you free, He will give you His Love, He will unite you with Him. So be very calm, very confident and very deeply happy

He will disperse all darkness The bright Sun of His Love will rise in the heart and radiate its golden splendour in all life

He will give New Birth

He will bring New Life of union with Him

Be calm, confident, happy

14-10-1967

*

The most important thing is not to be hypnotised by the obstinate persistence of the difficulties of the physical consciousness

However obstinately persistent they may be the Lord's Force is sure to remove them Of this simple truth I must remain absolutely confident and, in that confidence, always peaceful and happy

Not to dwell too much upon the difficulties and obstructions, not to feel hopeless and despondent because of their persistence or recurrence, not to get fixed into the idea of my incapacity because I cannot remove them by my own effort, but with absolute trust in the All-Loving and All-Powerful and always available Help of the Lord, constantly and more and more turn towards Him, lay all before Him, surrender to Him all more and more, offer all experience to Him constantly and simply and wholly open to His All-Powerful Love—that is the thing to be done, the thing most essential, the centrally needed change in the attitude now

There is no difficulty which He cannot remove and, if I constantly remain turned to Him, surrendered and open to Him more and more, then it is absolutely certain that He will remove it

Why then any doubt or despair, or guilt or fear?

There is no weakness, no fault, no mistake or wrong-doing, that He will not forgive and set right

Why then any shame or guilt or fear?

All the troubles arise by turning upon myself, folding upon myself, remaining

fixed in the idea of my defects, my difficulties, my incapacities—this attitude must be completely changed

I must very clearly remember that He—The All-Powerful, All-Loving Lord and Friend—is always whole-heartedly with me and He will do *everything* for me if I give myself, abandon myself to Him with absolute confidence

I must now make this crucial change in my attitude.

To aspire constantly for one thing alone—integral, eternal union with Him in True Love.

To remain confident that this aspiration will be fulfilled by Him

What I must do is to keep my aspiration sincere and intense and always turn to Him, open to Him, surrender to Him more and more

And *depend on Him with absolute loving trust* that He will fulfil my aspiration.

In this trust I must remain very calm, very firm and very happy.

When and how He will fulfil my aspiration—that I must leave to Him

I must cultivate endless patience, limitless endurance, however long He may take to reveal Himself, I must remain confident that He will do so

Relying on His All-Wise Love, I must persevere with absolute happy confidence.

9-12-1967

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Do not identify yourself with the defects and weaknesses of your nature; consider yourself as separate from them.

Remain separate from them and always reject them with a clear, firm and resolute will Go on rejecting them tirelessly Eventually they will disappear

But the best and the most decisive way to get rid of them is to turn towards the Mother and offer them to Her without shame or fear. *Whatever* may be the weakness or defect or wrong-doing, do not in the least identify yourself with it and, without any fear or any shame, expose it before the Mother as before one who never blames, never punishes, never rejects, one who always loves and sympathises and understands and forgives and radically helps

Hide not your weaknesses under a cover, but courageously expose them before the Mother, give them to Her and let Her All-Powerful, All-Tender Love set you free

Do not identify yourself with your shadow, cover it not, struggle not with it, but always and more and more offer it to the Mother and pray for Her Truth-Light to deliver you from it

Do this constantly with completest reliance on the All-Forgiving, All-Kind, All-Powerful Love of the Mother.

12-12-1967

(To be continued)

KISHOR GANDHI

(Compiled by Arvind Akki)

SUNIL, THE MOTHER'S MUSICIAN

“Gem of the purest ray serene”

TODAY Sunil is known as the Mother's musician among her devotees in India as well as abroad. Jhumur, Sunil's niece, has written a short article about him in *Mother India*, June 1998. Also Huta has given her account of *Savitri* painting and music in the last issue of the monthly.

My intention is to write some unknown episodes of his early life when his family came to the Ashram and settled here. He had finished his studies in Calcutta. These episodes have nothing striking about them, but for celebrities every detail of their life becomes interesting, even though not important.

Similarly, my close association with Sri Aurobindo for several years has made my life interesting to others and gained me many friends. Earlier I was just “a decent fellow”, according to the Master!

Among all my friends, I cherished most Sunil's friendship. It was a genuine soul-friendship, simple and candid, though he was much younger than I.

Our first meeting was quite unexpected. When I heard that a young Bengali musician had come to the Ashram, I felt an inner urge to hear his music, though I did not have a keen ear for instrumental music. I invited him to my place to hear him play, though it might have been a pretext to meet him. He however accepted my invitation, perhaps because he had heard about my closeness to Sri Aurobindo. His face and appearance and demeanour had some inner charm. We parted quietly after the music to meet again only much later after Sri Aurobindo left. I do not remember exactly how our meeting was renewed. Both of us were teaching in our Centre of Education and, perhaps, while on our way to our classes we used to exchange smiles.

As a teacher he had become very popular. His teaching of mathematics and botany specially appealed to the students.

Now our friendliness took a more intimate turn. He began to invite me to enjoy Sunday morning picnics. A small group of young friends used to go out on cycles or by car with a basketful of eatables kindly supplied by Gauri, Sunil's wife. It became a regular feature for some time. I need not mention that Bengali cooking after such a lapse of time tasted like manna to me. We used to visit various beautiful spots of Pondicherry. From among these scenic memories the one that had a special attraction was the garden known as Le Faucheur. It was the Mother's property, vast in space, and varied in its botanical treasure: all kinds of trees, old and young, flower-plants of various kinds, rich in colour, strange in their growth, making the garden look like a fairy-land. A special attraction for Sunil was the opportunity to make acquaintance with various species of plants, new and old, and in various stages of growth. He used to say that even the dying trees could be regenerated by medical fluids. My medical knowledge increased to a great extent. At the end of the inspection a lovely tasty meal awaited us! Sunil always saw to it that I had the best of all the dishes.

My next attraction for his company was his love of sports, specially football games. He would invite me to some special matches of the town club and pay for my ticket. Matches between our Ashram team and local players used to take place now and then. Games were at times very rough and Sunil being a good runner had to face strong opposition. Once he fell down and fractured his right hand, which affected his playing on the harmonium. Finally, games with the outside teams had to be abandoned.

Our third attraction was learning French. We were a group of four or five elderly people. Our teacher was a local Tamil and a high Government officer who knew French very well. He was also a devotee of the Mother. He was very strict, made us learn the verb conjugations by heart, held tests and reported our quantum of progress to the Mother. Once he even showed our test papers to the Mother. Naturally, Sunil fared very well.

Later, when our athletics groups were formed, Sunil and myself came together again. One day the Mother said she would inspect our group. Sunil and I were standing side by side. As the Mother walked past us, she asked me what the French expression for "razed to the ground" was. I knew the word but could not recollect it. Quickly she asked Sunil and he answered promptly. The Mother said jokingly, "He knows French, you don't!"

The last time we were together was in the Mother's French class which used to be held in the Mother's small room in the Playground. Here too Sunil and I sat side by side having made a pact that, should he miss something, I would pick it up—for the Mother generally spoke very fast.

In the days when the Mother played tennis with us, Sunil used to come regularly to be with her and pick up the balls. At first the sports programme used to take place in the Tennis Ground and running races started early in the morning on the sea-beach. Sunil was made the referee. He used to take his seat on the street and keep a place for me beside him.

Now suddenly came a big change in Sunil's life and thereafter we rarely met. We were living in two different worlds, mine being the world of literature, creativity, sports while he devoted himself to the Mother's music. He composed music for the New Year day.

Once he asked me if I could prepare for him a summary of *Savitri*, so that he could render it into music. Alas, that was too big a demand for me and I had to decline. I heard that a big organ had arrived from Europe. Its functioning was rather complicated. One day I asked him if he would explain to me how it worked. He took a good deal of trouble to make me understand it.

Sunil was very fond of his mother and when she had left her body he had a photo taken. He showed me how in the picture Sri Aurobindo's photo could also be seen. After this, we met very rarely and we seemed to have moved away from our closeness. Anyhow, when once we met by chance, he was returning from the market in the afternoon. I noticed some difficulty in his walking. We talked about various topics and parted. Now came a long period of separation till I came to know that he was not as

strong as before and was walking with difficulty. One day while he was crossing the bridge that connects the music chamber with his main residence, his eyes suddenly fell on me down there in the Playground. He stopped to look at me with a sweet smile. Jhumur was following him.

My next contact was after two or three months when I heard that he was not keeping well. I went to see him with my nephew who was one of his favourite students. We saw him lying in his bed, he was well-dressed and was being attended on by some of his relatives. His room was rather small and crammed with musical instruments. He used the room for his music as well as for other purposes. He was very happy to see me, caught my hand and caressed it. I enquired about his illness and noticed that his abdomen was somewhat distended and that he had a slight swelling of the feet. I did not go into the medical details and came away giving some general directions. Since then I used to visit him now and then. Once he fell ill with fever and had to be taken to the Nursing Home where I found him drowsy and running a temperature. When he came back home he had to remain in bed, otherwise he was cheerful and chatted with us on various topics. Once during the talk he reminded me that he had preserved a drop of Sri Aurobindo's blood and it was still there. During Sri Aurobindo's illness when we had to examine his urine, to draw the urine we had to use a catheter. Some drops of blood came out which Sunil along with his chemist brother had to examine. At that time Sunil kept a drop of blood and preserved it. Some attendants were always there since he could not get up without help or support. He walked in the mornings and evenings with attendants by his side. His legs seemed to have lost their strength and mobility. I came to know that once when he had gone out he had a fall. I could not make out what he was actually suffering from. Swelling of the legs indicated trouble with the kidneys or the heart. I did not interfere with the treatment of the illness. It was the attending doctor's business, I thought. At any rate, a patient lying in bed for so many months without any improvement made me somewhat uneasy. I came to know that the doctors were doing their best. He had to be removed from time to time to the Nursing Home, but he would insist on coming home to finish the New Year Music composition. And when it was ready he returned from the Nursing Home to hear it. His young friends would always help to drive him to and fro. Thus it went on for some time till he breathed his last.

It appeared to be a very mysterious illness—that's all I can say. I need not dilate further on it.

Two untimely deaths in the Ashram have left a deep scar in my memory. Both were geniuses—one a musician, the other a poet, Nishikanto.

NIRODBARAN

Extract of a letter the Mother wrote to Sunil

You may have been born as my physical child in a previous birth. But this indeed could not stir in you such a deep emotion. It is your soul which inspires your music. I put you in touch with your soul when I speak of your music, thus bringing contact with it as well as with me who remain for ever at the very core of your being. (The original is in French —Editor)

THE WAGER OF AMBROSIA

IX. The Divine Assurance (A)

(Continued from the issue of July 1998)

WHICH IS that supreme word the Gita declares to the bewildered warrior on the battlefield? which *paramam vācaḥ* has it to offer for the highest good of the soul now ready to receive the revelations of the Spirit? Arjuna wanted to renounce all the holdings of the world and all the trappings, all actions associated with it. He wanted to follow the path of ascetic self-abnegation, even as he saw in front of him his preceptors and his own people ready to enjoy the holiday of life by killing each other. Better to stay back from such a cruel and frightful sanguinary deed, *ghora karma*, than commit the sin of universal destruction. He desired no victory, nor empire, nor the pleasure of possession, not even the kingdom of the three worlds, *trailokya rājya*. But the Teacher of the Gita rebukes him in harsh terms and tells him that he should not deviate from the path of nobility and righteousness, the Aryan Path, and in every way he must uphold the dharma, the dynamism of one's own inner truth in the conduct of daily acts. Arjuna must cast off the infirmity that has overtaken him, something which is foreign, something calamitous to him as well as to other men and to the order of society. It is necessary that he should follow the law of action pertaining to him and tremble not while engaged in the gory task.

Puzzled, Arjuna is unable to decide the sure course of action he must follow in this conflicting situation. However, at this particular moment of queer psychological weakness of his, there is something noble and admirable, something wonderful within him that comes to his aid. He may not be quite aware of it or may not be directly in contact with it, with his deep and earnest inner soul, but his nature is well-prepared to receive its promptings, perceptive enough in thought and feeling and will to respond to its command and to put it into living practice. His trust in the Guide is implicit; it is pure and candid, unshakeable, and he speaks to this effect to him. In fact, he goes to the extent of telling him that he is his disciple and that he will follow whatever he is going to be told to do. He seeks complete refuge in him, *sādhu mām tvām prapannam*. Indeed, that moment of crisis turns out to be, we may as well say, the most extraordinary moment in his life. In the sequel, Arjuna is told that the doer of the works has the right to work but not the right to claim the fruit of it, that ever remaining in Yoga he must engage himself in action and that, surely, skill in works is Yoga itself. Arjuna must possess poised Yogic equality and in it act according to his nature.

Thus what Arjuna had shunned to do in the beginning, *ghora karma*, was exactly what he was finally made to do. In the sanguinary war he had to perforce face his kith and kin, his elders and all the revered teachers; he had to get ready to win the victory at the bidding of his Mentor. It was also pointed out to him that he could not have but done that,—his nature would not have allowed him to act or behave otherwise.

The psychological crisis and ambivalence arising out of the difference between the inner and the outer nature are aspects that have thus been well-focused in this episode taking place in the thick of battle Through it the deeper sense of action has been brought out in a most dramatic way to make that drama in the individual's and through him in the collectivity's life a living moment, a moment of action in the truth, action in the supreme dharma of the being itself It is in this totality that we must witness the mighty power of the Gita's Theory of Karma Yoga. What is most appealing about it is its positive luminous dynamism which does not negate this world howsoever transient and sorrowful it may appear to be

Arjuna is advised to harbour not the least doubt, he should be free and spontaneous in the conduct of his life-assigned tasks He must be without any fear and should not have any reservation, neither in his heart nor in his mind. Instead, he must always do what is for him his *sahaja karma*, unencumbered and natural work performed according to his true or inner character, according to what is inborn or innate to his being. It should not be the work determined by birth, nor heredity nor tradition In its universal context this *sahaja karma* becomes a part of our personality because of the several factors that belong to the three divisions of time in which we live, it is then that it proves to be the shaper of our destiny Certainly, when we come to this world we do not come with nothing of our own, not just a blank sheet of paper, *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, we bring with us all our worthwhile achievements of the past in order to promote them further,—as much as to mould by their merit our future, the future fulfilling the promise in the glory of the spirit We carry the encumbrances too, *samskāras* and *karmas*, which we have to tackle even while facing every prospect and every problem of life; we have to encounter them without ignoring or running away from them Whatever is conducive to this progress and in whichever way we respond and act, it should be always in the inner freedom and inner perception of ours, it is that which becomes our *sahaja karma* In it is the true excellence of our action and in it has Arjuna been enjoined to live and be

Indeed, at a certain point in our growth this *sahaja karma* becomes *swābhāvic karma* which is not governed by the outer qualities of Nature but, as Sri Aurobindo explains, by “a force of inner being in movement, the truth of the fourfold active power of the spiritual nature” (*Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p 506) It is in this context of the inborn or natural or innate *swābhāvic* or *swabhāva*-based action that we must read the supremely revelatory verses of the Gita occurring in its last chapter While preparing the disciple for this *grande finale* the Teacher tells him

असक्तबुद्धिः सर्वत्र जितात्मा विगतस्पृह ।
 नैष्कर्म्यसिद्धिं परमां सन्यासेनाधिगच्छति ॥
 सिद्धिं प्राप्तो यथा ब्रह्म तथाप्नोति निबोध मे ।
 समासेनैव कौन्तेय निष्ठा ज्ञानस्य या परा ॥
 बुद्ध्या विशुद्ध्या युक्तो धृत्यात्मान नियम्य च ।
 शब्दादीन्विषयास्त्यक्त्वा रागद्वेषौ व्युदस्य च ॥

विविक्तसेवी लघ्वाशी यतवाक्कायमानसः ।
 ध्यानयोगपरो नित्यं वैराग्यं समुपाश्रित ॥
 अहङ्कारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं परिग्रहम् ।
 विमुच्य निर्मम शान्तो ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥
 ब्रह्मभूतं प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।
 समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम् ॥
 भक्त्या मामभिजानाति यावान्यश्चास्मि तत्त्वतः ।
 ततो मां तत्त्वतो ज्ञात्वा विशते तदनन्तरम् ॥
 सर्वकर्माण्यपि सदा कुर्वाणो मद्भयपाश्रयः ।
 मत्प्रसादादवाप्नोति शाश्वतं पदमव्ययम् ॥

(Gita 18· 49-56)

An understanding without attachment in all things, a soul self-conquered and empty of desire, man attains by renunciation a supreme perfection of *naish-karmya*. How, having attained this perfection, one thus attains to the Brahman, hear from me, O son of Kunti,—that which is the supreme concentrated direction of the knowledge. Uniting the purified intelligence (with the pure spiritual substance in us), controlling the whole being by firm and steady will, having renounced sound and other objects of the senses, withdrawing from all liking and disliking, resorting to impersonal solitude, abstemious speech, body and mind controlled, constantly united with the inmost self by meditation, completely giving up desire and attachment, having put away egoism, violence, arrogance, desire, wrath, the sense and instinct of possession, free from all I-ness and my-ness, calm and luminously impassive — one is fit to become the Brahman. By devotion he comes to know Me, who and how much I am and in all the reality and principles of My being; having thus known Me he entereth into That (Purushotama). And by doing also all actions always lodged in Me he attains by My grace the eternal and imperishable status.

(The Message of the Gita, pp 264-70)

Jnaneshwar's commentary on these shlokas runs more or less on traditional lines. No doubt there are Yogic and poetic descriptions and there are deep spiritual insights present everywhere; but the thrust generally remains what we may call dharmic-religious. Liberation or moksha has been set as a single objective in life and the recommendation is that the whole endeavour should be directed towards this alone.

But liberation should not mean riddance of the world. Certainly it is necessary that we should avoid action which more and more binds us to this mundane existence. We must go beyond this stage and make freedom the true basis of all our activities. In it will be the fulfilment of the supreme or the divine purpose in this creation. It will be anterior to the manifest spirit's greatnesses in the conditions of mortality. That such could be the real intention of the Scripture was unfortunately missed by its interpreters in the Advaitic or Monistic past. The possibility of transcending death even here was never

conceived by them, never recognised and fully worked out in the spiritual functioning of life. Actually, that question didn't arise for them when they considered this phenomenal world to be an illusion. But the radical departure came only with Sri Aurobindo. In his hand the issue of this world's present Brahmanlessness in search of a growing and happier Brahmanhood showed the scope, as well as the prospects, of truth-conscious depths emerging out of the dynamism of the Spirit itself. Let us, however, restrict ourselves to the exposition as we have it in *Jnāneshwarī*. In the following we briefly paraphrase its general line of approach to connect it with the supreme Word the Gita is about to give as a benedictive assurance to the ready soul carrying out the divine task in the battle of life here.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

BEYOND AND HERE

UNCONQUERABLE is thy flight, O bird of golden spheres—
 Unattainable is thy range;
 Beyond the heat of day, the stark and midnight fears—
 Splendid, burning and strange

Uncaught is thy song, beyond in the caves of luminous pause
 Thy breath of lightning far,
 In thy height and mystery all symbol-space withdraws
 A wonder-invisible star

But thy feet-echoes are here awaking the hidden ray
 In the womb of light to be,
 A rapture of a birth unborn shall fulfil all clay
 In immortality

11-11-1959

ROMEN

(From the late poet's unpublished diaries)

“FOR THE GODS ARE THE POWERS OF GOD”

Observations on a Journey in South India

TRANSCENDING this world—is this a subject many people are interested in? How do you do it in practice? After the experience which can be termed “ascension”, is there another, maybe final, step to be taken in this world?

What would such a step be like? Of course, one cannot with any meaning talk about what “happens” after such a step, as one would then be outside any known frame of reference. Do then souls undertake this step and who are they?

What do I know? It seems to me that most people are not interested in transcending this world—they are after knowledge and power, after maybe psychic abilities and healing powers. They appear to believe that everything will be known in time and that all that is can also be manifested and they may attain a higher status than that of an ordinary human being by becoming a guide or an ascended master.

People, guides, ascended masters, even gods—all are trapped in this manifestation, as they only exist in this manifestation; but gods in particular would be aware of the next step—transcending this world.

Who are gods? In the western world we traditionally only recognize now one god, God, the god of this creation. The time of gods is long gone in Europe and those gods are today seen as legendary figures who don't have any power. And I too had not met gods until I visited India recently.

In southern India gods are very much alive. Again, the terminology—some gods we call gods I might have termed ascended masters.

I was tired after days of travelling. True, aeroplanes make travelling fast today, but there are no direct flights to Madurai. First I had to build up my energy before I could see clearly. When I could understand the squirrel, see local earth, then elves and elementals from the inner earth came and observed me curiously in eerie and timeless silence. I was on my way. When I had deliberately lifted my energy level, it happened that three gods appeared.

Yes, most spirits seem to be quite attached to a particular area of the Earth. Different spirits have presented themselves when I sought contact with them in different parts of the world—this is currently my reason for travel, as I “woke up” to the ability to “see”, I just observed this wondrous world.

In Madurai with its 12 million people constantly milling around, I could not “perceive”, although the famous and fabulous temple is on an ancient power spot. On the other hand, outside the small private guest house in the foothills of the Eastern Ghats, perception was easier. These three spirits or gods were not talkative, I received no teachings as I often did at other places. They just stated. “We are gods. We like to be joined by enlightened beings. We dream together now with the help of your energy.” And it became a scene of moving energy—aura-colours of all shapes. I soon lost orientation and concentration. To maintain the meeting with those three I gathered

more energy and seemingly solidified them, though unintentionally. ‘Now we will only go away when your attention turns to something else.’ How could I ever forget them? So, instead, I rose above them

Days later I stood at the eastern seaboard at daybreak. Hundreds of tiny fishing boats dotted the water. In the rolling sea only single upright people were visible. The tropical climate here is pleasant because one is constantly immersed in a fine spray created by tumbling waves. Expecting now to catch the first glimpse of the sun any moment, I glance at the sky and see a really huge manifestation of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh! He shows himself for all to see, even for those as ignorant of him as myself. Then as the distant low clouds showed red edges becoming a reddish haze and then letting the sun, a hot burning piece of coal, shine through, he disintegrated.

The sun took over and the reflections on the back of the waves ran like liquid colour, like a being on its own, towards the onlookers, filling their senses, heralding the next step of our soul-journey. Soon I walked through the bazaar, past the always-present elephant and entered the temple. On the large walls and ceilings there were paintings, all depicting one or another aspect of Ganesh. The cool twilight and the dust from the restoration work which was being carried out made this a good place to stand still for a while and to observe how Ganesh gets his great energy.

Worshipping Ganesh is today, as it may have been for thousands of years, a continuous coming and going of pilgrims. They all come to offer sacrifices—flowers, food or something precious and costly. The temple servants in front of the shrines collect the offerings on a golden tray, carry it to the statue and offer the gifts to the god. And the god accepts—I was amazed to see clearly that the energy out of the offerings rose, moved to the statue and merged with it! Ganesh explains himself:

‘I am important for many people and I was even more important in another Earth-age. In that age I manifested what could be manifested and thus I became a god, a creator. Wisdom and prosperity—indeed, that followed. I knew the limits of the human form and experienced how it was repeating itself over so many generations. And I found a key to change it. It was the first change, the change of the physical, the body. It made it possible for people to change their physical environment and thus their conditions. Animals can do it too with our help. Therefore animals became our helpers. Elephants in particular. It is said they got domesticated, but it is based on a shift in their consciousness as well as ours, in the human consciousness. One must see the element of connection and then strengthen and stabilize it. I worked out the procedure and I still hold it in my hand and preserve it as well as I am preserved, as I am fed. Could it otherwise get lost? It is not important now. All is so well anchored in the Earth and in mankind as well. You understand? I represent the working of God in a now past age and I am always an aspect of God, but I am not going forward. I became a static symbol—I became what I was to become. A great experience—and thus it never needs to be repeated. I am complete in all my aspects and vital knowledge. Acknowledge me duly. I cannot change, but I still maintain a part in you and your world. I am gladly of service. Your god Ganesh.’

And later he added. “And do you want to know what my secret is?—Love In earlier times people didn’t see themselves separate from all nature. Therefore, they couldn’t realise this force And then with love came attachment, of course.”

In South India the energies for all phases of the soul’s journey and its learning are present

A god of enormous power is Venkateshwara. Countless variations of the epic stories of his deeds and his incarnations seem to exist. His statue and the inner temple in Tirumala may be ancient and unchanged ever since time began, that is, since humans became aware of time Tirumala is one of the richest temples in India, visited by thousands of pilgrims on any one day, but rarely by non-Indians I had to fill in an extra form to be permitted entry All the pilgrims seek the darshan of Venkateshwara—darshan means that the god views you! Venkateshwara, however, has his eyes covered all the time—it is said his gaze would scorch the world If you get his darshan, then this birth is your last one. And all do believe that he grants you any wish How is all this possible? I would like to offer my observations as a partial explanation—just observations during which I felt like a child viewing a fairy-tale world

Venkateshwara appears to be a main god, maybe even the god-father of all, the highest power in manifestation, the starting-point of all manifestation Every being on Earth has first to deal with him before he can increase his consciousness and finally transcend the physical manifestation Venkateshwara is powerful—the full power of physically manifested energy! And that may be why so many come—everyone has really first to live physically as the basic experience on Earth

Also Tirumala, the sacred place, is truly impressive. From the service town, Tirupati, situated in a wide valley at the edge of a mountainous part of South India, one is transferred in special buses to Tirumala via a winding track cut into the steep rocky slopes The drive appears to be quite dangerous as one slowly gains the height of some 800 meters The last cliffs look like the remnant walls of a huge ancient fortress The temple lies in the valley behind those walls—a dish-shaped valley with an enormous energy-field, certainly a strong natural power spot Later, on the way down to Tirupati along another track, it seemed that all stone layers run from the Tirupati valley in a continuous clockwise spiral to Tirumala!

In the temple and around it, however, I didn’t perceive the field as strong—likely it has been obliterated by the millions of visitors over the ages. But I saw the energy brought to Venkateshwara by the pilgrims Pilgrims join queues which start in a large roofed waiting area behind the temple complex. The queues are directed through strong wire cages along the massive walls of many buildings before one even gets to the first gateway into the temple complex; waiting, therefore, can take 12 hours, I have read

Inside, within the barricaded way, people are tightly packed One passes through a golden gateway, then a silver gate, past two large golden columns, into the inner courtyard with the ancient gold-roofed temple. Finally one approaches the sanctum sanctorum. The spirit of the pilgrims rises—ecstatic shouting and pushing forward occur But suddenly there is space—everyone seems to be left to experience this special

moment at his/her own pace—until seconds later temple servants guide you further and soon the idol is out of view. When it was in view I was engrossed in observing everything and didn't think of the wish I had in mind. Did I get the darshan after all? I thought, and I heard Venkateshwara say: "Your wish is a wish which cannot be granted—and thus I made you forget it!"

Born in northern Europe and living in Australia, and being a civil engineer concerned with water supply and sewerage, I could not help but dislike the dirty and unhealthy streets and living quarters of India. Decaying rubbish everywhere, cows and goats in between. Most people walk in the middle of the roads because this is the only clear space! Chennai, where the tour to Tirumala started, was the worst city I had seen. How could I have any other wish than the one that the sanitary situation in India should be changed? As an explanation of his response Venkateshwara added "India has to be as she is as a learning ground for her people. India is complete as she is."

Walking around the small ancient temple I could perceive how the energy which the pilgrims brought here was channeled into the Earth. This may stabilize the Earth here and keep it as it is. Leaving the temple complex via the silver and golden gates, I knew that India is quite an amazing experience: here all is present, from the beginning of the human ages to the future.

W HEYER

TWO POEMS

WORDS

WORDS are thoughts that come
like visible wings
from the deep dark heart
of mortal things.

Words are apples that fall
towards earth's centre
and become distilled dreams
in mind's decanter.

YOUR NAME

I shall come back to this place again
rich with almonds, pears and plums
and think of you in the evening air
between the first stars and the first lamps.

My lips will utter your name
so that it becomes a pagan star
and with the red currants I shall dream
of the loveliness that you are

RANAJIT SARKAR

HISTORY OF BANDE MATARAM— OUR NATIONAL SONG

Bande Mataram began to be read after the publication of *Ananda Math* Jadu Bhatta's musical rendering of the song also helped it in becoming popular. It was quoted in the *Balak Patrika*, 1882 (Jaishtha 1292). Balendra Nath Tagore was inspired by the song and wrote in the *Bharati* (1887) "With the strength of their heart, religion and literature the Bengalees will hoist the banner of victory over the world and under the glory of their victory the Bengalees will sing in their own tune their own song *Bande Mataram*." Prophetic words indeed.

The Indian National Congress and *Bande Mataram* became inseparable from the day the Congress assembled in Calcutta in 1886 for the holding of its second session. The famous lawyer-poet Hemchandra Banerji sang *Bande Mataram* at this Congress session, held on December 27th. The Town Hall of Calcutta echoed and re-echoed with the sonorous voice of Hemchandra.

Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India, presided over this session and no less than 426 delegates attended the Congress. Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, the great Oriental scholar, in his address as the Chairman of the Reception Committee said: "We live not under National Government but under a foreign bureaucracy, our foreign rulers are foreigners by birth, religion, language and habits—by everything that divides humanity into different sections. They cannot possibly dive into our hearts." Indeed few Englishmen then understood the true meaning of *Bande Mataram*.

People were indifferent to *Bande Mataram*, but Bankim had the firm conviction that his song was destined to become the battle-cry of the nation. He confided to his eldest daughter on his deathbed: "One day you will see this *Bande Mataram* will stir the whole nation from the depths of its heart." Bankim passed away on 8 April, 1894.

Rabindranath Tagore liked *Bande Mataram* better than any of his own songs and sang it, dressed in white robes, in his own tune, at the 12th session of the Indian National Congress held at Beadon Square, not far from his ancestral house, under the presidency of Rahimtulla M. Sayani. "The song in the nectarlike voice of the poet and accompanied by an organ played on by his brother, Jyotindra Nath, produced an electric sensation." Rabindranath had composed the tune for the first seven lines of *Bande Mataram* in 1885.⁴ This information is contained in a book of songs called "Satagaan", published by Saraladevi in 1307 B.S. (1900).

We are lucky to possess *Bande Mataram* in the voice of Rabindranath as H. Bose, the pioneer recordist of India, did not miss the opportunity to record the song then sung by the poet, without the help of a loud-speaker in 1896. He first recorded the song on a cylinder and released it (No. 36250). Later he transferred it to the flat disc in 1906. Even Rabindranath's rendering of *Bande Mataram* did not help it attract much attention. Rabindranath says of *Bande Mataram*. "When I set tune to the song *Bande Mataram* and sang it before a vast assemblage of people in a Congress Session held in

Calcutta, I felt myself electrified from top to toe and my very existence was overwhelmed with a deep emotion. It was not a song, it was molten fire and every line and every word of it engulfed the audience. This sacred *mantra* which we received from a seer, intensified the nation's desire for freedom during the first decade of this century when the whole country was convulsed following the rash and mad act of an unscrupulous imperialist in the person of Lord Curzon."⁵

Bande Mataram was not used as a war cry during the life of Bankim Chandra. It was not used as a political slogan before 1905. Nationalism in India became militant with the proposal for Partition of Bengal. *Bande Mataram* was there, but it had to be received as a sacred *mantra*. Militant nationalism found full expression in *Bande Mataram* and the song became popular.

Curzon's folly was responsible for making *Bande Mataram* the national *mantra*. The great national awakening following the proposal on 20 July, 1905, for the Partition of Bengal, made the people of India indignant. The cry of *Bande Mataram* rent the evening air of Calcutta on 7 August 1905, when students took out a procession to the Town Hall from College Square. Sri Aurobindo recalls the occasion in 1907. "It is thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The *mantra* had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism."⁶ Bal Gangadhar Tilak also characterised it as a fateful moment when Bengal uttered the *mantra* of Indian Nationalism.

Singing of the song *Bande Mataram* or shouting of the slogan *Bande Mataram* was banned by the British Government after the Town Hall Meeting where the decision to boycott British goods was taken. Thus, the Swadeshi movement came into existence. The British bureaucrats rightly considered *Bande Mataram* the most powerful force behind the national insurgence and an open invocation to the goddess Kali for vengeance. The seed of a mighty revolution was ingrained in the two words *Bande Mataram*. The foreign government understood the meaning of the song and a circular was, accordingly, issued by the Government of East Bengal suppressing the cry of *Bande Mataram* in the streets. The skies of Bengal rang with "a redoubled force, with the holy cry of open and courageous worship of the Mother rising out of the throbbing heart of the nation, on account of the ban," according to Rabindranath Tagore. "Bad rulers serve a useful purpose in the evolution of nations. They stir up the sleeping lion from his torpor, they stimulate public spirit and foster national unity." —That is what Sir Surendranath Banerjee wrote.⁷

The Partition of Bengal was to take effect from 16 October 1905 and the streets of Calcutta echoed from the early hours of that morning with the cry of *Bande Mataram*. A society called "Bande Mataram Sampradaya" was formed in October 1905, to popularise the song. Kumar Manmatha Nath Roy was its President. The members of the Society used to march through the streets of Calcutta on every Sunday morning, singing *Bande Mataram* and collecting funds. Poet Rabindranath once joined the procession

Dwijendra Lal Roy was one of the active members of this society who regularly participated in the processions.

That *Bande Mataram* had stirred the hearts of the people of Bengal in 1905 is evident from Satish Chandra Mukherjee's comments in the *Dawn Magazine* of November 1905: "*Bande Mataram*, Hail Mother!—What Bengali heart is not set beating faster at the sound of the two magic words? When the late Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his immortal work—*Ananda Math*, the 'Abode of Joy'—first sang the heart-stirring and soul-lifting song, the opening words of which have furnished Modern Bengal with a battle-cry and a divine inspiration, so to say—could he have dreamt of the transformation—the miraculous and wonderful transformation which the two mellifluous words were destined to work in the hopes and aspirations of his degenerate countrymen. The welkin now rings with *Bande Mataram*. The streets and lanes of Calcutta and of the rest of the province resound with the solemn watch-word *Bande Mataram* has stirred the hearts of the people to their depths."

Bande Mataram was sung at the Congress session held at Benares in 1905 by Sarala Devi Chowdhurani (a niece of Rabindranath) despite its ban in Bengal. Sister Nivedita who was present at this Congress session has recorded that "when *Bande Mataram* was sung it threw the whole audience into a state of wild but dignified excitement." Since then *Bande Mataram* was a must at every Congress session.

The Bengal Provincial Conference was held on Saturday, 14 April 1906 at Barisal, under the presidentship of Abdul Rasul. The cry of *Bande Mataram* was banned in the streets of Barisal, and indeed of all the towns in Bengal. The volunteers and delegates wore *Bande Mataram* badges instead, but they were struck with lathis by the police, badly hurting some of them. This unprovoked and brutal lathi-charge was greeted with the cry of *Bande Mataram*. The hero of the Barisal Conference was young Chittaranjan Guha who greeted every stroke of the lathi with the cry of *Bande Mataram*. It was a supreme effort of resignation and submission to brutal assault without resistance and without questioning. Chittaranjan was thrown into a tank full of water by the police, in which, if he had not been rescued, he would probably have found a watery grave.⁸

The people of Barisal could not help but express their indignation at the brutality of the British Government. They took out a mammoth procession on 20 May 1906 to condemn the barbarous act. "An unprecedented *Bande Mataram* procession of Hindus and Musalmans numbering over ten thousand men came out of Babu Deena Bandhu Sen's house at noon.. passed through all the principal streets of the town singing national songs and crying *Bande Mataram* and Alla-ho-Akbar. Both Hindus and Musalmans carried *Bande Mataram* flags," reported the *Bengalee* of 23 May 1906.⁹

The brutality committed at Barisal roused the nation from its stupor. Over ten thousand people assembled in the open air on the Esplanade in Madras. Long before the hour fixed for the meeting, people began to come in streams, shouting *Bande Mataram*. Bepin Chandra Pal, besides starting the revolutionary English daily entitled *Bande Mataram* on 6 August 1906, took the song to Andhra Pradesh in the same year.¹⁰ Poet Subramania Bharati composed a patriotic song in Tamil based on *Bande Mataram*

Thus, *Bande Mataram* became the national song by 1906 and it became the *mantra* of the nation

A Nagpur report in *The Hindu* of 28 October 1907 said: "A curious *Bande Mataram* incident in a city school happened this afternoon. Dr. Bepin Krishna inspected the school. The boys who greeted him with cries of 'Bande Mataram' were admonished. The seventh standard section were suspended. The fifth was threatened with fine. Twenty-five boys were handed over to the police lock-up and after five hours' confinement they were released on bail. Investigations are proceeding. The boys unfrightened gave bold, truthful statements. Great sensation prevails."¹¹

"The cry, at one time banned and barred and suppressed, has become pan-Indian and national, and is on the lips of an educated Indian when on any public occasion he is moved by patriotic fervour to give expression to his feelings of joy. What is equally important to note is that it is no longer regarded by officials as the rallying cry of seditious men, intent on breaking the peace or on creating a disturbance," wrote Sir Surendranath Banerjea.¹²

The official attitude to *Bande Mataram* underwent a change and Sir Surendranath added in 1925: "At one of the recruiting meetings that I attended in North Bengal, I saw British officers standing up with the rest of the audience as the great national song was sung, and soldiers of the Bengalee regiment, wearing the King's uniform, were received by their countrymen, in the numerous towns that they visited, with shouts of *Bande Mataram*! And when they spoke at the recruiting meetings, some of them declared within the hearing, and with the full approval, of their officers that nothing would give them greater pleasure, or fill them with more patriotic pride, than to attack the German trenches with the cry of *Bande Mataram* on their lips"¹³

The first flag hoisted as our national symbol was called the *Bande Mataram Flag* as it contained the words "Bande Mataram". This flag was hoisted at Parsi Bagan Square (renamed Green Park and now called Sadhana Sarkar Udyan), Calcutta, on 7 August 1906. The national tricolour flag hoisted by Madame Bhikai Cama at Stuttgart on 18 August 1907, had also the sacred words *Bande Mataram* inscribed on it. She started a monthly journal called the *Bande Mataram* in 1909 while residing in Paris.¹⁴ Her leaflet entitled *Bande Mataram* appeared in 1907. Mahatma Gandhi concluded his presidential address at the Belgaum Congress (1924) with *Bande Mataram* and so did Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at the congress of Karachi (1931).

Bande Mataram was considered to be a synonym for resistance to British imperialism. The use of the first two stanzas of the song gained national significance and its formal adoption as our national anthem before Independence was considered unnecessary. Popular usage gave it a special and national importance as it had become an integral part of our national movement. Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose, the great scientist, was once asked by Subhas Chandra Bose if we could have *Bande Mataram* as our national anthem. He had no hesitation in saying "The children cannot distinguish their mother from the motherland by whose beneficence they are born and brought up. The chanting of the name of the Motherland has come out spontaneously from the heart

of the people and vibrated all over India. Because this cry is the cry of the inner life of India... *Bande Mataram* is not a mere poem—it is our unquestioned and unrivalled national song which has come out of the heart of the people”¹⁵

Meaning of Bande Mataram

Though the first two stanzas of the song *Bande Mataram* are unimpeachable on any count, the reference to Hindu goddesses was taken exception to by some of the Muslims in 1937. They were under a misconception. Let us, therefore, read the song in full, and explain Bankim’s philosophy behind it.

The first stanza beginning with *sujalam* and ending with *sukhadam varadam* is an impassioned description of the beauty and charm of the Motherland, with its nights of moonlit splendour, with its hills and dales, forests and rivers. The second stanza beginning with *trīsat* (originally *sapta*) *koti* describes the combined power of thirty crores of her sons holding swords in their hands, marching forth to serve the Mother and to vanquish her enemies. She is asked, “*Abala keno ma eta bale*” (Mother, why then do they call you weak and fragile?) It proceeds, “Thou art the strength of our arms and the love of our hearts.” The mother is worshipped here in the three aspects of energy, splendour, and wisdom as Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, and Maha Sarasvati. “*Tomari pratima gari mandire mandire*” (i.e., your image is installed in every home). It is the outpouring of a passionate devotion of the son to the mother, invoking her boundless strength and valour, when he sets out to defend the mother and proclaim her¹⁶

Bande Mataram “is neither Hindu nor Muslim in its contents. The Mother conceived is not an ordinary religious deity, but a new entity, the mother-country in which we live and move and have our beings. The mother-country is not a mere mass of territory but a living entity working through her sons and fulfilling her mission through them. Bankim discovered the religion of patriotism and gave an undying utterance to it in his *Bande Mataram*. Chatterjee’s patriotic doctrine of the country as the object of worship is integrally associated with his Comteist religion in which humanity (and not divinity) commands adoration. *Bande Mataram* is a Comteist hymn, an anti-theocratic ode of rationalism, freed from the cult of gods,” says an author quoting Benoy Kumar Sarkar¹⁷

P. THANKAPPAN NAIR

(Extracts from *Indian National Song and Symbols*)

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BETWEEN TWO STROKES OF MIDNIGHT

THE flower of silence opens in the sky;
 A moon encalmed, a poised and frozen song,
 Has gained the zenith where the clouds go by
 Unconvoyed by the shadow-shape of wrong.

Half of twelve to usher midnight's chiming,
 Three yoked with three to harbinger new day,
 Between, untimefast silences are climbing
 To the hilltop glint where golden Truth Beams play

Emptied of time, this rift between two beats
 Of the hammer, fate, upon mortality,—
 This threshing-floor whereon our being meets
 The Living One who bears us, henceforth, free.

28 July 1934

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's Comment:

The poem is a very good one, finished in diction and harmonious in rhythm.

THE MYSTERY

A TURQUOISE depth of heaven bends,—
Alas, how shall we ever know
Where it begins and where it ends,
This depth of turquoise glow?

A moon comes like an amber ball
Out of the ocean slowly rolled;
It is the evening's lonely call
Recurring as of old

And O! To think this little eye
Can with an equal depth commune
With yonder blue-concealing sky
Rich with a yellow moon!

20 minutes after 11, night
10-3-34

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

Sri Aurobindo's Comment: Very good.

Five poems of Harindranath bear this date, written in the course of the day Sri Aurobindo's comments on these are: Very beautiful, It is beautiful, Very fine, Very good, Very good The poems are of varying lengths and the present one is the shortest piece

The typescript volume has the title *Hues and Whispers* with a subtitle Poems of Nature and Man —Ed

HERITAGE OF LIFE

In search of a Red Rose I set out on a journey
And travelled along a stream, across hill and land,
I trod many seasons of grief and pain, of hunger,
And saw dreaming shadows walk hand in hand.

Maybe a few thousand years passed this way,
Of mythic wakefulness and of ancestral sleep,
And yet another thousand rose in a true answer
That in moods of silver-mauve I need not weep.

But all this must end like a comic, end forever,—
Wounds of heart, teardrops from foolish eyes,
The blackbird song, time-torture, must withdraw,
And make room for the Red Rose's enterprise

The sages say the fields are rain-green, happy,
And the sky is blue and happy the gentle breeze,
Without danger you may soar like a little bird,—
Because the foundation of the world is in peace

And the night is there for the stars to twinkle,
And the day for flaming hours to carry the gold,
True, quite true, there is death tied to the leg of life,
But the heritage of life is a joy unknown, untold.

R Y DESHPANDE

END AND BEGINNING

AFTER every war
comes the cleaning up.
Even a makeshift order
won't happen by itself

Someone must shove away
the wreckage from the roads
so that carts piled high
with corpses can pass.

Someone must rummage
in the ashes and rubble,
sofa springs, splinters of glass
and bloody rags

Someone must drag the post
to prop up the wall
put glass in the window,
hang a door back on the hinges

This is not photogenic
and takes a long time
All the cameras have already left
for another war

Bridges are needed again
as well as new stations
Sleeves will get tattered
from being rolled up

Someone with a broom in his hand
recollects aloud what was the matter here.
Someone else listens
nodding with a head still on.
Soon others will loiter near them
who will find it all a bore

Now and then someone will
dig up from under the bushes
arguments half-eaten away with rust
and take them to the rubbish heap.

Those who know very well
what happened here
must give way to those
who know only a little
Then, less than a little
Finally nothing at all

In the grass that sprouted
causes and effects
someone must lie down
with a green blade between his teeth
and gape at the clouds.

W SZYMBORSKA

(Translated from the Polish by Marta Guha)

ARISE

Lotus, lotus, why do you die?
 Bloom forever in my heart.
O Falsehood, make your peace
 with God
 Death depart!
Greed and suffering abdicate
 whilst you can,
lest the flames of heaven's wrath
 turn you into ash.
Torturers tremble, there is a finger
 pointing at you!
Merciless poverty, the rich have
 sealed their ears...
Divine in heaven,
 please come down!

GEORGETTE COTY

KRISHNAKUMARI-DI

As I was sitting in the garden of Golconde that morning, a victory flower fell from the creepered wall behind the little stone bench, and landed near my feet. I picked it up and thought “A victory flower for Krishnakumari-di”

Half an hour later, I was told that Krishnakumari-di had passed away, just when this little flower detached itself from the branch, that her soul had left us, left this garden of earth, those high walls and little stone benches where we meet for a while.

She had fallen ill just after the April Darshan, and when her condition worsened, when the pain became unbearable, she finally agreed to go to the Nursing Home. But I never thought she would leave her body—that she would leave us—so soon, so suddenly.

Have you ever been caught in a whirlwind? When I think of Krishnakumari-di’s passing, my mind is caught in a whirlwind of grief, disbelief, anger, regret.

Anger? Yes, anger because I feel—no doubt very stupidly—that there is something wrong—a “mistake somewhere”. But maybe it is the pain of parting that is “the mistake”

She would have smiled at my foolishness. For her, everything was Krishna’s play, and nothing could go wrong. Each page of our life was faultless. There, even she could find no mistake. And that’s one of the reasons why I liked her so much: she made me feel at peace with the world. For an hour or so, I kept aside my bunch of keys and sat in the Open. She had a magic file to make mind’s rough edges soft and smooth.

In her little room, facing the Governor’s Residence, the ritual began, invariably the same. We sat in our respective Cane Chairs, took our respected Plywood Planks, our revered Pencil and Rubber and, on great occasions, the Most Precious French Sharpener offered to her by Janine, and after a few seconds of silence we plied our minds away into the Fairy Land of Words, far beyond Space and Time.

“Quelle chance nous avons de faire ce travail—quelle grâce que notre *travail* soit de lire les œuvres de Mère et de Sri Aurobindo, jour après jour, année après année,” she told me many a time, her large eyes brimming with childlike delight.

Regret? Yes, regret that we could not finish the work that she had so much at heart: the revision of Archaka’s translation into French of Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*. We had started two years ago, but there were full stops all the way, commas and semi-colons, other work dashing, school periods and those long periphrases of life, so that at one point she told me. “Quand reprendrons-nous *La Vie Divine*?” But we had to give the last touch to the French translation and proof-reading of *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, then came *La Poésie Future*, then Nirod-da’s *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*. Everything was “urgent”. She proof-read Nirod-da’s book three, four times, out of care and out of love. It was to be her last work. Is that why she wished it to be absolutely faultless? But it took time. Nirod-da would ask me, with a stern smile, or

a smiling grimness, seeing me from afar, “Monsieur, mon livre!” “Presque fini, Nirod-da!” Just a few more weeks.. Once, I remember, I caught dear Krishnakumari-di at her best. She had returned some pages with very few corrections, and I could feel her disappointment. She looked like a little girl come home from the forest, her basket empty. How is it that so few cherry-mistakes had been picked up? There must be more somewhere! What to do? Well, the answer was clear. find them at any cost! The chapter had to be read once more, each leaf thoroughly combed. But Nirod-da’s “Alors, Monsieur, mon livre!” made me hesitate at the gate of my Duty as a Proof-reader. Finally, her sweet will prevailed as usual and we agreed to give the Mistake one more chance. Krishna-di went happily back into the forest with her little basket. A few days later, she returned the pages. Her eyes had a subtle glint. “J’aurais raison de le relire, regardez .” Indeed, she was right. one little error sat trembling on the corner of a page, caught red-handed. Once more, the Crooked had been uprooted! Who now will find the last mistake?

Then, just before her birthday on April 17th, I gave her a wonderful present *en avance*. “Krishnakumari-di,” I said, “now let us resume our work on *The Life Divine*.” I had suddenly felt the urgency, which I had not felt before. She was so happy!

I will never forget those bi- or tri-weekly sittings. I would ring the bell, wait on the pavement, rain or shine, with a pure yogic attitude, then a plastic rope would slowly or abruptly descend from the sky, with a hook at the end, and the key to heaven attached to it. Sometimes the Big Bag came down with its cluster of heavenly proofs. Sometimes it went up with the earthly ones.

As I climbed up the stairs, I would greet her midway with a “Krishnakumari-di!” And she would inevitably answer from her room, “Oui, venez!”

I would return the key, and she would give it or let her maid Valli give it a vigorous bath. Each time the key descended from heaven, it had to be purified on getting back. Once, only once in all these years, I asked her, most gently “Il faut la laver chaque fois?” (“Is it necessary to wash it each time?”) She smiled. Yes, “il fallait”. Even if the key went up and down four times in half an hour. Then I would enter her room and often, quietly switch on the lights. How could she read in this half-lit obscurity? . No doubt, she had an extra pair of eyes. Maybe Hers?

Whether about the key-ceremony or any other matter, we never argued, never engaged in mental discussions. We were different, indeed so different from all angles, but we realised one of India’s long-cherished dreams: “Unity in diversity.” I the “Frenchman” born in Paris from a Russian mother and a Canadian father, both actors. She the pukka Punjabi, the Vedic brain. I the mixed breed, she the pure Hindu girl. But it worked! Maybe because she also had a Latin mind and I an Indian heart! Or maybe, simply because we worked for Them and that was all that mattered. Besides, she, the serious girl, would laugh for the smallest of things, with such disarming candour!

For almost 25 years we worked together, “proofing” and “reproofing”, correcting and recorrecting, so much so that the Press sometimes got annoyed. But fortunately,

she had the last word “Mother wished our Press to be the best in the world,” she often told me. At the fourth reading, she would still find mistakes. She would catch tiny little errors that had escaped our French eyes, hunt them with her ever lucid mind, and at times made me understand what I had translated. Sometimes I taught her a little style—“pour le style, je vous laisse décider” (“as for the style, I leave it to you”) she would tell Archaka and me. But she never let us relax on the grammatical side. The agreement of participles had no secrets left for her. She knew Sanskrit, Hindi, English, French. She could remember the way “lucchi” was spelled on page 35, and catch another “loutchi” *in flagrante delicto* on page 256. What a memory she had, what concentration “pour mettre la vérité dans la matière”, as Satprem once wrote to her. She had been trained by the Mother for this particular work, and it made all the difference.

She was very insistent on “equal spacing”. Each line had to match as perfectly as possible the preceding and the following one, so that the whole paragraph looked well-proportioned. Proof-reading was not only a drab, commonplace, mean seeking for faults. It was a work of art. And when sometimes it seemed to me a little excessive, my mind went to those Tibetan scribes who had spent their lives copying a single book... It helped to some extent. The spacing problem was made more acute by the fact that we did not like to indulge in the breaking of words either, so we had to compromise... Ashok and I have spent hours doing “run overs” and “run backs”, to equal her sense of perfection. How many miles we have run! It did not make of me a great athlete, but I have learnt a lot about running on the spot for the Spotless One!

Many times she enjoyed recounting to me this delightful anecdote. Once, working with Archaka on the translation of *Essays on the Gita*, she found one awful passage where the spacing between the words seemed beyond repair. No matter how much she ran over and back, it stubbornly refused to be mended. Then Archaka readily came to her rescue, laughing as usual: he simply changed the language! She was thrilled. She was full of admiration for the man who had such mastery of French that he could rewrite a whole passage simply to alter the space between words! It was her grandest hour, the apotheosis of the Proof-reader. Truth and Beauty walking hand in hand.

Another thing that endeared her to me was her humility. She was never proud of her catch, because Hers was the eye that had picked it.

Krishnakumari-di, I am sure that you must have reached by now the house of Sri Aurobindo in the subtle physical, and that you have already started revising *The Life Divine* with our dear Archaka, who also left us so suddenly and inexplicably two years ago. I am sure you are doing very good work together. Please, keep in touch with us. You both have all Space and Time for yourselves. We have our memories, and our hidden tears.

On my last visit to her at the Nursing Home, the day before she left, she enquired about the work at the Press. “Le livre de Nirod est-il fini? .” “Oui, Krishna-di, oui, il est fini. Presque... Il ne reste plus que l’appendice...” She was happy. And as I was leaving the room, she said suddenly with great force “Au revoir!” Beni, who came

daily to massage her feet and legs, was as surprised as I was

Yes, "Au revoir!"

Then some days later I thought of the little victory flower. And it suddenly struck me that it had fallen among soft blue flowers growing on the grass. I asked Richard for their name. "Krishna's light in the physical mind," he said with a smile.

Everything fell into place. Another proof of Her unmistakable touch.

CRISTOF

A LETTER

Dear Nirod,

As you must know by now, my husband, Eugene Finn, passed away on October 19, 1997. He had final stages of advanced liver cancer, along with hepatitis. He was only sick a week and a half and went very fast. He passed away in his sleep and felt no pain. He treasured the blessing packet you sent him and massaged it on his liver every day, even when he was in the hospital. Also, I put the blessing packet in the pouch he wore around his neck and asked the funeral home to put the pouch around his neck when he was cremated, so the blessing packet merged with his ashes.

Even at the end, he felt no pain from the liver cancer.

It was full of cancer and yet I believe the blessing packet helped in that sense. Well, I just wanted to tell you that it meant a lot to him.

I truly miss him but he has been preparing me for this for a long time. He was a wonderful man. Thank you for everything.

Sincerely,
Mary (Angel) Finn

Nirodbaran adds:

This is a very instructive letter. It is exceptional indeed to my mind for a cancer patient to be free of cancer pain by simply massaging the blessing packet of the Mother on the cancerous liver. Cancer pain is very severe indeed; nothing can relieve it.

GREECE IS CHARMING*

A Letter to a Friend

THE year is ending soon, time to look back and ahead, evaluate and set goals. Time also to say ‘Hi’ and freshen up ties with people, send them thoughts from India, tell them how things are, where we’ve been, what we’ve seen.

Gary and I went to Greece this year, a spring visit, spent three months there and left just when the real tourists started coming for the summer!

I am nearing forty, fifteen years ago I left Greece behind for good and went to Switzerland first, then came to India. Both places are lands of the extreme, especially to a person whose mind, heart and senses are made in Greece! Greece is charming.

Although India has the in-built faculty for spirituality, she is at the same time acutely indifferent as far as matters material go. Greece on the other hand has a natural bent for beauty and clarity, and her thought which soars mostly high does so without ever being fully disconnected from Matter.

India’s gracefulness lies in the feelings of quietude and ease her people carry within themselves as well as in her temperament which never quite forgets the transience of being as life is ‘‘down here’’ away from ‘‘That’’.

Greece, however, is alive within an environment which her people create through a selection of harmonious components, components chosen from and set in the daikness of life as the senses and the mind perceive it.

Psychologically, the Greeks are a pleasant lot, the fluid precision of their mind meets the wideness of their heart at a right angle. Were they to give themselves to something larger and higher than the loftiness of the intellect or the sweet amicability of their emotions, it seems to me they would and could quite easily succeed to make the next evolutionary step. providing they were ready to give up the importance of their mind and its highclass weavings!...

For Easter we chose to go to Patmos,¹ the holy island where St. John had lived and where he wrote his *Apocalypse—the Revelation*, the New Testament’s last chapter.

There is the cave there where all this happened and a monastery built around it. Higher up, on top of the hill, the great monastery of St. John the Theologian imposes itself: a one thousand years old monument of a castle, with the city embracing its feet of massive walls, one of the centres where Christianity survived and grew. After Jerusalem, this is the second holiest place for Orthodox Christendom.

We often visited the cave; meditation was easy there and concentration happened.

* It is an interesting clarifying document of a mind and soul genuinely in search of truth. It especially goes home to me because according to my own intuition, confirmed by Sri Aurobindo, I was in a past life an ancient Athenian. Even my surname ‘‘Sethna’’ is an acronym of ‘‘Athens’’
—Amal Kiran

¹ A small island on the south-eastern edge of the Aegean, north of Rhodes and near to the Turkish coast, it has often been used as a place of exile for unwanted or troublesome people. St. John was one of them!

almost automatically The island itself has an in-drawn feeling about it, there is a kind of silence brooding in its atmosphere. No wonder it has been sacred for several thousands of years, not only to Christianity Where the present castle-monastery stands, there used to be a temple to the goddess Artemis, scattered around the island are ruins of old, even in little chapels or churches one recognises stones and symbols carved in an antiquity far more ancient than of the present faith!

It is interesting, indeed, to find *in Matter* a place where *something of the Spirit* exists and can be experienced, we always separate the within from the without, the spiritual from the material, the inner from the outer reality. Our mind comes in between, provides labels and explanations, proceeds as it might with subject after subject after subject, its logic and degree of organization and perception directly aligned with its definite and limited borders of existence

Whilst we were meditating in the cave, living and breathing in its atmosphere, many people came—groups from the fancy cruise-ships the naturally shaped harbour welcomes, as well as local and other Greeks visiting the island; many people Yet few were the ones who took the time and made the slight effort required for this movement of a self-giving that is outside the usual dailiness

My niece and her fiancé, young, upcoming and no-nonsense business-people, had no difficulty agreeing that there is something in Patmos, they've visited there. The accuracy of their perception surprised and made us wonder, they must not have known what to *do* with it, probably most of us do not know what to do with something like that.

The inner has been separated from the outer, we have replaced direct experience with religious doctrines and rituals, our endeavours rarely venture any further than where the mind has already been taught to go

Athens is the capital of modern Greece and a monster of a city, greed and lack of any planning have created it out of the one clustering around and hugging the Acropolis. It possesses nothing to compare it with the classical Athena we have all read and known about, nothing, and yet, one easily glimpses the City of our Antiquity in each and every corner; in the ruins as well as the people

I had much dental work to be done whilst there; the dentist was a lady, her name Mary. Mary and I became friends, Mary came to India this fall. She had much to tell and be critical about after that 12-day tour of hers! Mary worked in my mouth with the same attentive clarity with which her mind wondered and philosophised about things and thoughts, about people and her life, the perceptions and perplexities she has.

One day she confessed to me how she often has the feeling of being let loose inside a wonderful garden, a most beautiful, luscious, lush and luxurious garden. There are flowers there and trees, many trees. And one of these trees, she knows, is her own; her own precious Tree which she has to find and attend to amidst all others. And when that happens, when she finally finds that tree of hers, she will then come to terms with her own true and real self; but she knows not how to find the tree, so she wastes time roaming around the garden!

There is a word in Sanskrit, *swabhāva*, which means “own being”, “own becoming”; it describes the principle of self-becoming; the spiritual temperament and essential character.

Although Mary has not read the Vedas or the Upanishads, nor does she claim to be making any highly spiritualised attempt, Mary has had a glimpse within herself and has thus grasped a truth not many have experienced. Mary is a very attractive woman, she is also a successful professional.

The other island we visited was Samothrace.² The first time the island was “historically” mentioned is during the Trojan War: Homer refers to it when he tells how Poseidon followed the events, perched on top of its high mountain (over 1600m) Green and lush isle of Samothrace, Homer calls it, and it remains so even today.

We met Nikos one late and memorable afternoon, he took us into his heart at the first glance and shortly afterwards we were also taken into one of the rooms-to-let he has where he played for us his music. For over two hours we were launched into his world, a world where his bouzouki³ became the extended expression and instrument of his feelings, bountiful, as those feelings rose and flooded the room!

“I meet with God when I am up there,” Nikos confessed and indicated the mountain; “there is something up there,” he continued, “and with that something I commune; this something has been the cause and reason for many of the understandings that have occurred in me. You know, I was over and done with schooling when at grade five, yet, I know, growth happens elsewhere and independently of education...”

We listened, marvelled and kept on looking at his so-very-Greek straight-nosed profile, at his athlete’s broad-shouldered body, at the way it bent and curved and stretched itself as it followed the music his fingers were passionately and expertly producing. Nikos lives in Samothrace, he was born there, he has no wish to go or be elsewhere. We were sent to him because of our inquiries about climbing the mountain; he knows the island better than anybody else, we were told, he has walked and climbed every inch of it.

It was so; he has also filmed it and sells the video tape at the little taverna he and his wife are running. Their two children help them during school-holidays.

Trade and personalities are intricately as well as intimately related and co-existent in Greece; Greeks are tradesmen, so they naturally link subjects, people and circumstances which, in other cultures, remain usually apart. For that reason it was simple and straightforward for Nikos to bring the love and attraction he has for the mountain and nature into the realm of business and money-making; as simple and straightforward as

2 This island is at the north-eastern side of the Aegean Sea, very close to Turkey also—so close that when our plane had to land at Alexandroupolis, the harbour-city from where we took the boat for the 2½ hour journey to Samothrace, it had to sharply turn 180 degrees so that it would not “touch” Turkey!

3 Bouzouki, Greek form of mandolin, a popular instrument with roots in Asia Minor. It was brought along with the Greeks from there when they had to flee and find refuge in mainland Greece, after the 1922 disaster, when Greece lost pitifully in her confrontation with Kemal’s Turkey.

our response was in buying his video tape, eating at his little taverna, inviting him to our table for a coffee and paying the bill at the end!

So, Greece was interesting, almost as interesting as India is, maybe because they are both ancient cultures, maybe because the culture remains distinct and alive in the people

Like the Indians, the Greeks are also conscious and aware of themselves and their "Greekness" They feel apart from and other than the rest of the world and, in fact, they are.

Although I chose to speak only about Mary and Nikos⁴, there were many others, friends and strangers, people we met by chance Taxi-drivers, sales-ladies, receptionists and shop-keepers, they all carried *in themselves* the quality I've tried to describe

It must be a cultural characteristic; there is a clarity and a directness in the perception the Greek mind has, an ease that allows it to reach high and from there take whatever it needs—almost effortlessly, as if through an extra sense of given capacity it alone has. "You wouldn't have this kind of conversation in Canada, even if it was with a university professor!" Gary exclaimed when I quickly translated the main points of the discussion I was having with the bus-driver. There seems to be a complexity in them which exceeds and isn't based on the linear and one-dimension-only evaluation the western approach gives to things. For example, take this very common expression which is used in Greece when things need to be brought back into perspective; it runs "we are not equal nor are we alike." Try to repeat this elsewhere!

The point I am trying to make is that, although it was Greece who gave logic and democracy and so many other, equally important, concepts to the world, Greece herself has never abided by nor has she herself been limited to those rules.

In short, there is something special about the place as such, and this isn't its natural beauty or the charm of its people. There has been a continuous existence of the culture and this continuity carries its own particular characteristics. There is an impetus, a driving force that has kept most of it all alive; the language, the basic view of the world, that very particular, very specific manner of friendly poise and easiness the Greeks possess, even their poetic⁵ attitude which allows and enables them to see in the world the greatness and subtlety that lingers beyond and behind the forms and norms apparent.

We are probably living through one of the most interesting ages of mankind; never before have the horizons of our earthly existence been so wide Also, never before have we been so openly and overly exposed to each other in such varied, complex and interrelated ways

As a species, we are probably quite close to the apex of our present stage of evolution, the mental stage of our evolution, certainly, we must be going somewhere

4 Perhaps because they seem to be two extremes, one academically educated, the other a drop-out Additionally, they are my own age, the three of us belong to the same generation

5 From the Greek *poieo*, to make

else! Our civilisation is striding and in its wake it churns and moves all and everything; from the Cyber Space to the United Nations and the question of consciousness the physicists are getting involved with and lost in! There is hope in this stride, and our sight seems to be opening up, our childhood's end might not be so far away after all!

The information existing in and crossing the four corners of our earth today is awesome; everybody has heard of something and, consequently, has got something to say too. We have opinions more or less formed about things and events, we follow the news, know the difference between products, we read books, become computer-literate, speak off-handedly about the latest craze and discoveries, we visit foreign lands to go shopping. Most of us can have easy access to anything we might want to know, do or try.

Yet, peculiar as it may be, there are still very few who actually care for information through a personal, direct and individual experience; very few who seek to shape their lives in a manner other than that of the general tide.... And so long as the hour of the rational age has not arrived, the irrational period of society cannot be left behind and that arrival can only be when not a class or a few, but the multitude has learned to think, to exercise its intelligence actively upon its life, its needs, its rights, its duties, its aspirations as human beings for humanity at large... the mind and intellect must develop to their fullness so that the spirituality of the race may rise securely upward upon a broad basis of the developed lower nature in man, the intelligent mental being⁶

We have sought as a species, as people, as individuals. It is our humanity's traces that are built solidly into temple-walls and pillars and it is our grandeur that we find in churches and monuments of epochs past and present. The outlines of our quest through life and time are engraved in laws and rituals, we have etched our thoughts and given them permanence in philosophy, religion, science.*

Our passage on the planet has been prominent indeed; we've been trying our skills constantly upon earth and Time. The results are of a certain progress, no doubt. We have sought and we are presently finding ourselves close to an ideal material organisation; we are nearing an economic and social ultimate. We have created a civilisation of comfort through the use of reason and science and education, and our goal has been to make the individual a perfected social being in a perfected economic society.

Fine, but what about the spirit? What about our most intimate self? Is there a most intimate self?

Indeed, man is transitory. However, there must be some sense concerning our existence and the world we inhabit, another, a *larger* scheme must be active and at

* Cf Francis Thompson's
And all man's Babylons can but impart
The grandeur of his Babylonian heart

Amal Kiran

6 This is what I remember Sri Aurobindo having written somewhere

work, independently and *outside* our narrow and limited perception of the short-lived individuals we appear to be

Darwin brought up the subject of evolution more than a century and a half ago, today science is struggling with facts and results that go beyond and mock its experiments; a Largeness seems to exist and within it universal events are taking place—a Being is evolving with Consciousness as its growing component, Evolution is happening with man as its main actor. Man is, must be, a transitional being. Man is getting himself ready for yet another starting-point, he is just about to take a step similar to that of the Ape, when he crossed the transition-line to where Man stood!*

I've been writing lately a lot and not because there isn't enough printed matter in the world!

It all started a couple of years ago when looking into the subject of translating Sri Aurobindo into Greek, which I did, yet when last spring I met with the publisher in Athens he cautioned me about the attempt

Sri Aurobindo's compact and visionary thought isn't exactly the dream-material for a best-seller.

Couldn't I write something simpler?

The publisher waved towards the general direction I could take, it fell upon me to find a way in, about or out of it!

And that's how the book was started, that's why it is in Greek.

It is a book about the Mind and of the mind's Evolution; it tells of Heraclitus and of the *clear views*** he had when he looked back and down onto the plains of our humanity's simple ground of first thoughts, when he stared up and beyond the mights and heights of our intellect's growing peaks; a book that tries to tell simply and lightly of matters that weigh tons! How the descent of Mind occurred and how mankind is slowly coming to the end of all the roads it could and has taken; glimpses are there of the evolutionary curve we are just about to take and of a splendid future to be, words are searched for the dream to be described, the dream that is already a pressing reality, waiting and working its way down to come true. The book attempts to speak of a Life beyond the Mind, of a Life Divine!

A rather ambitious attempt, I agree. And so are my days, filled with words lately!

Ideas and brooding expanses of silence are my companions and base-camp! In a sense, it does not matter if the book will or will not be a success, whether it is published even. Its preparation seems to be doing a work of enlargement within the well-defined borders of my personality, as if it is founding there a solid ground of mental existence, an existence content in itself yet becoming ever more ready and specific in its quietude

Verily, a time of growth.

* I doubt if an ape could cross any transition-line. A man-like creature must have been "accidentally" born among the apes —Amal Kiran

** Heraclitus is called both the weeping philosopher (as opposed to Democritus the laughing philosopher) and the obscure philosopher because he embodied his views in short enigmatic sentences. He is also the philosopher of flux. Cf. his *panta rhei*—"everything flows" —Amal Kiran

It has been a good year, a turning-point of a year, I might add

There have been specific life-experiences and gains, mostly in the grounds of mind and finance, a quality has been admitted into my perception of the world, a kind of a practical receptivity which clearly sees that a lifetime is too precious a gift to be thrown around and wasted, without actually leaving the world, I've been blessed and lucky enough to look after needs spiritual *and* material in a most supportive, if not extraordinary, environment, to continue doing so is the resolution made for this new year arriving shortly!

It took me awhile to re-adjust after coming back from Greece. It was almost anger I felt, irritable and homesick for awhile, there was plenty I was critical about

Had I come to the end of my India affair? Perhaps, perhaps not. For certain, I needed to have a good look into the accounts of my life! Which I did, and the balance brought forward is on India's credit! Shall not go now into any details; there isn't much of a logic in my decision, anyhow

The other day I happened to come across the lines below, they describe poetically what is behind the abstraction I am trying to convey, the vision this life of mine is given to

A world touched by truth's fleeing hem,
A world cast into a dream of what it seeks,
An icon of truth, a conscious mystery's shape.
It lingered not like the earth-mind hemmed in
In solid barriers of apparent fact,
It dared to trust the dream-mind and the soul

Thus, I too, trust!

KATI WIDMER

THE CONCEPT OF BRAHMACHARYA AND TAPAS IN THE INDIAN VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

It is now universally recognised in the emerging thought in economics, management and development studies that the quality of “Human Resources” and the creative and innovative potentialities of the human work-force are the most important factors determining the prosperity of a society. Much research work is being done on creativity and innovation; but here again most of this research is focused exclusively on the pragmatic and short-term results without any long-term vision. No attempt is made to explore the deep foundations and source of the creative energies of Man. Here comes the utility of the Indian insights which can provide a deeper, holistic and long-term vision for managing human creative energies.

The Concept of Brahmacharya

According to the Indian vision of life, all energies in the individual, Nature and the Universe are manifestations of the creative Energy or Shakti of the Spirit, the One Self in all. Man is a microcosm of the macrocosm; whatever principles, laws and energies operate in the cosmos are also present in Man. All the creative energies in Man, on every level of his being—physical, vital, mental and spiritual—are derived from the corresponding planes of the cosmic energies of the divine Shakti. There are various centres of energy in Man through which the individual human being is linked dynamically to the cosmic energy. In the philosophy of the Tantra, that great, bold, fascinating and synthetic spiritual culture of ancient India, this creative Energy of the divine Being is made the central object of worship, adoration and seeking. Right understanding and application of the methods, laws and processes, Tantra or the Shakti, are considered the means for all mundane and spiritual success, wealth, enjoyment, liberation and beatitude. To progressively increase the capacity of the human system to open, receive, store, conserve and radiate the universal creative Energy, until it becomes a perfect instrument of the divine Shakti, at once a perfect receiver, transmitter, of the divine Light, Intelligence and Energy of the Supreme and Universal Self—an individual Motor in conscious union with the cosmic Dynamo—is the process and aim of the Tantric Sadhana. One of the first principles of this Indian system of human energy management is the concept and practice of Brahmacharya. This ancient Indian practice is normally misunderstood as celibacy. But the primary aim of the practice of Brahmacharya is not a mere sexual abstinence for the sake of moral purity but the conservation and transformation of the biological and vital energy stored in the human being into pure intellectual and spiritual energy. The practice of Brahmacharya is the secret behind the extraordinary cultural achievements of ancient India in the field of religion, spirituality, philosophy, literature, art and architecture.

This is the metaphysical foundation of the Indian theory of Brahmacharya. The application depends on the right understanding of the physiological structure of the

human receptacle of energy. According to the Indian occult physiology, all human energy has a physical basis and foundation, though the source of all energy is spiritual. This physical basis of human energy exists in the human body as the vital-sexual fluid at the bottom of the spine. This fluid state of energy (*retas*) potentially contains hidden within it all the other higher luminous states of energy (*tejas*) in the form of heat, light and electricity. When this vital-sexual fluid is not wasted and allowed to run down in uncontrolled indulgence of vital passions but conserved and directed upwards by appropriate discipline, it progressively gets transformed into higher states of energy—first it becomes heat, *tapas*, stimulating the whole system with health, strength, energy and well-being, in the second stage, it becomes light, *tejas*, which is the source of all knowledge, in the third stage it becomes electricity, *vidyut*, which energises and strengthens the nerves and is the source of all vital vigour and dynamism that gives the individual the capacity for successful and forceful action. Finally when the discipline is pursued further to the last stage of transformation the energy becomes *ojas* and informs the brain with that “primal energy which proceeds from ether” and “which is the most refined form of matter and nearest to the spirit.”² This *ojas* is the source of “spiritual force... by which a man attains to spiritual knowledge, spiritual love and faith and spiritual strength.”³

For those who like to play with modern scientific terminology, we may say Brahmacharya is the transformation of the “bio-plasmic” energy in the body from the fluidic state of *jala* to the thermodynamic energy of *tapas*, from the thermodynamic to the electromagnetic energy of light and electricity, *tejas* and *vidyut*, and finally from the electromagnetic to the nuclear or subatomic energy of *ojas*. While the modern scientific terminology refers only to the different states of material energy, the Sanskrit terminology denotes primarily the different states or stages of transformation of the vital energy in the body. But there may probably be some correspondence between them; the various states of material energy discovered by modern physics could be the material expression of the corresponding states of vital energy.

The practical discipline of Brahmacharya consists of preventing all form of wastage and downward gravitation of the vital energy and directing it upwards by giving it a higher orientation. All forms of uncontrolled indulgence of vital desires and passion, especially sexual passion, in thought, feeling and act wastes the vital energy. On the other hand all forms of conscious self-control preserves and increases energy.

This is the principle behind the Indian concept and practice of Brahmacharya. We must note that what is enjoined here is not merely a complete abstinence from sex for all but a balanced control over all vital passions—especially of course the sexual impulse which wastes the vital energy, called in Indian yoga Prana, which is the source of all creative dynamism and forceful action in every level of the individual. We would also like to repeat here that this control is insisted upon not for any moral reasons but for the conservation of the vital energy of human beings and transforming it into a higher form of energy, dynamism and creative force. The special emphasis on control of the sexual impulse is primarily for two reasons: first, because it is considered as the

source of all energies in the human body and second, because it is the strongest and the most intense among vital passions, with the highest build-up of vital energy in the urge and maximum waste of energy in the act. Therefore when the sexual energy is conserved and transformed it can become a great and potent force for the higher evolution of human beings.

But to achieve the higher aims of Brahmacharya it is not enough to increase the fund of vital energy, it has to be directed upwards by giving it a higher orientation. The average man either wastes his vital energy in the satisfaction of his gross material desires like food and sex or else uses it to satisfy his higher vital ambition for power and success. But in neither case is there Brahmacharya. For the progressive transformation of energy envisaged in Brahmacharya, the increased fund of energy created by the discipline of Brahmacharya has to be turned toward the realisation of some higher mental, moral or spiritual aim and creatively released in some intellectual, artistic, ethical or spiritual pursuit. This brings us to the other Indian concept related to human energy management: Tapas.

The Concept of Tapas

The basic principle behind all the Yogic practices for human energy conservation and transformation is summed up in the profound Sanskrit word Tapas. Here we have another Indian Yogic term which like the earlier word Brahmacharya is loosely translated as penance or austerity. But Tapas is something much more positive than mere penance. The Indian scriptures declare that the divine Being created this world by Tapas; it is also said that nothing is impossible for a man who is capable of right Tapas. What exactly is this Tapas? Here again Sri Aurobindo brings out the true meaning of the word with his unerring Yogic insight:

Tapas is the energising conscious power of cosmic being by which the world is created, maintained and governed; it includes all concepts of Force, Will, Energy, Power, everything dynamic and dynamising.

Tapasya is the concentration of the will to get the results of Sadhana and to conquer the lower nature.

When the will and energy are concentrated and used to control the mind, vital and physical and change them or to bring down the higher consciousness or for any other Yogic purpose or high purpose, that is called Tapasya.⁴

Thus Tapas is the practical aspect of the Indian theory of Brahmacharya. Tapasya means energisation of consciousness, focused and disciplined turning of the creative energies of human consciousness towards higher aims and purposes, especially for a moral and spiritual aim. Though the word Tapas is used in Indian tradition especially to denote moral and spiritual ascesis, in a general sense all concentrated application of human energy—physical, vital, mental or spiritual—directed towards the realisation of

some specific aim is Tapas. Success in any human endeavour requires Tapas.

Thus Tapas involves concentration and self-control, two great qualities which are constantly and repeatedly insisted upon in the Indian spiritual tradition and which are indispensable for the realisation of the aims of Brahmacharya. For it is only by a systematic and conscious discipline, concentration and control that the higher energies are conserved and cultivated and the lower energies transformed by directing them to higher aims.

But Tapas can be effective only when the method and aim of the discipline are in harmony with the natural temperament, *swadharma*, of the individual and the group. Only then the human energies get interested in the discipline and the process of Tapas, instead of a hard penance, become a spontaneous and joyful self-expression of the creative potentialities of the human being leading to harmonious growth. This is the reason why Indian culture never imposed the same and uniform discipline on all irrespective of their natural temperament.

These are the basic principles of the Indian approach to human energy management. Whatever we have discussed above applies to the development not only of the individual but also of the collectivity. If the collective aim set before us is only an endless expansion in the Artha-Kama (Power and Desire) dimensions of life, then the Indian approach becomes redundant. But this is against Nature's law and intention. Man has to evolve beyond his Artha and Kama motives to the higher level of Dharma (Righteousness) for his very survival, he has to fulfil his humanity and then ascend beyond Dharma towards his super-human spiritual destiny. For this higher evolution he has to turn his creative energies towards the realisation of these higher aims and values of Dharma and Moksha (Freedom). This requires a much higher and qualitatively superior intellectual, moral and spiritual force than the one needed for progress in the Artha and Kama dimensions of life. These higher creative energies have to be developed, released and made consciously active in the individual and collective life of humanity. This means some form of collective Tapas with the priority attention focused on the development of the cultural dimension of the collectivity.

M S SRINIVASAN

References

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- 2 *Ibid*, p 335
- 3 *Ibid*
- 4 *Glossary of Terms in Sri Aurobindo's Writings*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram p 164

“SHEER PLAYFULNESS AND DEADLY SERIOUSNESS”

A SURVEY OF THE RECENT WORKS OF P. RAJA*

A Review-Article

WHAT IS astounding about P. Raja as a writer is the range and the volume of his writings. Excelling in creative, critical and non-fictional works, he is the author of poems, short stories, essays and a couple of novels under publication. His critical articles and reviews number in the hundreds. His non-fictional works include biography, history, radio/TV documentary scripts and feature articles for encyclopaedias. A popular writer read avidly by children and housewives on the one hand, his works have received high critical acclaim, winning awards, titles and cash-prizes on the other.

P. Raja reminds one of Hopkins's poem *Pied Beauty* in which the poet expresses wonder at the variety and the multiplicity of God's creation—the vastness and the magnitude, the sheer number of trees and birds, animals and people that populate the earth which is everywhere teeming with life. P. Raja's literary output has not only been impressive but simply enormous.

With the simultaneous publication of three volumes by P. Raja, the multifaceted talent of this much-acclaimed Indian writer from Pondicherry is now available to readers, a collection of personal essays (*For Your Ears Only*), one of short stories (*Kozhi Grandpa's Chickens*) and a third of poems (*To the Lonely Grey Hair*). Readers now have under one cover (three covers, to be precise) some of his best writings that have been published severally over the period of a decade.

The three-volume omnibus leaves the reviewer with a dilemma of where to begin. Nevertheless a beginning has to be made, so let me begin with the volume of essays, *For Your Ears Only*. Not merely because the essay is thought to be the least complex and most direct expression of a writer's thoughts. I do it primarily because P. Raja may be rated among the finest prose essayists in the English language.

On the one hand, the personal essay (more than the novel or short story) has been thought to be the exclusive domain of the Englishman. On the other, the Indian writer writing in English, who has tried to excel in writing novels, short stories and poems, seems not to have taken the essay form seriously. The intimate personal essay, beginning with Addison and Steele and reaching its zenith in Charles Lamb, became favourite reading material of the general public with Chesterton, Lynd, Priestley and company. In this process, it evolved into a fine and subtle medium. Light-hearted and light-humoured, it was a form thought to be best suited to the English sensibility. Not

* The three volumes authored by Dr. P. Raja are *Kozhi Grandpa's Chickens* (short stories), pp. 143, Rs. 75, *To the Lonely Grey Hair* (poems), pp. 62, Rs. 50, *For Your Ears Only* (essays), pp. 111, Rs. 60. All the volumes are published by Busy Bee Books, 74, Poincaré St. Olandai Keerapalayam, Pondicherry - 605 004, India. Tel. (0413) 357247.

even his American or Canadian counterpart was considered to be a match for the English (i.e. British) personal essayist.

One has only to read a couple of essays by P. Raja, or even one, "Visitors to My Library" (Essay No. 3), to dispel this colonial mindset. In its range of interests, in that personal intimacy with the reader taking him into familiar confidence with that gentle, nearly indiscernible soupçon of irony, for his choice of phrase and felicity of expression, in the evocation of a mood or in dwelling on a sentiment, for that good-humoured tongue-in-cheek-iness—for all these you need not turn to Western models. Read Raja.

Yet these essays are not mere ingenious imitations. The author has masterfully adapted the genre to the Indian sensibility and psyche. Like all successful personal essays these are drawn from everyday, personal experiences and not from abstract, theoretical premises. They then go on to touch upon the universality of these experiences. Often, while reading them, one is bound to feel, "I too felt that way, only why didn't I think of saying it in those words?"

There are 13 essays in the collection, like the 13 stories in the other volume. 13 seems to be P. Raja's dozen. If his fame and success as a writer, the awards and citations he has received are an indication, 13 must be Raja's lucky number!

His creative art can turn the drab and the mundane into very interesting reading matter. One sees everywhere in this collection of personal essays the master storyteller. The strands and threads of life are woven into delightful patterns of fabric. So much so, we do not see the diarist or memoirist—a mere recorder of facts or a chronicler of events. We see everywhere the fabricator, the yarn-spinner, the storyteller.

Each of the 13 essays has an interesting story to tell though each of them is based on the hard facts of the author's life and experience. We find that reading about someone's life can be as interesting as reading his art.

With abundant humour and affable irony, the first 3 essays deal with the author's personal library. They tell the story of how his entire collection of books was obtained to build up an impressive library. There is also the story of visitors to his library—insect visitors! Each of his library books has a story to tell, not only the story contained within its cover, but the story of how it was acquired and collected by him. The next two essays are about his career as a writer, in which the author records his indebtedness to his mentors. The fifth essay speaks of his romance with writing. The theme of the remaining essays are the members of his family, friends and colleagues. The last two essays are the crowning masterpieces of this collection. "How I Collected the Folktales of Pondicherry" is an interesting story of how he collected stories. The last essay "My Poems and I" describes how his poems are born. Peppered with a few of his poems, it illustrates the occasion and the process of the creative urge in P. Raja.

The only limitation of these essays are the names of some of the people and places mentioned by the author. For Pondicherrians, for the author's friends and relatives, they evoke a special interest. To the distant reader, mention of these names must be

annoyingly ‘personal’, a mere chronicling This double-bind is a weakness that is inherent to the personal essay One recalls *Essays of Elia* in which Charles Lamb remembers his relatives and friends and the South Sea House in which he worked This handicap (quite unavoidable) is more than offset by the breadth and sweep of the author’s experiences which are so delightfully narrated

From the personal essays, turning to the volume of short stories, *Kozhi Grandpa’s Chickens*, is a smooth, easy transition, for with P. Raja it is hard to define where fact ends or fiction begins The first short story, ‘The Unforgettable Woman’, narrated in the first person, is anecdotal You can read it as one more personal essay, a record of its author’s childhood memories Or it could be a clever disguise—a short story camouflaged behind the façade of a personal essay

Unlike the personal essay, the short story is a form at which Indian writers are adept Mr. P. Raja does not lag behind, as these stories are among the best in Indo-English writing All these stories celebrate the *comédie humaine* (except the 12th, ‘Midnight Knock’, which is sombre). Everywhere it is the typical human predicament—the climax so convincing—as fitting as it is unexpected and twisted Even in ‘Glass Fish’ (5th story), which is an outpouring of the anguish of a cuckolded husband narrated in extended first person monologue, it is the human comedy that is brought out With a deceptively simple title, this story is a dramatic monologue in prose, rich in ironies and metaphoric language. The diversity of the people and culture of India is expressed in the author’s own idiom. All the diversity of our nation is to be found in the unity of the Bombay Red Light district which is ripe with ‘Kashmir apples,’ ‘Tamil guavas,’ ‘Kerala coconuts’ and ‘U P laddus’!

‘Mr Fishbowl’ (story no 2) is another long monologue. This time the narration is put in the mouth of Sendhil, the protagonist, with brief interruptions by other characters to nudge the narrative ahead Surprisingly in this story, Sendhil has a chest of drawers, impossibly containing, yes, 13 drawers! One is puzzled, but with P Raja the number 13 seems to be neither unlucky nor unwieldy The story is a monologue on Mr Fishbowl, an Englishman, a fastidious ass with a fetish for cleanliness This monomaniacal obsession of Mr Fishbowl is narrated in a droning monologue. Here, Raja’s technique itself helps you to discover the theme of the tale Sendhil’s monologue is broken by the arrival of Mr. Fishbowl himself. The resulting (anti)climax is a remarkable achievement in the art of short stories, à la O’Henry or Maupassant

The third story, ‘Crabs’, is autobiographical, reminding us of the Dickensian dread of the schoolboy living ever in fear of the master’s rod ‘Clouds’, the next story, is built on the generation gap, but based on an Indian household situation

The voice of the little girl hungering for her daddy’s love and attention is heard in ‘Dear God, This is Radhika’ (No. 6) The girl has lost her father’s attention because he is busy with the activity of building a house

By this time, half way through the collection, if you begin to wonder whether all the stories are only monologues, just wait ‘Kozhi Grandpa’s Chickens’ (No. 7), the title-story, is narrated by the omniscient author in the traditional Indian storytelling

manner. There is little dialogue—or monologue here. With full narrative control, the author relates the adventures and the final misadventure of the oldest chicken thief in the village. As in the other stories, here too irony abounds. The next story, “A Weird Brood of Rivals” is a ghost story narrated through the frame-tale technique. “The Gold Seed” is told in the folkloric, Raja-Rani-tale tradition. On the other hand, “The Day of the Minister” is tightly constructed, steadily building up to its climax.

Among the last 3 stories, there is “Midnight Knock”, the sole exception to this delightful collection. A poignant tale with a Joycean epiphany, it tells us that nothing changes in the world more than for a Hindu woman who finds herself widowed. “Even a Blade of Grass,” the penultimate story, is brilliant self-reflective fiction. The story is a metaphor for the art of story-telling and the (lucrative) business of story-telling. “After Grandma, Who?”, the last tale, is an experiment in multiple narration.

The breadth and variety of these 13 tales provide an enjoyable reading experience. The author’s achievement here is that there is a plurality of voices in these tales. Nowhere does he take a fixed stance, nowhere does he thrust his world-view on the reader, nowhere is he palpably present. If, while reading a story, you feel convinced that it is the author’s own voice, his personal conviction that is speaking, the author unsettles you without fail by taking a different stance and assuming a new pose in the next one. *Kozhu Grandpa’s Chickens*, a *pot-pourri* of tales, deserves a place in bookshelves containing the best short story collections in English. Read it for enjoyment, read it for its author’s technical skill, read it for its smooth flow of dialogue or descriptive narration, or read it for the English language in Indian idiom that has been the forte of writers like R. K. Narayan. Read it any way and you will be delighted.

“Primarily, I am an entertainer”, declares P. Raja on the back cover of his third volume, a collection of poems titled *To the Lonely Grey Hair*. He keeps his promise in this collection of 52(!) poems, mostly light verse. Raja’s dozen, numbering 13, relentlessly pursues the reader with a vengeance, this time multiplied four times. But it is a sweet revenge that the author wreaks on you! If you need a rough guide to understanding these pieces, turn to the last essay in his collection of essays, “My Poems and I”. The poetics of P. Raja there can be found in practice here. Not that you need a guide to read these eminently readable and thoroughly enjoyable pieces.

Obscurity and dense writing have been taken to be the hallmark of great poetry ever since T. S. Eliot’s dictum that modern poetry has to be necessarily complex. So much so that it is now a commonplace that if a poet has something profound or important to say he better say it in obscure, dense verse. But in the case of many poets, obscurity is a veneer to cover the mediocrity of their thought and fuzziness of expression. Simplicity and clarity of expression have become taboo in poetic expression. To this literary asphyxia, P. Raja’s poems provide a breath of fresh air—simple, elemental, yet invigorating.

Most of the poems are entertainers, unrestrained by the shackles of rhyme or metre, written in free verse. As in his essays and short stories, in their themes and concerns, the poems deal with what is immediate and personal to the writer. Here too,

there is little abstraction or theorization. Each of the poems is based on some solid, felt, personal experience, going on to celebrate the universality of these experiences.

The 52 poems can be grouped in two ways. One can go by their set of themes, most of them recurrent. Or one can go by the author’s treatment, his attitude to the topic at hand—ranging from genuine, simple admiration to subtle, good-natured irony or from gentle satire to biting invective.

First there are the poems about his poems, his career as a writer and his critics. “A Place of My Own” (Poem No. 5), a poem about his library, ends up as a satire on his critics. “Inspired Typewriter” (No. 7) is on the creative process in him. The moment of the spark of creativity in him is described thus:

The inward stillness
Like a pebble-disturbed pond
Creates a gleaming circle of ripples

“The Writer at Home” (No. 11) is about criticism within the home. It concludes:

Hailed by fans from all corners
the writer is
a non-entity at home

“A Budding Writer’s Life” (No. 16) describes the frustrations of an apprentice writer eager to see himself in print. “My Fans” (No. 19) describes humorously how his poems are consumed and digested *literally* by bookworms—real, not metaphorical worms. “Oh, These Ideas” (No. 40) and “Gratefully Yours” (No. 41), “Dust” (No. 43) and “Why I Write a Poem” (No. 49) are about the creative process, while “Get Lost, You Cynic” (No. 50) is an invective against unfavourable critics.

One major target of the satirical pieces is the Hindu worship of stone idols. “The Hindu Wife” (No. 13) and “Indian Gods” (No. 24) decry idol worship, while in “Lungless Gods” (No. 35), the poet concludes:

Lungless Gods
are but creations of
heartless men.

Bitter invective is reserved for the academia. Rank careerism coupled with the intellectual mediocrity among academics are the target of the poet’s unalloyed anger in “Refresher Course”. The poet laments that shallow knowledge is hidden under high-sounding jargon and lack of scholarship is made up for by name-dropping. In this poem and “Seminar” (No. 48), the poet pours his wrath against the whole business of academic conferences and seminars. Very often, he points out, these meets are meant to perpetuate the career advancement of the visiting professors rather than to enlighten

their listeners. Likewise, in “Quiz Master” (No 42), the author says

Pluck the sheets
 from his proud hand.
 You will see another
 Samson without hair

As a contrast to these satirical verses, there are a few poems on nature which express genuine wonder. Totally without a trace of anger or irony, the imagery of these poems is breathtaking. The capstone of these images is to be found in “On the Seashore” (No 12). The poet sees in the rising waves on the beach the cobra raising its hood.

Who is the snake-charmer
 to whose unheard music
 from his invisible flute
 these foaming snakes
 charmed to the tip of their tail
 ferociously poised
 to attack?

Likewise, the opening poem of this collection, “Disturbed Flowers”, catches, in Imagist fashion, butterflies taking to their wings from non-flowering garden plants. Like the cinematographer’s lens, the poet catches and records in poetic medium, in a single image—a momentary, silent explosion of colour. In total contrast, “In Indian Streets” (No. 44) presents a street scenario, catching the vibrancy of life pulsating in the streets of India.

Then there are the reflective, philosophic pieces, a recurring theme being death. To these pieces can be added the lighter verse including the title poem “To the Lonely Grey Hair” (No 2). Using humour to cover the frustrations of greying, this ode is addressed to a stray grey hair. The lonely grey hair is a traitor to be banished (plucked out) from the realm of his crown of dark hair. The following piece, “To the Poet From His Hairs” is a palinode, a rejoinder to the poet. In Trade Union fashion, his hairs threaten to desert him en masse, leaving him utterly bald for dismissing one of their members, the single grey hair. Similarly in “Shame”, the poet curses the flies pestering his wounds until his moment of realisation.

Cursed be my wounds
 for it is they
 that attract them .

Several of the poems are personal, dwelling on his father, his wife and child while there

are a few pieces which are impersonal like “Killer Time” (No. 6) and “Toes and Foes” (No. 8).

The poet has not ignored the most vital and mysterious of human functions—sex. When it comes to writing about sex, P. Raja is no hypocrite. Nor does he care for indirection or subtlety. The borderline between what is erotic and what is pornographic is very thin and difficult to define. A severe limitation of Raja’s poetry lies in not finding this borderline.

There is even a love poem entitled “A Love Poem” (No. 20). The last piece “The Traitor” is a serious poem, while “Ghosts” and “Somewhere One Should” (Nos. 25 & 26) present some obscurity.

All said and done, as a poet P. Raja will be read as a master of light verse, with a fine eye for detail, imaginative in metaphor, bitter invective in satire, delightful in humour and quite serious when it comes to the expression of his feelings.

As said earlier, his total disregard for rhyme and metre makes the poems unsuitable for reading aloud. The major setback of free verse can be found in the poem “Why I Write Poems?” (No. 49). Realign the poetic lines in this poem to form whole sentences by removing the “intimidating silences” on both margins and you are left with perfect prose paragraphs! In reverse, it is a prose paragraph of continuous sentences chopped mechanically to create poetic lines and stanzas. Beware, writers of free verse!

After reading the trio of this delightful collection of thirteens, it can be emphatically said that reading Raja is a rewarding experience. No mere abstractionist or philosopher, his writings are grounded on the real, the everyday experiences of his life and his occupation as a writer. His writings entertain and delight. With him, it is no retreat to the intellectual ivory tower. Nor is his poetry tough nuts to be cracked with difficulty. They are like spring water, pellucid and sparkling, quenching and invigorating, unembellished by artificial colour or flavour. Easily accessible, consumed without much effort and digested. No dabbler in obscurity and dense writing, P. Raja’s poems succeed by his simple, straightforward approach.

Conspicuous in his entire writing is the total lack of any mention of his experiences as a teacher. A teacher for 18 years, why is it his classroom experiences find no place in any of these collections? Surely, when everything seems to be grist to Raja’s writing mill, one wonders why. But given his range and variety, he may be keeping something still up his sleeve.

P RAMASWAMY

A POINT OF KEATSIAN ORDER

A BOOK perhaps not without some value is *On the Poetry of Keats*, by E. C. Pettet (Cambridge, 1957). In the course of the annotation to this book, Mr. Pettet takes exception to the treatment given the ode "On a Grecian Urn" by one of the more prominent of our plentiful Modern supply of lightweights, Cleanth Brooks. Mr. Brooks, a man well instructed in the "paradoxes" and the "ambiguities", has said that the famous equation of truth and beauty with which the poem ends is to be taken within its context, dramatically, as an utterance of the urn, and thus appreciated; while he also in another place praises this poem for its "insight into essential truth". Mr. Pettet complains of obstruction here, and advances the assertion that Mr. Brooks cannot have it both ways. He says that if the poem sees any essential truth it cannot seal it up hermetically, as it were: it must be willing and ready to "test its validity against the scientific and philosophical generalizations which dominate our world." Mr. Pettet adds that Mr. Brooks has not met Mr. Eliot's charge, that the conclusion is untrue, but has evaded it.

Here we may observe that Mr. Eliot himself has been a remarkable master of the evasion of the serious questions, and of the consequences of his own statements; and that his damp charge need not occasion us apprehension, or long detain us. He is no authority as to whether Keats (or the urn) is right or not, this Mr. Eliot, and his own generalizations and conclusions have neither truth nor beauty. Beauty at least one must grant this famous ode, a beauty of which only a genuine poetic mind is capable; and for this alone it will continue to be commented upon, when Mr. Eliot is forgotten.

And now, just where is the difficulty, and why cannot Mr. Brooks have it both ways? Because it is not logical? Perhaps it does not seem so, but whether it is or not is irrelevant. Logic is a valuable thing, and it can keep one from falling into disorder, but it can also be a crippling thing, preventing one from rising into a larger and more complex order, and from grasping the simplicity of it all. There is nothing to prevent a thing's being true in a certain dramatic context, and yet also expressing and embodying something of absolute and universal validity. Or if he would claim that there is, the burden of proof is on the logician's own narrow shoulders. And in fact one may question whether a thing, or a general statement of this kind, can be really *true* in a circumscribed context, if it is not also true in the larger order.

But is it not passably well known even among the Modern academics that the word "truth" is used in various ways? And is not our understanding of Keats contingent upon our understanding of his use of the word? Certainly if by "truth" we mean actual facts and the phenomena of this relative world, or something and something alone that, like a Euclidian proposition, is "logically verifiable"—if we confine ourselves to the surfacemost physical and social, or the most formally conceptual existence—then the generalization of Keats cannot but look like arrant nonsense. But if we venture to believe in Truth, that is, something absolute, then the case is altered. And it must be acknowledged that poets do have a way of venturing into beliefs removed from the

common and even the learned and logical apprehension Poe did it. This has occasioned confusion for some, for he does not always use the word "truth" in the same way, his abhorrence of didacticism, or the prating of a conditional and problematical truth, not contradicting his conviction that poetry can give truth indeed.

May we understand that a poet is not wont to submit to bullying as Mr Pettet advises, and that he is usually not very much in harmony with the kinds of thing that "dominate our world"? He is even logical enough, in fact, to see that domination is not its own proof of genuine validity, and that the fact that our world is the slave of certain "scientific" and "philosophical" generalizations does not of itself give those generalizations a necessary rapport with what is true. Because our science and our present science-dominated philosophy do not deal with Truth or even believe in it, they have nothing to do with Keats or with the determination of whether he is right or wrong. They are entirely negative in this respect, most frequently they deny Truth, thus maintaining an unproved assumption which for some reason makes them comfortable, at their best, their clearest and most honest, they can only admit that they know nothing of it, or of anything, indeed, beyond the very narrow compass of their instruments and their methods. And as to whether Keats or any genuine poet may know more than they, or have a genuine inspiration or even revelation from a realm that is closed to them, they are quite incapable of judging, unless they can do so "unverifiably", outside of their "scientific" preoccupations.

Some have been perplexed by the fact that Plato was considerably less friendly to poets than poets have been to Plato. But his fumbling idea of mimesis aside, the philosopher had one tremendous insight, that of an ideal or a supra-phenomenal world of forms; and since great poets feel a breath of that world (to speak poetically), they are naturally in some rapport with the man who announced its existence to this plane of shadows. Then they have Plotinus, who took the step of granting them the capacity to give something of that world direct, for the mitigating of this shadowy existence. The inspiration that is essential to poetry gives always something of the stable, the clear and unshadowy, beyond, and raises the consciousness. With a crystalline compact power the poet's vision is a flame, that can burn even to intimations of a higher being that is true substance, where there is no division as we know it here, and where all diversity is a unity with itself and all, in perfect self-containment, perfectly formed, and the cause of form and true substance in others, as they can receive its light and power. There is indeed a Platonic or more than Platonic world where truth and beauty are truly and beautifully identical. That the scientists and their philosophical hangers-on that now dominate us do not know this world, and that the world they do know is one in which division is natural and unity factitious, their very approach and method confirming it in this character, is quite irrelevant to the serious question with which we are here concerned. We need not capitulate to the abjectness of supposing that their way is the only way, and that their ignorance must be our utmost enlightenment. The question—as with all true questions—can be truly and decisively answered only by an enlarging, a deepening and heightening of the consciousness. Beauty, as one of the

major aspects of divinity, cannot truly be separated from truth, its being so or seeming so in our common experience is a matter of the veiling and the stepping down of its truth, and thus its beauty, to the conditions of this world of reflections and fumbling approximations. The closer that one comes to the divine consciousness, or the more of it that comes in one's inspiration, the closer its aspects come to the radical unity, the identity that is always theirs; and one may be sure that they are one, though in one's general living and ordinary and habitual consciousness there may be little realization of the fact.

But the remoteness of the unity is not meant to be everlasting, it must become less and less remote, until finally it is manifest here, in this world. Beauty being only one aspect, however, the utterance of the urn is not complete, and the identity of truth and beauty is not *all* that one needs to know, or can know. Truth is also knowledge, power and love (the true divine things, not the approximations, poor translations and deprivations we know in this fragmented and divided life); and beyond these major aspects there are no doubt others; and the unity must be fourfold, and manifold. The utterance of the urn is not sufficient to this larger wisdom and life to come.

As for Keats himself, one should not forget the double equation—the statement is, not only that beauty is truth, but that truth is beauty. To Keats both were important, and if he had lived he might have proved himself as one of our greatest poetical intellects, or philosophical poets. It was in that direction that he was tending. While it may be that in some way the seeds of “aestheticism” can be found in him, to try to hold him responsible for the sterile or anaemic beauty that has been the stock of some later and lesser poets would be too much, a positively indecent addition to a fate already sufficiently severe. What he wanted in his depths was a full poetry, opulent and ripe, with the love, knowledge and power of true beauty—an equal development of meaning, image and music in a fulness of art that would give some fulness of the Permanence that never dies.

Note That good man Professor Tillotson—if indeed he enjoyed the distinction of that title, and was not just a Don or something—that fine and suggestive scholar has put forward another interpretation of the ode's concluding Word: that it is spoken to the figures on the urn, and was not meant as a general statement at all. This does put a different complexion on the matter; and certainly, for those figures, their truth and very being is simply in their status as works of art, which is their beauty. Perhaps this was all that Keats meant, but the words will not be so restricted and, indeed, the more richness that one may find in a poem, the better.

JESSE ROARKE

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of September 1998)

The Human Cycle is the projection of Sri Aurobindo's theory of 'social evolution', from the symbolic to the psychological stage. *The Human Cycle* was reprinted after over thirty years of its serialisation in the *Arya*. The reprinted text contained occasional references to Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler and to Fascism, Nazism and Soviet communism, and showed that here and there a sentence or a paragraph was added when the *Arya* sequence was reissued as *The Human Cycle*.

As a convenient starting-point, Sri Aurobindo takes up the German theorist Lamprecht's idea that human society progresses through certain distinct stages—symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist and subjective—that are "a sort of psychological cycle through which a nation or a civilisation is bound to proceed"¹

Looking at the early societies all over the world, Sri Aurobindo points at how these men were aware of elements and powers in Nature that exercised a profound influence on their daily lives. They felt and sensed some presences in the environment and they looked up to them with awe, worshipped them and developed relations with them through their own rituals and prayers. This is the Symbolic Age in which everything in external life is looked upon symbolically for deeper and unseen but concretely felt truths and prayers. A religious and intuitive mentality characterises these societies. Gradually, the external forms tend to become more important than their motivating truths, leading to the Conventional and Typical Age.

In India, the Vedic Age could be called "Symbolic" in the true sense of the word. Sri Aurobindo says "If we look at the beginnings of Indian society, the far-off Vedic age which we no longer understand, for we have lost that mentality, we see that everything is symbolic. The religious institution of sacrifice governs the whole society and all its hours and moments, and the ritual of the sacrifice is at every turn and in every detail, as even a cursory study of the Brahmanas and Upanishads ought to show us, mystically symbolic. Not only the actual religious worship but also the social institutions of the time were penetrated through and through with the symbolic spirit"²

Sri Aurobindo has said: "The conventional stage of human society is born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the ideal, become more important than the ideal, the body or even the clothes more important than the person. Thus in the evolution of caste, the outward supports of the ethical fourfold order,—birth, economic function, religious ritual and sacrament, family custom,—each began to exaggerate enormously its proportions and its importance in the scheme. This rigidity once established, the maintenance of the ethical type passed...In the full economic period of the caste the priest and pundit masquerade under the name of the Brahmin, the aristocrat and the feudal baron under the name of the Kshatriya, the trader and money-getter under the name of the Vaishya, the half-fed labourer and economic serf under the name of the Shudra. When the economic basis also breaks down, then the

unclean and diseased decrepitude of the old system has begun; it has become a name, a shell, a sham. That invisible fact is the last and present state of the caste system in India ”³

Since things become more and more artificial, the tyranny of social law and custom try to stifle the individual spirit. This leads to the revolt of the individual in an Age of Individualism and Reason to assert his freedom to function and grow as he chooses. The unchecked career of the individual at the cost of the society leads to the search for the key to human progress, and in the Age of Subjectivism there is a shift from surface probings of reason to deeper questionings. Having passed these stages, we are on the verge of the Spiritual Age. The problem of man is being seen in a different perspective and the higher human mind is coming to recognise that it is only at the level of the soul, the self, that all disharmonies can be resolved, conflicts eliminated and peace and unity achieved. Sri Aurobindo writes “Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion—it does not greatly matter which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it—of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature, that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge—the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter—can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within, but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous spiritual figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain for ever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failures. Failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used and the gate that so long resisted opens ”⁴

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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MANTRA IN SRI AUROBINDO: THE SUMMIT POETRY

ACCORDING to Sri Aurobindo, Mantra is the poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality. It is the reality of some higher plane of the Intuitive or the Overmind Consciousness. The Vedic Rishis too believed that the Mantra dwells on higher hidden planes of Consciousness. Rishi Dirghatamas speaks of “the Mantras of the Veda, as existing ‘in a supreme ether, imperishable and immutable in which all the gods are seated’.” [RV I 164 39] Since the soul, a spark of the Divine, is at the centre of our being with body, life and mind as its instruments, it expresses realities of the One Divine on these planes in what we call Mantra.

For the Mantra to exist in the depth of our being, transformation of our ordinary consciousness is imperative. Sri Aurobindo has spoken of triple transformation—psychic, spiritual and supramental. Towards it is man’s need to be able to enter into the domain of the Mantra. Ordinarily, the instrumental selves are in command of the governance of our nature. In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo says

Certainly if you want to achieve a greater poetry, more unique, you will yourself have to change, to alter the poise of your consciousness. At present you write, as you do other things, too much with the brain, the mere human intelligence. To get back from the surface vital into the psychic and psychic vital, to raise the level of your mental from the intellect to the Illumined Mind is your need both in poetry and in Yoga.²

The way is thus paved to go into the inner or spiritual spaces of the soul to find the domain of the Mantra. Of the Mantra Sri Aurobindo says.

An inspired Knowledge sat enthroned within
Whose seconds illumined more than reason’s years
An ictus of revealing lustre fell
As if a pointing accent upon Truth,
And like a sky-flare showing all the ground
A swift intuitive discernment shone
One glance could separate the true and false,
Or raise its rapid torch-fire in the dark
To check the claimants crowding through mind’s gates
Covered by the forged signatures of the gods,
Detect the magic bride in her disguise
Or scan the apparent face of thought and life.³

Further he says

Oft inspiration with her lightning feet,
A sudden messenger from the all-seeing tops,

Traversed the soundless corridors of his mind
 Bringing her rhythmic sense of hidden things
 A music spoke transcending mortal speech.⁴

Mantra is not a mental construction. It is revealed poetry, "revealed by silence to the silent soul."⁵ It is the future of poetry. Sri Aurobindo visualizes that man is destined to evolve to the higher planes of Consciousness where dwells the Mantra. Since these higher planes are very near the Sovereign World of the Divine Consciousness, it is creative in effect.

The intense creatrix in his stillness wrought..⁶

Here the words are expressive of the Divine Consciousness. Nay, the words are made of its own stuff. In *Savitri* the poet says.

As when the mantra sinks in Yoga's ear,
 Its message enters stirring the blind brain
 And keeps in the dim ignorant cells its sound,
 The hearer understands a form of words
 And, musing on the index thought it holds,
 He strives to read it with the labouring mind,
 But finds bright hints, not the embodied truth.
 Then, falling silent in himself to know
 He meets the deeper listening of his soul
 The Word repeats itself in rhythmic strains:
 Thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self
 Are seized unutterably and he endures
 An ecstasy and an immortal change.⁷

It has got its effect on the universal planes as well.

The Mantra can not only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychical being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did not before possess, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the production of material forms on the physical plane.⁸

Mantra may thus be viewed as the Divine's instrument to work out what it holds. Its descent into the earth-nature will bring about a greater evolutionary change for which the earth has come into existence. Such a future of poetry in which the psychic change is imperative and destined as well is drawing the world to it. This is no more a matter of distant tomorrow since we find T. S. Eliot having an urge for peace while he says:

Shantih Shantih Shantih ⁹

As a matter of fact modern poetry is a yearning for peace, divine peace
To quote *Savitri*

He feels a Wideness and becomes a Power,
All knowledge rushes on him like a sea
Transmuted by the white spiritual ray
He walks in naked heavens of joy and calm,
Sees the God-face and hears transcendent speech ¹⁰

This vision of 'the God-face' and hearing of the 'transcendent speech' are on the Mantric plane

Since *Savitri* is the vision of the Truth from this Supramental Consciousness, it transcends all the Mantras. It brings about the total transformation of man and the universe, and contains the Divine and all Its manifestations which are yet to take place. Mantra is thus the reality of those planes of existence also which are unmanifest.

The murmur and whisper of the unheard sounds
Which crowd around our hearts but find no window
To enter, swelled into a canticle
Of all that suffers to be still unknown
And all that labours vainly to be born
And all the sweetness none will ever taste
And all the beauty that will never be ¹¹

They are inaudible, unmanifest to the physical, vital and mental. Sri Aurobindo further observes

Inaudible to our deaf mortal ears
The wide world-rhythms wove their stupendous chant
To which life strives to fit our rhyme-beats here,
Melting our limits in the illimitable,
Tuning the finite to infinity ¹²

Such a tuning of the finite to the infinite will create the necessary conditions for manifestation of the reality of the planes of the Mantra. Going into *Savitri*, the Mantra is a journey to the higher planes of existence. We have a 'rhythmic voyage' to the worlds which Ashwapati undertakes for the destined transfiguration of the earth.

The *Savitri*-mantra has come to uplift earth's fate "lifting earth-beings to immortality." It has come to show Matter revealing "the Spirit's face" ¹³ We hear.

The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life Divine ¹⁴

NIKHIL KUMAR

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- 8 Sri Aurobindo *The Upanishads* (1988), pp 125-126
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LOGIC, LANGUAGE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of September 1998)

Sri Aurobindo

THERE IS a rich Indian tradition in language philosophy. The *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* schools of thought paid particular attention to logic. There is also one of the most advanced studies in philology known as *Bhashika*, Panini was its protagonist. What Aristotle was to formal logic, Panini was to the Sanskrit language and grammar. Sri Aurobindo has a unique blend in him. His thought has the background of Western systematic study, i.e., all his theses are grounded in logic. In other words, his doctrines,—e.g., evolution of man, consciousness, systems of knowledge and ethics,—are argued critically, methodically, delineating cause-effect and relation. At the same time, his themes are thoroughly Indian. the metaphysical concept of the Absolute and the individual, the relation of one and many, the spirituo-ethical concept of karma, the final liberation of the soul and, above all, the doctrine of consciousness. The greatest difference between Western logic and Sri Aurobindo's logic is that the former has no spiritual element in it, but, for the latter, spiritual enlightenment and attainment of spiritual perfection are the sole and supreme aim.

Sri Aurobindo says that "logic consists in the right perception of relations"¹ between one and many. What we express in sentences or propositions contain within them entities in relationship with each other, subject and predicate, substance and quality which stand in relation to each other, whatever their relation, whether quantitative or qualitative, singular or plural, it must be expressed intelligibly. Such an exercise of establishing relationships is logic. There is a spiritual side to this definition! According to very old Indian metaphysics, the Vedanta Philosophy, although there is one single Reality, the Brahman—we find it being expressed in individuals that are many. The supernatural logic demands that, over and above the mundane logic of relations between things, we must also see the transcendent aspect. The real logic, the true knowledge, is to learn to relate these, the one and the many.

Why Logic

"Logical reasoning is useful and indispensable in its own field in order to give the mind a certain clearness, precision and subtlety in dealing with its own ideas and word-symbols, so that our perception of the truths which we arrive at by observation and experience or which physically, psychologically or spiritually we have seen, may be as little as possible obscured by the confusions of our average human intelligence, its proneness to take appearance for fact, its haste to be misled by partial truth, its exaggerated conclusions, its intellectual and emotional partialities, its incompetent bunglings in that linking of truth to truth by which alone we can arrive at a complete knowledge"²

In the above passage, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between logic and practical truth. Logic is precise and is able to relate intelligibly with the physical, psychological and transcendental facts. Our practical reason, the judgment of appearance, may mislead and confuse us. It is true that one need not be formally instructed in logic—we all speak logically without ever studying the subject. We learn to drive a car, but we do not bother to know the mechanics of the functioning of the engine which only the experts in that field know and whose help we seek when our car breaks down. So, too, we speak and relate to each other in a language that is learnt in a social milieu, and we do so quite intelligibly. We do not, in the least, require the knowledge of the structure of syllogisms to speak logically or sensibly.

Then, why logic? But the advantages of this science are obvious. For, logic not only helps us to understand our system of thinking, it is the system itself, the various fundamental laws that govern our reason. Logic is indispensable if our reason has to function in a systematic way. It also helps us to distinguish what we perceive through our senses as real and unreal. However, over and above these obvious advantages, it indicates to us the possibility of a transcendental reason that enables us to know the mystery behind the things, the Truth. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

To understand truly the world-process of the Infinite and the Time-process of the Eternal, the consciousness must pass beyond this finite reason and the finite sense to a larger reason and spiritual sense in touch with the consciousness of the Infinite and responsive to the logic of the Infinite which is the very logic of being itself and arises inevitably from its self-operation of its own realities, a logic whose sequences are not the steps of thought but the steps of existence.³

Our reason is limited to sensual abstraction and association of ideas. It is a limited and an imperfect instrument, however, it is the only instrument that we have which directs us to something infinite and transcendental. Human reason shadows the eternal reason, therefore, although it is limited, it can still indicate to us the transcendental; through our reason we may deduce the existence of God. We may not be able to experience the Divine through our senses, but with a raised consciousness—that is accomplished by the Divine Himself—we can reach that stage. At that stage, of course, the logical parameters are not the same as the rational, but then they are not irrational, they are supra-rational. Likewise our consciousness has an experience that transcends the sensual experience.

Language, Logic and Truth

A. J. Ayer, one of the protagonists of modern positivism, insisted that anything that does not measure up to the logical truth is magic and that philosophy has no business with it. Metaphysics was one such magic, for, its statements made no sense. In the same vein, the statements of theology too are non-sensical. The business of philosophy is to

examine language and collect exact data to build a true body of knowledge with precise language. If any statement has to be accepted as true it must be done so on the condition of its empirical verifiability¹ Philosophy was, thus, strictly a logic of science The language analysts probed this thesis for the better part of the 20th century The strenuous results of such philosophising by Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein and scores of others ultimately led to the conclusion that it is not possible to arrive at any truth, not even the mathematical one, except the testimonial truths of our basic observations such as ‘‘I have pain’’ or ‘‘I see orange’’, etc An entire century was spent to find this out! But even such personal propositional testimonies may not be true, since they are totally subjective and such propositions may only be apparent Thus language, which was supposed to have solved philosophical problems, itself became a greater problem

Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, had no problems with metaphysics He welcomed it as something that helps one in the accumulation of knowledge Accordingly, we develop a definite language that helps us to share this knowledge. Of course, this knowledge has limitations and it is reflected in our language. What is important, however, is that when we have arrived at a certain stage of knowledge, then we pass over it to the transcendental from a language of words to a language of non-words, from finite logic to what Sri Aurobindo would call the logic of the infinite

(To be concluded)

DANIEL ALBUQUERQUE

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BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A Captive of Her Love letters and paintings of Janina Stroka Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, February 1998 Pp 80 + 27 Price Rs 175

The Mother on Janina's Passing

I remember, the very day Janina died (she died at about six in the morning, I think), around four in the morning, suddenly something made me take interest in this question What will the new form be like? What will it be like? And I looked at man and at the animal Then I saw that there would be a much greater difference between man and the new form than between man and the animal I started to see things, and it happened that Janina was there (in her thought, but a quite material and very concrete thought) And it was very interesting (it lasted a long time, about two hours), because I saw the whole timidity of human conceptions, whereas she had made contact with something it wasn't an idea but a sort of contact I had the impression of a Matter that was more plastic and full of Light, responding much more directly to the Will (the higher Will), and with such a plasticity that it could respond to the Will by taking variable and changing forms And I saw some of these forms of hers, which she had conceived—a little like these beings who don't have a body like us, but who have hands and feet when they want, and a head when they want, and luminous clothes when they want—things like that I saw that and I remember I congratulated her I told her, "You have had a partial, but partially very clear perception of one of the forms the new Manifestation will take " And she was very happy I told her, "You see, you have worked fully for the future " Then all at once I saw a sapphire-blue light, pale, very luminous, shaped like a flame (with a rather broad base), and it made a kind of flash, pfft! and then it was gone . And she was no longer there. I thought "Well, that's odd!" An hour later (I saw this around six in the morning; all the rest had lasted about two hours), they told me she was dead That is, she spent the last moments of her life with me and then, from me, pfft! went off towards a life elsewhere.

It was very sudden She was so happy, you know, I told her, "How well you have worked for the future!" And all at once, like a flash (a sapphire-blue light, pale, very luminous, with the shape of a flame and a rather broad base), pfft! she was gone. And that was just the moment when she died

It is one of the most interesting departures I have seen—fully conscious And so happy to have participated! . I myself didn't know why I was telling her, "Yes, you have truly participated in the work for the future, you have put the earth in contact with one of the forms of the new Manifestation."

From a talk of 11 August 1964 (translated from the French)

This exceptionally beautiful book is a collection of letters, poems, paintings and drawings by Janina Stroka, a Polish disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who lived in the Ashram from 1957 until her death in 1964. In addition to a foreword that supplies some background information, there is a sensitive introduction by Janina's friend Michele Lupsa, recounting in a touching and interesting way the little that is known about her life.

The letters are in two series. The first is a selection from letters written to a Dutch friend and covering the six months after Janina's arrival in Pondicherry. The second set were written between 1960 and 1963 to a young Bengali writer and social worker.

Then come some poems, dating from 1961 to July 1964. These are followed by full-page reproductions of a few of Janina's art works.

Janina died in July 1964 on the eve of her 55th birthday, and the book concludes with a translation of a conversation of the Mother's on 11 August 1964, as given above.

The Mother's comment in itself gives great interest to the art works—two are reproduced in colour on the front and back covers—and whets our appetite to see more of the three hundred paintings Janina produced during the six and a half years she lived in the Ashram.

The Mother had put her in charge of a nursing home for Ashramites convalescing after surgery, and in one of the letters to her young Bengali friend Janina wrote:

“I have two patients and I paint, and paint, and paint—or rather I draw, and draw, and draw. I have swept the whole universe away and put it on my white sheet of paper, my small white sheet of paper. And I did not even need to squeeze in. And from my nebulas and divine forms I go to my two coughing and ‘prosaic’ creatures, but when I go to them, I see them as two tiny dots in my world of dots on my tiny white sheet of paper. Because, you know, I am now drawing not with lines but only with dots.”

These drawings and paintings with dots, in which each one is laid down with great consciousness and concentration, have an extraordinary intensity, even in reproduction. On Janina's birthday in 1963 she offered 35 pictures to the Mother. In response, the Mother sent this message: “To Janina. With my blessings that the Beauty and the eternal Truth express themselves more and more through her art.” (p. 65)

Particularly interesting to me are drawings nos. 6 and 7, showing the profiles of the Mother and Janina herself and expressing their relationship, and no. 12, where the Mother appears within and behind two other profiles, one Janina's own. These express a feeling that emerges again and again in the letters and the poems. To give the flavour of these I would like to quote one of the earlier ones in full:

“My Mother, Supreme Vibration,

Thou art now becoming my real Friend and my Teacher. It is almost all the day, without a break, that I listen to Thee and try to do what Thy will is. And Thou art so near, so close, every day closer to me. During the last days Thou hast poured on this being so much that it really feels like overflowing. I am so grateful. Thou hast made me conscious in the mental being and physical separately and they have surrendered to Thee. Now, when I walk or eat or do exercises the physical being feels Thee vibrating

and working and it surrenders with all its strength and with immense happiness that Thou Thyself art moving this being. The physical being is now almost all the time prostrated at Thy feet with as great a humility as possible and it opens itself, all its most hidden corners, for Thee to see, and it is never satisfied with this opening, as for Thee all the tiniest twists must be visible, very clearly visible. So it goes on and on bringing them all before Thee, without end. I feel like a leper who lays before Thee all his wounds and never stops showing all of them, trying not to miss any, not even the smallest.

It is a vibration that comes and comes and before which I can only prostrate myself. And as Thou, being God, art becoming my intimate Friend and Teacher, with whom I talk all day, from early morning till late in the evening, all my life changes again and all becomes more and more simple, in its purity and reality, so that my thoughts stop existing—disappear—as it is all too holy. And yesterday I asked Thee what is the matter with my vital—that it does not become conscious of itself—and in answer Thou hast made it act. It began to pour waves of a previous sexual character and I had to reject them one by one, imploring Thee all the time to give me strength. It began (like the last time with the pain in my ears) before the *Synthesis* Class and just as I was so vehemently imploring Thee to help me Thou hast entered and Thou hast looked again at me like last time. Oh, Mother, Thou art always with me, in me and around me! Thou knowest everything that troubles us, Mother! I prostrate myself at Thy feet in gratefulness and humility. And all the time during the class the battle was going on in the lower vital being. Then She took the vital and filled the lower vital being with peace. Is this the last examination of the vital? I do not think so. But this is not for me to think about. Thy will be done. Today the lower vital—surrendered and peaceful—is giving itself all the time to Thee, without end. But all this is only the beginning of surrender, as all the smallest elements have to surrender, each separately—each cell, each movement. And rejection must go on and on. Allow, Mother, that this being shall have strength enough to persevere and persevere.”

The foreword says, “The poems have been included less for their inherent poetic value than to show the intensity of Janina’s inner life.” But what they show, precisely, is that an intense inner life of aspiration and experience with precision and simplicity, can produce poetry of high value. Most of them are not only original in content but excellent in expression, as this one example, *Do Not Dare*, will show:

Do not dare to say that we are not He,
 Not the One who is in each proud lone rock
 Or, born into flame-souls of the world to be,
 Carries up in His tempest even you who mock!
 For we are He.

Do not dare to disdain our radiant child-look
 When to our Mother who is radiant bliss we cling,

When bent over dark pages of the sacred book,
 Only from Her eyes we read, grow under Her wing
 For we are He

Do not dare to dream that on this sweet black earth
 Will be left one corner where we are not!
 In us will spread the all-embracing hearth,
 The globe immense of love in a tiny dot
 For we are He

October 1963

All these elements together make the whole book an inspiring joy to hold, to look at and read with concentration. It made me feel deep gratitude to the Mother, and to Janina.

SHRADDHAVAN

Sri Aurobindo: The Critic of English Poetry, by D. Venkateswara Rao. New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1997. Pp. 217. Price: Rs. 225.

Close on the heels of his earlier book, *Sri Aurobindo and the Poets of the Dawn* (1996), D. Venkateswara Rao, a Professor of English Literature at Vishakhapatnam, has now published *Sri Aurobindo: The Critic of English Poetry*. Rao's aim here is more focused: to evaluate the originality and Indianness of Sri Aurobindo's criticism of English poetry. Sri Aurobindo, he maintains, is both a "pioneer of criticism and a great aesthete of modern times."

Employing a wide range of background material so essential to the study of an eclectic and versatile genius like Sri Aurobindo, Professor Rao has undertaken his study in consultation with noted Aurobindonian critics such as K. D. Sethna, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and C. D. Narasimhaiah (see the preface of the book). According to Narasimhaiah, for instance, along with Tagore and Ananda Kumaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo is one of the chief inaugurators of modern Indian criticism.

Of the many possible approaches to the study of his topic, Rao appears to have opted for one which is conventional and therefore safe. He adopts a chronological account that broadly parallels Sri Aurobindo's own chapterization in *The Future Poetry*, namely Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, Milton and the Augustans, Poets of the Dawn, Poets of the Victorian Era and finally The Prophets of "Overhead Aesthetics." The merit of this approach is that it has a ring of familiarity for those who are already acquainted with the subject. For the author, the approach has additional appeal. For it enables him to focus on one aspect at a time and remain faithful to the line of arguments of his Master. However, the obvious pitfall here is that unless one is

sufficiently careful, the analysis might dwindle into mere summaries of viewpoints. Though few and far between, regrettably this is what happens occasionally in the volume. Such lapses are fortunately compensated by the author's endeavour to offer constantly a larger vision. For instance, while making an assessment of individual British poets, Rao invariably brings in a review of the latest critical opinion. This saves the presentation from being mechanical. More importantly, it lends the assessment a contemporary relevance.

Professor Rao's book would appeal to both beginners and more advanced scholars. The volume combines a judicious balance of biography, literary history and philosophy. There are liberal allusions to the different works of Sri Aurobindo. First-timers would find, in particular, the opinion of some of the leading Aurobindonian critics of special value. Here, for instance, is V. K. Gokak. Sri Aurobindo, he says

. is free from the incoherence of Blake, the prosiness of Wordsworth, the vagueness of Shelley, the fragmentariness of Keats, the tortuous self-division of the later W. B. Yeats and the retardation that the brain causes in the poetry of T. S. Eliot.

Similarly, K. R. S. Iyengar remarks that "considered merely as a poet and critic of poetry, Sri Aurobindo would still rank among the supreme masters of our time." C. D. Narasimhaiah asserts that "Sri Aurobindo's criticism has a relevance for us today because of the significant pointers in it to the nucleus of what may be called the 'Indian school of criticism'." Regarding the usual critics of Sri Aurobindo, Narasimhaiah is right in holding that "almost always Sri Aurobindo is run down without being read."

The underlying argument of Venkateswara Rao is that Sri Aurobindo's views on art and aesthetics are firmly grounded in his philosophy of evolution. Art reveals the manifold working of the Absolute Being. Thus we find that there are poets of the life-world, such as Shakespeare, and the other Elizabethans, such as Spenser and Marlowe. Similarly, Milton and the Augustans are described as representations of the "thought-mind." Rao goes beyond his immediate task and draws an interesting parallel between Milton and Sri Aurobindo:

Milton and Sri Aurobindo belong to the same Alma Mater, St Paul's and later Cambridge University. As patriot, Milton wants to see his country become pure and perfect, Sri Aurobindo fights to liberate his Mother India from bondage and see her restored to the pristine glory of her former ages. Both the alumni of Cambridge University are epic poets, never to be forgotten. If Milton composes his *Paradise Lost*, having lost his vision, almost away from the masses, Sri Aurobindo composes his epic *Savitri* in his cave of Tapasya in the French colony Pondicherry. Both authors aim at the restoration of man—Milton's man falls disobeying the instructions of God and Sri Aurobindo's man Satyavan falls to Death in utter acquiescence to the laws of Nature. These are but a few similarities.

germane to the context Milton and Sri Aurobindo have created traditions of their own in the fields they trod to cultivate. They are epoch makers.

Likewise, Professor Rao seconds Sri Aurobindo's description of the British Romantic Poets as the poets of the dawn. For they reveal in their creations the awakening to a new reality. Blake, Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley are the harbingers of a new poetic age. As always, Sri Aurobindo's critical comments are illuminating. Here for instance is a verdict regarding Wordsworth:

In the end the poet in him died while the man and the writer lived on; the moralist and the concentrated thinker had killed the singer, the intellect had walled up the issues of the imagination and spiritual vision.

Similarly, the poets of the Victorian era such as Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne are portrayed by Sri Aurobindo as the dominant voices of a later period. "...for all its activity and fruitfulness," he observes, (it) "was by no means one of those great intellectual humanistic ages which the world will look back to with a satisfied sense of clarity or of uplifting."

And finally, Rao sums up Sri Aurobindo's views on "overhead poetry." He shows that Sri Aurobindo's own epic *Savitri* is a good instance of the "overhead aesthesis." There are also many favourable references to the "new" poets: Whitman, Tagore, A. E., Yeats, Meredith, Stephen Phillips. Rao offers Sri Aurobindo's readings of these poets and indicates the possibilities of greater achievements.

Integral to the new poetry of the future is the notion of the Mantra which has not been peculiar to the Western tradition. As Sri Aurobindo explains.

The Mantra is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self.

Rao maintains that the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo "lies in his rare faculty to translate his aesthetic experience into words and phrases capable of conveying the minutest details of it." But, how does one understand the difference in aesthetic experience among different people? The answer, according to Rao, lies in the Indian concept of "Adhikara." The critic of art or literature can best understand a poem by some intuitive power alone. Thus Rao concludes that "the soul culture is the source of creating poetry while the critic's objective is to explore the soul in a work of art." As Sri Aurobindo outlines the poetry of the future:

The poetry of the future will be unlike that of the past in one very important circumstance that in whatever language it may be written, it will be more and more moved by the common mind and motives of all the human people. Mankind

is now being drawn to a fundamental unity of thought and culture, among all its racial and national differences to which there has been no parallel

To sum up Venkateswara Rao has read widely in Sri Aurobindo's writings on English poetry and criticism apart from other relevant works. He has a sound grasp of the subject matter and uses, wherever he can, a comparative approach. He never conceals his admiration of Sri Aurobindo and yet his admiration never gets the better of a balanced judgement. In an otherwise well-argued volume, perhaps the only blemish is a surfeit of quotations. While these testify to a wide reading and critical survey, they appear excessive and give the volume the look of a research dissertation.

On the whole, however, I find *Sri Aurobindo: The Critic of English Poetry* a well-produced and timely volume. It is a welcome addition to a growing body of criticism on a somewhat neglected aspect of the Master's writings.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Angels and Aliens, by Keith Thompson. Fawcett Columbine Books 1991. Price Rs 255.

An independent scholar and journalist, the author Keith Thompson has written an original, provocative and bold book explaining all aspects of the Flying Saucer mystery, various U.F.O. sightings and encounters. Thompson has maintained a very objective approach throughout. He describes the various phenomena as reported by news media and then narrates both the versions i.e. those of the debunkers of such phenomena and those of the believers. In sixteen lucid chapters Thompson leaves the reader amazed by the depth of his scholarship but does not merely tread past ground. He thinks both sides are *not* asking the right questions and are merely waiting for the expected stereotype Yes/No pattern of information. With scholarly insight he takes the reader into the history of the human race and makes us come up with the Greek god Proteus whose dwelling is in the sea and who is ceaselessly changing shape and nature, representing in us the multiple and ambiguous forms of the soul. Then comes Hermes, son of Zeus, the messenger of the Gods, between Heaven and Earth, the God of communication and the patron saint of liars and thieves, plus the God of persuasive speech for trade and commerce. He flits ceaselessly between domains and thresholds of various worlds. Then comes a figure known to North Americans, Indians, Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, Semitic and Siberian people called TRICKSTER. It is his capacity to manifest as the creator and destroyer, giver and negator at the same time, one who dupes and is himself duped—a person of no well defined or fixed form, remaining active in the most archaic recesses of the collective mind. Quoting Jung he says that the trickster is God, man and animal at once, sub- and super-human, bestial and divine, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. Like Proteus and

Hermes, the Trickster is indeed a shape-shifter but less well defined and lacking in overall order. Then comes Dionysus—again born of Zeus—a god of Fertility, Wine and Theatre—a god who is behind the U.F.O. play, like others just mentioned. He is not only “God behind the mask—but also the mask”. These ancient characters are skilfully described in chapter eight and we see throughout the rest of the book the roles these archetypes are still playing. Sisyphus is the last character we meet, on page 244. He is a tragic hero conscious of his futile task of rolling a heavy stone up a mountain. The stone falls down to the bottom by its own weight and Sisyphus begins his task once again. Sisyphus is a history-haunting ghost whose face and form change from age to age. Yet this character continues to play and influence the whole range of the U.F.O. drama. Proceeding thus, Thompson involves us in theories of poltergeists, “U.F.O. abductees and contactees phenomenon”, theories of allegory and symbolism, quoting extensively all the modern psychologists from Carl Gustav Jung onwards. He describes various types of researchers both civilian and official, who have, like the players in the great epic Mahabharata, been willy-nilly playing on the stage of one or other side of this U.F.O. myth and fact. On page 223 he quotes extensively Michael Murphy who stayed at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the mid 1950s. Murphy has taken his bearings from Sri Aurobindo’s theory of evolution and in his own right has written a breathtaking book *The Future of the Body*. Thompson succinctly asks in the sixteenth chapter “Are the U.F.O.s indeed coming to us as they appear to be or are we in fact unknowingly meeting them on middle ground, owing to our own tantalising mixture of objective materiality and subjective elusiveness?” Thompson feels his hypothesis to be both and says we must re-enter and claim the body which as per the Taittiriya Upanishad is multiple, dynamic and diverse. He gives, as correspondences to these Upanishadic ideas, Greek, Sufi and Egyptian views of the various bodily sheaths. Strangely enough, at present the U.F.O. story is in its fourth decade and there is a strange lull in the various sightings. Why have these got suddenly reduced? In the past such a lull preceded another spectacular event giving cheer to the U.F.O. believers and drawing equally strong negations from the “debunkers”. Thompson sees the present U.F.O. phenomenon in continuity with ancient myths in various cultures, where Gods walked the earth and mated with humans, where heroes and tragedies played an unmistakable part in the lives of those ancient inhabitants. Reading this book was a non-stop pleasure. Yet one point keeps hovering in my mind—a point which neither Thompson nor any other person mentioned in this book can clear. It is this. How is it that in the whole book and more, since 1947, when the first U.F.O. sightings were reported in the USA—there has been no sighting, no mention of any U.F.O., no contact with aliens, no abduction of people or contact with U.F.O.s in India or for that matter anywhere else? Speaking for India itself why have U.F.O.s never been seen here? Do we not have any need deep down in the collective psyche for such phenomena to be seen? Or are we protected by the Presence and Force of the Grace of various Spiritual Masters from this century and earlier? Or is it that we in India are not so cut off from our depths? Are we aware of our various religions, personages and powers, gods,

goddesses? Do they still exert a living influence on our day-to-day life and is there somehow no barrier between the surface and the deeper consciousness of our collective existence? What is the answer to this? I would surely love to know. Nonetheless Thompson's book is balanced, superbly written, very readable and, to say the least, thought-provoking. It has an extensive bibliography, an excellent index and the print is easy to the eye. It is a book that takes you from surface to depth and from depth to bedrock regions, exploring both individual and collective aspects of man on this planet.

ANONYMOUS

Students' Section

THE FAILURE OF LOVE IN TCHEKOV

IN Tchekov's five plays, *Ivanov*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*, love is either unrequited or when fulfilled proves false. Often the young lover finds his beloved already married and social or moral laws forbid him to break the tie. Often the lover changes and the love remains unfulfilled. At other times though one is passionately in love, the other party does not respond. In other cases one of the lovers falls in love with another and his beloved repents in vain, their love remains unsatisfied.

Love is often sacrificed to an already established but unhappy married life. For example, in *Uncle Vanya*, Yelena and Astrov are in love with each other. At first Yelena refuses to accept the failure of their marriage but later she reveals her love for Astrov. Yet she is afraid to break her tie with Serebryakov and face society. Astrov too knows that he has fallen in love with Yelena, "I fancy," he says, "if Yelena Andreyevna wanted to, she could turn my head in one day." But he is afraid to speak it aloud, and subdues his statement saying, "What still affects me is beauty." Similarly, in *Ivanov*, Sasha and Ivanov are in love. Sasha, only twenty, loves the fifty-year old married man and hopes to regenerate his interest in life. Though Ivanov does not love her with the ardour of youth, he is happy to think that life might begin anew for him. Later he realises that society will ridicule him for marrying a young girl and for hastening the death of his faithful wife, Sara. He excuses himself from marriage saying, "I've worn myself out, and other people are tormenting me continually. I just can't bear it." He is afraid of society. "People ought to laugh till their sides split at all my affectations." He is indeed determined not to give in to Sasha's pleas and when she refuses to change her decision to marry him he commits suicide. In the *Three Sisters*, Vershinin also must endure the agony of separation from his beloved Masha who loves him but like himself lacks the courage to break the marriage tie between herself and Kuligin.

Another element also intervenes in Masha's love for her husband. As a young girl she fancied loving a school teacher. She adored Kuligin's intelligence and learning and thought him to be the most important man in their little town. With age her fancy melted into thin air. Now she detests her husband's colleagues and realises how unrefined he is. He lacks good manners, good breeding and she prefers Moscow-returned Vershinin to her husband. But she is too weak to break the marriage.

In several instances lovers separate because one of them feels that he has been cheated by the fancy of loving the other. For example, Sasha in *Ivanov* once thought that Ivanov was the only joy in her life, that she could not live without him. She knows that he is not young any more but she says that love is most profound when it can serve selflessly, when it can uplift the lover in his declining years; the greater the effort to love the greater is the love itself. All this is, however, forgotten when all of a sudden

she realises that her love and admiration for Ivanov was a mere fancy. Even before their marriage she tells her father, "There are moments when I feel that I don't love him as much as I should. And when he comes to us or talks to me I begin to feel bored." In the *Three Sisters*, Andrew had once been madly in love with the unrefined Natasha. He loved her "marvellous youth", called her "my adorable girl" and felt "ecstatically" happy in her presence. Their love was momentarily fulfilled in marriage until Andrew realised he had loved an ideal, beautiful Natasha very different from the Natasha of real life. He is a depressed, ruined human being after their marriage. Both his financial and psychological condition have deteriorated after this union. He is almost penniless and has given up all future prospects. Similarly in *The Seagull* Nina's love affair with Treplov ends when foolishly she falls in love with Trigorin, a literary figure. Nina is at first overwhelmed by Trigorin's fame. She thinks him, as an artist, to be the happiest man on earth. Gradually they fall in love with each other. But soon he abandons her with a child and falls in love with another woman. This awakens Nina and she realises that her life is ruined.

Love also remains unfulfilled because one lover does not respond to the other's love. For example, Masha in *The Seagull* is in love with the playwright Treplov. She adores all that he writes and although his plays seem uninteresting to Nina, the girl he loves, Masha would hear them again and again. She remembers how his face glows and turns pale when he reads with his mournful, poetic voice. Masha says that she is miserable and would "mock her life" or "ruin it" if she must continue to live in this misery. But Treplov is in love with Nina and does not pay any attention to her. Similarly, in *The Cherry Orchard*, Madame Ranevsky is in love with the man who abandoned her penniless in Paris. She must return to him. She is aware that this love is "a millstone" round her neck and that he will desert her again. Their affair is doomed to misery. In *Uncle Vanya*, Sonya is in love with Astrov and drops several hints of her love to him but he is in love with Yelena who is unhappily married to Serebriakov. Sonya too must remain unloved. Uncle Vanya's disappointment at not being loved by Yelena is even greater because his future is bleak, lonely and none but Yelena could have helped him.

Often love remains unsatisfied for no obvious reason. For example, Lopahin in *The Cherry Orchard* is thought to be in love with Varya. Everyone is congratulating her for their future marriage but Lopahin never proposes. Madame Arkadin, Varya's step-mother, asks Lopahin to spend a few lonely moments with Varya before they leave the estate. Lopahin thinks it to be a good opportunity for a proposal but left alone with her he talks of the most trivial matters and never proposes. Similarly, Sara and Ivanov loved each other madly before their marriage. Sara gave up her religion and her family relationships in order to marry him. But after their marriage Ivanov loses all interest in love and life. He falls in love with another girl thirty years younger. People condemn him for being unfaithful to his dying wife but he cannot change. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Dunyusha, the maid, is in love with the dollish Yasha, a young valet. He promises to marry her and, believing in him, she refuses Epihodov's hand in marriage.

But Yasha forgets about her as soon as he finds a good opportunity to return to Paris. In *The Three Sisters*, Tusenbach is madly in love with Trina and they are about to be married when in a duel he loses his life. Fate seems to snatch away the only possibility of a successful love affair.

In all the five plays by Tchekov love ends in disappointment. Some lovers, like Yelena, Vershinin, Masha and Ivanov, are afraid to break the social code and their unhappy marriage-ties. Others, like Nina, Andrew, Sasha, realize that their youthful love was a mere fancy and that such an affair cannot end in happiness. Some other lovers never respond to the persons who love them madly, either because they are already in love or simply because such love does not interest them. Sometimes sudden or insignificant events prevent them from happiness, as with Lopahin and Varya or Yasha and Danish or even Tusenbach and Trina.

Tchekov depicts the vital and physical love that rises from ignorance, attachment, passion and desire. This love is devouring, not self-sacrificing, it is a barter. And therefore for one reason or another love either proves false or remains unrequited in the world of Tchekov.

MOHOR

(This critical appreciation of Tchekov's five plays was written as an assignment for the second year English Class of the Higher Course at Knowledge)