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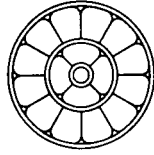
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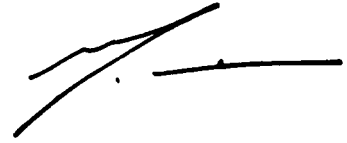
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LII

No. 5

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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GOD'S MESSENGER MUST BEAR THE PANG

...when God's messenger comes to help the world
And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose;
He too must bear the pang that he would heal:
Exempt and unafflicted by earth's fate,
How shall he cure the ills he never felt?
He covers the world's agony with his calm,
But though to the outward eye no sign appears
And peace is given to our torn human hearts,
The struggle is there and paid the unseen price,
The fire, the strife, the wrestle are within
He carries the suffering world in his own breast;
Its sins weigh on his thoughts, its grief is his
Earth's ancient load lies heavy on his soul,
Night and its powers beleaguer his tardy steps,
The titan adversary's clutch he bears,
His march is a battle and a pilgrimage
Life's evil smites, he is stricken with the world's pain:
A million wounds gape in his secret heart.
He journeys sleepless through an unending night,
Antagonist forces crowd across his path;
A siege, a combat is his inner life.
Even worse may be the cost, direr the pain
His large identity and all-harbours love
Shall bring the cosmic anguish into his depths,
The sorrow of all living things shall come
And knock at his doors and live within his house,
A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie
All suffering into his single grief and make
All agony in all the worlds his own.
He meets an ancient adversary Force,
He is lashed with the whips that tear the world's worn heart,
The weeping of the centuries visits his eyes.
He wears the blood-glued fiery Centaur's shirt,
The poison of the world has stained his throat
In the market-place of Matter's capital
Amidst the chafferings of the affair called life
He is tied to the stake of a perennial Fire,
He burns on an unseen original verge
That Matter may be turned to spirit stuff:

He is the victim in his own sacrifice
 The Immortal bound to earth's mortality
 Appearing and perishing on the roads of Time
 Creates God's moment by eternity's beats
 He dies that the world may be new-born and live.
 Even if he escapes the fiercest fires,
 Even if the world breaks not in, a drowning sea,
 Only by hard sacrifice is high heaven earned.
 He must face the fight, the pang who would conquer Hell
 A secret enmity ambushes the world's march,
 It leaves a mark on thought and speech and act
 It stamps stain and defect on all things done,
 Till it is slain peace is forbidden on earth
 There is no visible foe, but the unseen
 Is round us, forces intangible besiege,
 Touches from alien realms, thoughts not our own
 Overtake us and compel the erring heart,
 Our lives are caught in an ambiguous net
 An adversary Force was born of old.
 Invader of the life of mortal man,
 It hides from him the straight immortal path

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task,
 The world itself becomes his adversary,
 His enemies are the beings he came to save
 Those he would save are his antagonists
 This world is in love with its own ignorance,
 Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,
 It gives the cross in payment for the crown .
 Yes, there are happy ways near to God's sun,
 But few are they who tread the sunlit path,
 Only the pure in soul can walk in light
 Escape, however high, redeems not life,
 Life that is left behind on a fallen earth
 Escape cannot uplift the abandoned race
 Or bring to it victory and the reign of God.
 A greater power must come, a larger light

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL Vol 29, pp 446-48)

A FEW ESSAYS ON THE GITA IN BENGALI

(Continued from the issue of April 1999)

THE GITA: AN INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE

Foreword

THE Gita ranks first among the world's scriptures. The knowledge that has been briefly explained in the Gita is the highest and most secret knowledge. The law of right living, *dharma*, propounded in the Gita includes within its scope and is the basis of all other law of right living. The way of works shown in the Gita is the eternal path for the world's march to the heights.

The Gita is as if the bottomless sea, the source of a myriad gems. One may spend a whole life-time fathoming its depths and still not touch the bottom or gauge how deep it is. One may search for a hundred years and still find it difficult to gather even a hundredth part of the riches contained in this endless store of gems. And yet, if one can recover one or two of these gems, the poor man may become rich, the deep thinker acquire wisdom, the hater of God become a devotee, the mighty and powerful hero of action come back to his field of work fully equipped and ready for achieving his life's purpose.

The Gita is an inexhaustible mine of jewels. Even if the jewels are gathered from this mine for ages, the coming generations will always be delighted and astonished by their acquisitions of new and priceless ones.

Such is this Book, replete with deep and occult lore. And yet the language is perfectly clear, the style is simple, the surface meaning easily grasped. By simply gliding along the surf of this bottomless sea without taking a deep plunge, there is a certain gain in strength and joy. By taking a walk around the peripheries without entering the deep recesses of this mine illumined with jewels, there can be found strewn among the grass bright jewels which will keep us rich throughout life.

The Gita may well have a thousand commentaries, but a time will never come when a new one will not be needed. There can be no such world-renowned scholar or man of deep knowledge as can write a commentary on the Gita on reading which we can say, this is enough; now it will not be necessary to add another commentary on the Gita, everything has been grasped. After expending all our intellectual powers, we can hope to understand and explain only a few facets of this knowledge. On being engrossed in Yoga or by rising from height to greater height on the way of desireless works, all we shall be able to say is that we have had experience of some of its truths, or have applied in the course of this life one or two of the Gita's teachings in actual practice.

Whatever little the present writer has realised in experience, whatever little he has practised in the way of works, the meaning he has found by reasoning and thought based on that experience and practice, to elucidate that as an aid to others will be the aim of these essays

The Speaker

In order to understand the meaning and object of the Gita, it is at first necessary to consider the Speaker, the listener and the time and circumstance. The Speaker is Lord Sri Krishna, the listener is His friend Arjuna, the most heroic of men, the circumstance is the prelude to the terrible slaughter of Kurukshetra.

There are many who say that the Mahabharata is only a symbol, Sri Krishna is God, Arjuna the human soul, the sons of Dhritarashtra the inner enemies of the soul's progress, the Pandava army represents the forces that help towards liberation. This is to relegate the Mahabharata to a low position in the world of letters and at the same time to minimise and bring to nought the deep seriousness of the Gita, its utility for the life of the man of action and its high teaching that makes for the progress of mankind. The war of Kurukshetra is not simply a frame for the Gita picture, it is the prime motive and the best occasion for carrying out the law given in the Gita. To accept a symbolic meaning for the great war of Kurukshetra is to reduce the law of the Gita to a law of ascetic quietism inapplicable to life in this world, not a law of the heroic man, a law to be followed in life.

Sri Krishna is the Speaker. The scriptures say that Sri Krishna is God Himself. In the Gita too, Sri Krishna has proclaimed Himself as God. It has there been declared, on the basis of the Avatara doctrine in the fourth chapter and the theory of the Vibhuti in the tenth, that God dwells hidden in the bodies of all creatures, shows Himself to a certain extent through the manifestations of power in some particular beings, and is fully incarnated in the person of Sri Krishna. According to many, Sri Krishna, Arjuna and Kurukshetra are mere metaphors, and in order to recover the true meaning of the Gita these metaphors are to be ignored. But we cannot reject this part of the teaching. If the Avatara doctrine is there, why should Sri Krishna be ignored? Therefore, God Himself is the propounder of this knowledge and the teaching.

Sri Krishna is an Avatara. He has accepted in human form the law of man's body and mind and spirit and has played his game, *lilā*, accordingly. If we can grasp the obvious and the occult meaning of that play, we shall be able to grasp the meaning, the aim and the method of this world-game. The main feature of this great game was action impelled by total knowledge. What was the knowledge underlying that action and that play has been revealed in the Gita.

Sri Krishna of the Mahabharata is a hero of action, a great yogin, a great man of the world, a founder of empire, statesman and warrior, a knower of *brahman* in the body of a Kshatriya. In his life we see an incomparable manifestation and mysterious play of the Supreme Power, *mahāsakti*. Of that mystery, the Gita is an explanation.

Sri Krishna is Lord of the worlds, universal Vasudeva; and yet, by shrouding His greatness He has entered into play by establishing with men relations like those of father and son, brother and husband, intimate associate and friend and enemy. In His life is implied the supreme secret of the Aryan knowledge and the highest meaning of the way of devotion. Their essential principles are also part of the Gita's teaching.

Sri Krishna's incarnation is at the juncture of the Dwapara and the Kali age. In each of the evolutionary cycles, *kalpa*, God incarnates in full at such junctures. The Kali age is the worst as well as the best among the four epochs. This age is the reign period of Kali, the impeller of sin and the principal enemy of man's progress, the utmost degradation and downfall of man occur during Kali's reign. But there is a gain in strength by fighting against obstacles and new creation comes through destruction of the old; this process is seen in the Kali age too. The elements of evil that are going to be destroyed in the course of the world's evolution are precisely the ones that are eliminated through an inordinate growth, on the other hand, seeds of new creation are sown and sprout, these seeds become trees in the Satya age that follows. Moreover, as in astrology all the planets enjoy their sub-periods in the period of a particular planet, so, in the period of Kali, each of the four ages, Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali, repeatedly enjoys its sub-period. Through this cyclic movement, there is in the Kali age a great downfall followed by an upward trend, another great downfall and again an upward surge; these serve the purposes of God. At the juncture of Dwapara and Kali, God through His incarnation allows an inordinate growth of evil, destroys the evil, sows the seeds of good and prepares favourable conditions for their sprouting, then begins the period of Kali. Sri Krishna has left in the Gita the secret knowledge and the method of work that would be useful for bringing in the age of Truth, *satyayuga*. When the time comes for the Satya sub-period of Kali, the world-wide propagation of the law of the Gita is inevitable. That time is now come, that is why the recognition of the Gita, instead of being confined to a few men of wisdom and learning, is spreading among the generality of men and in foreign lands.

Therefore it is not possible to distinguish Sri Krishna the Speaker from His Word, the Gita. Sri Krishna is implied in the Gita, the Gita is Sri Krishna in His form of the Work.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated by Sanat K. Banerji)

THE REAL ORNAMENT

केयूराणि न भूषयन्ति पुरुषं हारा न चन्द्रोज्ज्वला
न स्नानं न विलेपनं न कुसुमं नालङ्कितं मूर्धजाः ।
वाण्येका समलङ्करोति पुरुषं या सस्कृता धार्यते
क्षीयन्ते खलु भूषणानि सततं वाग्भूषणं भूषणम् ॥

It is not armlets that adorn a man
Nor necklaces all crammed with moonbright pearls,
Nor baths, nor ointments, nor arranged curls
'Tis art of excellent speech that only can
Adorn him. jewels perish, garlands fade;
This only abides and glitters undecayed

(Translated by Sri Aurobindo from Bhartrihari's *Niṣhatakam*
The metre of the original is शार्दूलविक्रीडितं)

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of April 1999)

My dear Mother,

B said to me in a cutting tone. "Who sweeps the back of the ladies room in the D R ? It is so dirty—since the last four days no one has swept there " I kept quiet, but when I went to check I saw that it was as clean as it could be and it is swept every day.

DID you tell her "I went and saw and it is quite clean Why do you say that it is dirty? Remember what Mother has said. first sincerity and truthfulness."

5 May 1936

My dear Mother,

C has stopped working in the kitchen and D is trying to do the same E, F and G are the only ones left to work there. I pray for peace, peace, peace

Well! The fewer the number the greater the chance of peace, I suppose

9 May 1936

My dear Mother,

When disturbances or bad suggestions come, my being clearly speaks to them and says. "If I submit myself to you, you gain strength and enter into the atmosphere Go away, you have no place here " And they do go away By calling the Divine Force and remaining completely quiet and undisturbed, the bad force is sure to go away defeated

Yes, this is just the right attitude that is sure to bring the victory

My dear child, I am always with you and my strength is constantly in you

13 May 1936

My dear Mother,

H is now quite unable to eat and feels sick. Is her nausea not due to the weakness that must have come by her not eating for so long?

Certainly it is that and purely nervous, and the less she eats the more she will be unable to eat

She says "Look here, I have full strength in spite of not eating " This I do not believe. The attitude in her letter to You does not seem to be quite good. If she does not want to

eat in the D. R. she can eat at home. But it would be good if she would take at least one spoonful of food

Yes, her attitude in this is not helpful—she has not sufficient trust to overcome her own fixed idea and she does not open to the Force that would give her the capacity of eating and overcoming this attack

J too boasts of her strength in spite of not eating. To me it looks all false

You are quite right.

She could wreck her body if this condition gets prolonged, and there would be complete chaos in the work

Yes, what you say is quite true—but the mischief is that both J and L do not accept at all what is told to them, on this subject at least.

May the physical consciousness open more and more to the Divine Light and come under its direct influence.

Yes, it is the only solution.

My love and blessings are always with you.

20 May 1936

My dear Mother,

The number of persons not doing Ashram work is increasing and increasing. Perhaps they think it is a good sign of their sadhana.

The progress in sadhana comes from the rectification of the inner and outer attitude, not from the nature of the work one does.

With my love.

2 June 1936

My dear Mother,

With all my heart I wish for peace, happiness and harmony in the Ashram. This is my humble prayer on the eve of my birthday. let jealousy, disharmony and anger pass away and peace be established in every heart.

Let this year bring you the power of being constantly aware of my Presence, for, indeed, I am always with you, in all trust and affection.

18 June 1936

My dear Mother,

From my very boyhood, my attitude has been one of disgust towards life and its things But now I accept all life and whatever things come from You

Yes, I am in the things also and that is why they must be treated with care
All love and blessings to you, my dear child.

2 July 1936

My dear Mother,

The cause of the outburst between M and N was nothing of importance If we do not rise above personal feelings and stand for the work, how is the work to be done!

It is the control over oneself that is the first thing needed, and especially the control over one's tongue! If people could learn to keep silent how many troubles would be avoided!

3 July 1936

My dear Mother,

I do not understand the troubles in the D. R.—there are angry outbursts for nothing.

The spirit of quarrels is still in the Aroumé atmosphere. Unless the workers make an effort to throw it away, it will always attack them and create some mischief or other

10 July 1936

My dear Mother,

There are plenty of thoughts suggesting my failure both as a sadhak and as a worker and of my being unfit and unworthy.

You know that these thoughts are quite wrong and come from a hostile force All thoughts of that kind must be rigorously driven away, for to receive them is an unfaithfulness towards the Divine

The child does not worry about his growth, he simply .. grows.

Love and blessings to my dear child.

15 July 1936

(To be continued)

DEVOTIONAL LYRIC

How should I smooth Thy way,
Speed Thy feet,
O sojourner of Day?—
“Doff deceit.”

How shall heart's waters lure
Thee to my shrine?—
“Be stillness and candle-pure
Vigil thine ”

Make this poor fitful flame
Bright as of yore,
Shiningly spell Thy Name
Evermore.

Take, take my moteling gem—
Words fain to greet;
There is no worth in them
Save at Thy feet.

7 March 1934

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: A very successful lyric—well-shaped and felicitous in the simplicity of its feeling

SLOWLY MY CUP IS FILLED

A POEM BY NIRODBARAN WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S
COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS

(Original form)

| Slowly my cup is filled
| With the nectar of thy fire·

now

| The tumults are (now) stilled
| And voices
| (Tumults) of (wild) desire

each

|| A new blood (runs) in (the) vein
|| Carries
|| (Bearing) thy golden light;
| Yesterday's sorrow and pain
| are
| Today (is) lost to sight

| *Only*

Wrong rhythm

| I think (only) of Thee
|| And my thought-currents shine
|| On thy tranced Spirit-sea
|| Like ripples of crystal wine

far-off

| Echoes of a (distant) flute
| Drifting
| (Winging) through vacant air
| Make(s) my heart hushed and mute

In

| (With) a flame of silent prayer

|| No more the glittering dews
|| On plumes of butterflies

fiery

|| Enchant with (passion-) hues
|| *glamour-captive*

Wrong rhythm
Glamour

|| My (once-glamouring) eyes.
|| (captive)

Q Guru, I hope again the rhythm and metre are O.K.

A Mostly all right—where not, noticed

Q. Line 4 if not effective, can it be:

“Of wild crimson desire”?

Crimson suggesting tumult of blood, I suppose—“bloody” I mean!

A Too wild and bloody.

Q In the 2nd stanza—“Yesterday” and “Today” too prosaic?

A No

Q Can pain lose to sight?

A. It is not physical sight

Q Stanza 3—“crystal wine” not significant enough—too material! But no inspiration to make it spiritual.

A It is all right

Q Stanza 4, line 4—“Like a sky of silent prayer”

or

“with silent flames of prayer”?

diamond

A. No need.

Q Stanza 5—Doubtful about the imagery; butterflies have plumes?

A Don’t think so.

Q. This “glamouring”?

A. “Glamouring” if at all possible can’t mean caught by glamour.

Q. Stanza 8—first 2 lines all right?

A. What the deuce is this “waived”—You waive your claim, not your hair.

Q. Stanza 8—2nd line I had thought of “Washed by the gentle waves”—but I wonder in this solitude “waves” will fit.

A. ?

Q. Stanza 9—*nude* hour to a petal?

A. It must be “hours” or no rhyme. Can’t weave hours to a petal.

Q. Has the poem a harmonious, natural close?

A Yes

Q I thought it could be extended

A. No.

(Revised form)

Slowly my cup is filled
 With the nectar of thy fire:
 The tumults now are stilled
 And voices of desire

A new blood in each vein
Carries thy golden light,
Yesterday's sorrow and pain
Today are lost to sight

Only I think of Thee
And my thought-currents shine
On thy tranced Spirit-sea
Like ripples of crystal wine

Echoes of a far-off flute
Drifting through vacant air
Make my heart hushed and mute
In a flame of silent prayer

No more the glittering dews
On plumes of butterflies
Enchant with fiery hues
My glamour-captive eyes

Thou with thy alchemy
Hast changed my earthly sense
To a crowned felicity
Of heaven's reticence

Now the free radiant flow
Of music in the streams,
The twilight's mystic glow
And high star-haunted dreams,

Green locks of virgin woods
Ruffled by a slow breeze,
And moon-pale solitudes,
And caves of rocky peace,

And smile of vestal flowers
On rainbow-stalks of Eve
That e'er nude, barren hours
Their wonder-petals weave,

Are messengers with a bright
Promise of thy intimate
Love, Beauty, and delight
Beyond chained time or date

TWO LETTERS

Dear D. V ,

I have written out a brief answer to your question “What according to you is the ultimate role of poetry in life and yoga? or what purpose does it serve?”

My answer runs·

It has been well said that poetry may not save souls but it can make souls worth saving Nothing except sustained yoga can put a soul in genuine touch with the Eternal But a soul needs preparation and poetry can certainly refine it and create in it an openness to the higher mood of mind, the inner sense in the heart, thus by evoking sympathy with

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity

and by calling us towards a mind forever

Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone,

poetry can prepare us to launch on the directly spiritual adventure All the more can this launching take place if the Master of Yoga is himself a poet of a high order who is able to carry out not only Meredith’s ideal of expressing our inmost in the sweetest way but also Sri Aurobindo’s vision of our inmost in the inmost way! To discover for our finest moments of vision, imaginative reflection and emotion an expressive manner which is native to our profoundest life-moments such is the ideal of word-music held out for us by Sri Aurobindo Ultimately such an ideal would make us break into another space and time exploring an accent proper to a new way of living from within outwards The most distinctive species of this breakthrough is called by Sri Aurobindo “Overhead Poetry”—that is, vision and word found in levels of consciousness into which the practice of yoga forges an opening

Your second question is more difficult to cope with

“I strongly believe you have occult vision, so I pray to you to tell me what shall be the goal and purpose of my present birth? Which Mahamantra can lift me to the other shore?”

Whether I have occult vision or not, it is my belief that for all of us the Master Mantra is *Ma Sri Aurobindo sharanam mama* (Mother-Sri Aurobindo is my refuge) To make a Mantra come home to us with an absolute force we have to pack it with a meaning which is to us full and final In the guiding phrase I have held forth, we have the Master and the Mother combined, thus making for a fullness of Guruship and the word following the two namings suggests a wide search which brings us the hopelessness of going elsewhere than to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the discovery of the right goal in making ourselves their disciples, a discovery which brings complete safety and peace

Dear A. K. B.,

About your question regarding your son and how to handle the situation: When you pray and appeal to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, you have to appeal more intensely and sustain the appeal, there must be concentration and continuation of the appeal each time. You should also visualise yourself offering your son to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—picture for instance seeing your son at the feet of the Mother

Lastly you must practise sustained, solid calm in the presence of your son. This does not mean that you should not talk to him but behind your words the inner state has to be sustained.

Is your son consciously a believer and follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? Would you be able to keep Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's photographs in your son's room after appealing to the photographs to help him? I am sure all this will help your son.

AMAL KIRAN
(K D SETHNA)

THE AUREATE WORLD

WHAT IS it that beckons beyond this haze,
When it is neither night nor morn,
What compels me to rush outside
Wrenching wide my drowsy lids?
Like a spirit set free from its shackles of flesh
I shoot forward from the torpor of sleep
And leave my chamber of birth and death
Not knowing whither I have leapt.

Wide, wide I raise my gaze
And stay transfixed by what lies beyond—
There is no sky nor any heaven above
No sun, no moon, no stars.
The entire universe is a disk of light,
An aureate disk of light.
Round and round it spins, covering all the worlds,
Whence comes a downpour of golden Light
And all is but Light and Gold.

SUTAPA M

A BOOK FOR SRI AUROBINDO

The following is a facsimile of Maria Montessori's inscription on the title-page of her book *The Secret of Childhood* she had sent to Sri Aurobindo

THE SECRET OF CHILDHOOD

To Sri Aurobindo
with devotion and gratitude

Maria Montessori

December 1943

(To Sri Aurobindo
with devotion and gratitude

Maria Montessori
December 1943)

NAGIN-BHAI TELLS ME

Introduction

IT WAS about SIX years ago that something strange happened I got a message through three or four people telling me that Nagin-bhai wanted to see me as early as possible I didn't get time and then followed another spate of errands I was told that I should see him immediately, in the Ashram the next day during the 9 30 School recess He also told me later that he wished to confide in me something very important and consult me about certain things which were to some extent crucial for him at that time But my own feeling, in retrospect, is that it was perhaps more in the nature of opening himself out rather than seeking my views in connection with what he was going to tell me

Nagin-bhai used to be in the Ashram doing Samadhi-duty between 8 and 10 in the morning and he thought that the most convenient time to have a brief rendezvous with me, just for a few minutes, would be the School recess period We thus decided to meet for this short duration two or three times in a week

In the beginning he would ask me questions of a probing manner, about some passages from *The Life Divine* or from the *Letters* It looked as if he wanted some clarifications, for instance, about what Sri Aurobindo is conveying by the term Reality, whether this Reality is an abstract notion or an entity or a person He even justified this kind of exchange with me by saying that it gave him a certain mental support which for him was essential in what was Yogically happening within him at that time

After this quick period of warming up, Nagin-bhai started telling me the important aspects of his sadhana as it was progressing during those days His statements were always concise, and also precise Moreover, I must say that generally he remembered well what he had told me on earlier occasions I believe my comments apropos of them, besides the contextual basis they provided to him, were helpful to him in some respect Perhaps he got a degree of confidence to open himself out and talk to me more freely about his experiences This I can maintain because he was extremely careful about speaking of such matters to others

Long ago, in the thirties when he was just a boy in his teens, Nagin-bhai had written the following to Sri Aurobindo "In the early days of my sadhana I once had an experience of great stillness in which my consciousness rose upward, at a certain height, it felt the bliss, consciousness and existence all together and at the same time " Afterwards his sadhana went through many stages, with several long interruptions, sometimes coming almost to a stop It seems that it began again, at a much higher level, or rather going deeper into the physical also, and he had a distinct intuition that presently something definite was being done in him It is in this context that we may possibly understand what he was trying to tell me during our brief meetings From the indicative statements he made, it is quite clear that a great advance was made by him in his spiritual pursuits He always regarded the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, to put it in his own words, "like my own mother and father" and there is no doubt that it is they who

were doing Yoga in him as his spiritual parents. This also means that he was a Yogi of a high order with remarkable spiritual achievements to his credit. I may quote here a poem of his, marking the intuition he had, much before the event of 29 February 1956, of the supramental manifestation in the subtle-physical of the earth

Standing on the last horizon
I saw a golden gate opening
It had no bolts, no hinges—
Only a huge lid that looked like a sun

Amazed I watched on, forgetting my very self
The opening lid made no sound,
Only a movement of light
Then gushed out air the world had never breathed before

Coming back to our meetings. These continued regularly for the first three years or so and later less often than in the beginning. I do not know whether he was becoming more and more reluctant to speak about his sadhana or whether there was a general lack of intensity because of his indifferent health. He was in his late eighties.

I have put down in the following his experiences as faithfully as I could. I used to make the records the same day and therefore they are generally true to what he had told me. But I must also admit that he had never seen these records. However, I am pretty certain he must have suspected that I would be recording them in my notebooks. Perhaps he wanted these to be left behind, although of it he never gave any hint to me.

Records

16:02:1994

I am the Reality. I want to make you a part of my Reality.

I am getting the experience after a long time. My sadhana had almost stopped in between. But it seems it has started again. This is happening after a long time.

27:02:1994

But what is Reality?

I am here for such a long time and I still do not know it. I tried to read *The Life Divine*. What is Reality? I do not know. Reality is creative Divinity.

10:03:1994

I went to the Supreme and, while I was coming back, saw just for a quick while a huge golden Form.

Yes, it was a huge golden Form. I saw it only for an extremely short duration.

17:03:1994

I was in the physical body of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother was doing some work in me

My psychic being went to the Transcendent, yes, to the Transcendent—and about it I was told afterwards But I do not know which part of me had gone along with it. Which part of me had gone along with the psychic being to the Transcendent, that I do not know

07:04:1994

“I am working on your essential human elements” I heard this distinctly Sri Aurobindo was telling me that

And then this happened, what I am going to tell you. I don’t know the connection between the two, but this is the sequence

It was a concrete experience It happened at the Samadhı I had kept my forehead on the Samadhı. Sri Aurobindo rubbed some paste on the forehead,—as is done in our temples.

I had a distinct feeling that he had come physically; the feeling of his rubbing the paste was there for a long time.

09:04:1994

I was shown the Height I was also told to bring it down in me

I did not see the Mother anywhere; no, I did not see her but she must have been there around. Sri Aurobindo was there, but he was not doing anything.

As for the Height, I could not bring down the Height in me Why did they want me to do it when they were there?

20:04:1994

It was a big work The field was to be brought down in me. But my spirit could not do it It asked the Mother to pray to the Grace

Later on, in another meditation, I was told,—Sri Aurobindo had told it to me,—that the Mother had prayed to the supreme Grace The field had come, or will be coming down,—I do not know exactly when It was a difficult work

23:04:1994

Two days after that, I was told that the Grace had descended. It did its work

There was a difficulty in the cosmic field, which I felt in me. That was removed.

The work in the individual field remains to be done

27:04:1994

Yes, I was freed from the cosmic field

Long ago, a woman had approached me—not in a doubtful sense, she is a mother of several children. But I did not allow her to come closer to me, come to me at all.

The force went back. I did not mean it but, because I did not accept it, it had to go back. It did harm to her, to that woman. It had to work somewhere because I did not accept it.

I was free from the environmental forces

On yet another occasion, a woman could not even touch my environment.

So, you see, that freedom was there. But now with the working of the Grace I have become free, free from the cosmic field

30:04:1994

Yesterday I wanted to go to the Samadhi. But I could not do that.

My spirit was busy with Sri Aurobindo, as if in a discussion. But it was not a discussion. They were busy and I could not disturb them.

My psychic being was standing a little behind, at the back. This whole thing went on like that for a long time. How could I then do Pranam?

Two days ago, in the evening, just before the general meditation in the Ashram, there was an embodied Presence and my being was in it.

I wanted to leave the Ashram before the meditation would start; but the Presence was still there. I came out and stood on the footpath, outside the Ashram. The Presence continued to be there for a long time.

04:05:1994

What is Ananda? I had first a brief experience of it. But then I was going to the Samadhi. It descended in me.

I was standing at my usual place, close by the pillar, with my hands holding the slab of the structure, it was so for a long time.

How could I recognise that it was Ananda?

Sri Aurobindo told me that what was descending was Ananda. I could see him. Normally he does not interfere when the experience is going on. But, this time, he told me that it was Ananda. I could see him only for a brief while.

He was very powerful. I could not have withstood him, that presence, for too long. But my psychic being was there with him. I could see it.

The Ananda continued to come down. However, in spite of that I came out of the Ashram. The general meditation time in the evening was approaching. So I came out, as I had done on an earlier occasion. I stood on the pavement for a long time.

It continued to pour, and it continued so to my utter surprise. Ananda was still pouring even as I stood there outside, on the pavement

Earlier I had suffered physically for too long; in contrast to that the present experience of Ananda was marvellous. This was new. No, it had never happened to me before. It was altogether new. It was marvellous.

07:05:1994

I was told that the Being of Ananda had gone back. Earlier, it was the descent of Ananda, now the Being of Ananda is mentioned.

It must have been for the second time. Ananda cannot stay for so many days. No, Ananda cannot stay for so many days. That is why I say it was the second time that it must have come. But about the departure of the previous experience and the coming of the Being of Ananda,—about that I do not know anything more.

The entire body up to the subtle-physical was very still, it was very still all the while. Possibly this itself was the result of the descent of Ananda, it might have been due to the descent of Ananda, though Ananda cannot descend without that stillness. No vibration, no movement; only the stillness. The body was still.

How is it that I did not know Ananda?

For that, one must have Supermind first. Only Supermind can know Ananda.

Because I did not know it, I was told about it. Yes, that is why I was told that it was Ananda that had descended.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

SUNIL-DA AND HIS MUSIC

I WAS away from the Ashram when Sunil-da left his body. When I opened *Mother India* I read the words ‘‘Sunil was’’ I had to turn to the end of the article to see that he was no longer with us in his physical body.

The Mother taught us never to grieve. Her children go straight to Her and when the time comes we will come back with Her. But the heart felt a pang at not having been able to take some flowers to Sunil and say a silent ‘‘au revoir’’ When I finished Jhumur’s simple yet evocative article I sat down with Surakshita, Roberto and Bhakti to listen to the 1972 music which has always seemed to me the most inspired and which holds special memories. Nata, Ishita and I never failed to meditate with it on our birthdays and to play it for all family members and friends on theirs.

As soon as the first stirring notes of the music filled the room Sunil’s presence flowed in with it. Inside the music, a part of it I began to relive the first time I had heard it in the Mother’s room with Sunil and Nata and a few other people. It was also the first time the Mother was listening to it. And how the Mother listened! With such quiet intensity. One was carried by the music, transported by that carolling promise of joy and then the last aspiring rising voices which lifted us and deposited us in a beatific vision made flesh. It was difficult to come back. In fact, we didn’t really come back until somewhat later, when Sunil was kneeling beside the Mother who was looking at him with grave tenderness. She said to him, ‘‘With this music a new world has come down’’ I will always remember the way he carried Her hand to his forehead.

As I listened to the music, I was in the Mother’s room again. The memory of it all assailed me, but it wasn’t a memory, or rather, it was more than a memory and the music was saying about the pang that I had felt ‘‘What does that matter? I am here with the Mother. We are this music. I will always come with it and bring the Mother with me’’ It is not possible to tell the splendour of Sunil’s being as I perceived it, but Stephano, an Italian Aurovillian, must have caught something of it in a dream before Sunil left. Sunil came to him in gold and orange robes. That seemed so right and so like the colours of my experience and of the music, the colours of the new world he brought in with it.

What Sunil showed of himself was the modest devotee in simple Ashram kurtas. I don’t think anyone could have made him wear gold and orange. He didn’t even particularly like to be told how much people loved his music. Minnie, who has a strand of mischief in her, once said to me, ‘‘Tell him how much you like his music and see what happens.’’ But he caught on and actually his modesty was such that he smiled slightly and the compliment slipped past him as though there was not enough ego there even to shrink from it. It didn’t really make a dent in him. In fact, his modesty was such that he could even show the Mother’s messages of appreciation when asked as though they had very little to do with him and were only for the music. These messages were published in *Mother India*, but now, a year later, they bear repetition.

Sunil, this is genius! It is magnificent, with a deep and true emotion. It has made me very happy

With my blessings.

29 12 64

I heard the music—it is wonderful! Music itself pure and high and strong—it is delightful and leaves you waiting and wanting to hear more

I heard it with deep emotion as something exceptionally beautiful... I want to repeat here that this music opens the doors of the future and reproduces admirably the musical vibrations of the higher regions.

Sunil, my dear child,

I have just heard what you have recorded. It is beautiful, very beautiful It is the first time that I have heard music express true power, the power of Mahakali, the power of the Mahashakti It is formidable and at the same time, so deeply sweet .

And specially, while listening to it, I had the impression of a door opening on to a still more beautiful realisation

8 12 65

Sunil, my dear child,

It was with impatience that I was waiting to listen to your music and I am so happy to have heard it today

30 12 65

On the day after I had read the news in *Mother India* and had listened to the cassette, Chamanlal came. We spoke of Sunil I told him of the first time we had heard the 1972 New Year Music in the Mother's room, and now he sat with us to listen to it once again When it was over, after a while he got up in the silence and began to move towards the front door. He had almost reached it when it occurred to me to follow him to ask whether he had felt any effect from his remedy. He didn't answer that question but just looked at me and said that while he was listening to the music Sunil and the Mother had been there and Nata had been there "And you were there," he added. Where were we? I didn't think to ask and I still do not. We were of course in Sunil's world of gold and orange music. He had kept his promise to come as he always does now when I put that music on.

Sometimes They come in on those very first notes, a call to consciousness. Sometimes They come in on the Mother's appeal to us to be worthy. Sometimes, when the mind is very busy I suppose, they steal in between the notes during the pauses, unobtrusively,—but They are there, here with us, and sometimes again They suddenly tap me on the shoulder.

How many countless times must Sunil's music have lifted people's hearts, opened 'corridors of light', given hope to despondent spirits and soothed people's sorrows. He changed our lives. It is difficult to think of all these years in the Ashram without his music. It is impossible to think of the Mother coming down without him. The very thought leaves a greyness and a void and even now one cannot think of 1999 being ushered in without his music. But of course it wasn't. He will be there for the third millennium. The music will never cease. It will lead us triumphantly right up to the threshold of the golden age and I wouldn't be surprised to see him waiting to welcome us in his gold and orange robes.

On First Hearing Sunil's Centenary Music

No longer glimpses, gleams or corridors of light
 But light cascading undiminished,
 Carolling and quick and bright,
 God-music beckoning, God-music beckoning

At first too stunned, too unaware to heed
 We looked
 And let the plectrum skate and slide upon the mirror of our soul
 Then pluck a first deep chord like ruby's light.
 Another shook and opened wide the door
 On trembling matter's ear
 And plunged within a hand to tune our substance to the dawn
 Of shift from night to light,
 From dead to living day

Oh, tune us thus,
 Pluck long arpeggios of deep, of strong delight from our deep sleeping,
 Pry loose our timid guarded hearts
 And make our beings sing and dance like this, like this, like music
 That no unawakened voice may stay;
 At last, at last the first clear sign.
 Earth's untried tongue will learn to sing,
 Will rise against the palate of the skies
 And ring and ring and ring

From mountain peak to moving mountain peak
 The message sounds and grows and echoes
 And peals a word not occult but revealed,

A word both passionless and pure,
 Earth's seas and trees and soil enriching it,
 Sovereign, and all there is and sure

Earth, you are born anew,
 Baptised by music's reign
 You will sing and dance with gods
 Your children are immortal
 Deep night has flown like mist,
 You will not be the same again

MAGGI

VISHNU OF THE VEDH

VISHNU of the Vedh
 I saw him
 Enshrined in stone
 On a summer night
 Upon a crowded hill
 In a Deccan town,
 The soft breeze fluttered
 Through leaf and flower
 And all was bathed
 In blue incandescent light

A hymn I heard
 In an ancient tongue
 And then it happened
 I saw with 'other eyes'.

Vishnu of antiquity
 Pervading the air
 Transcending time and stone
 And in the aspiring crowd
 I heard the pulse beat
 Of a people born again

SURESH THADANI

THE JOURNEY ETERNAL— THE POETRY OF K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

(Continued from the issue of April 1999)

AFTER Sita, who? But no such doubts crossed father's mind. He had plunged into the very infinitudes of our ancient Indian heritage and day after day meditated upon the great heroines who were all indeed emanations of the Supreme Shakti. It was a problem to choose, and the vicissitudes of age and failing eyesight necessarily restricted further studies in a big way. Once again he turned to meditative absorption and seven emanations of Shakti literally formed themselves into an array of divine flowers for the epic *Sati Saptakam* (1991) is shaped as an *Avatamsa Kavya*, a garland-narrative where there is no exact progression in terms of time, but simply the presentation of "seven near-apocalyptic visions of maidenhood-womanhood-motherhood, distinctive in their tints and colours," as in an ornament made of different gems. Yet distantly *Sati Saptakam* does indeed "team into a spectrum of archetypal variety projecting almost a parable of Evolution spanning a whole Yuga Cycle." Father has himself said that this was the result of an inner *adesh*, command.

After *Sitayana*, look for a constellation of Sapta-Matrika, Seven Mothers, amidst the breathtaking munificence of the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* and similar seminal classics.

Devahuti, Sukanya, Devayani, Damayanti, Renuka, Draupadi, Kannaki. How they had suffered and overcome! A whole Himalayan range of sheer nobility, endurance, heroism, fire, love! "A *mandala* of unfading Lights that sustain with hope and faith all confused wanderers in the Dark." Father's choice deliberately left out Savitri. Sri Aurobindo had written an epic on Savitri, and her closeness to earth's wideness and intimacy with heaven were to be the sustaining inspirations for father's heroines. And in effect, these heroines become role-models for Indian feminism. Unlike in the West, frailty is not the mark of Indian women, to judge by the nation's classical heroines and in the Prologue the Master (an imaginative vision of Sri Aurobindo) advises the author.

Other countries, my son, see her branded
with the birthmark of frailty,
pity her for her weakness, or succumb
to her sheer beauty of form

But sufferance in most situations
is frozen *shakti*, unlike
the spendthrift and vagabond dispersal
in which the male oft excels

Thus with their uncanny inner vision
 our Seer-poets and Rishis
 saw Woman as embodiment of strength
 and as Mother of the Race

Sri Aurobindo has also explained how the frozen *shakti* becomes an irresistible, destructive flame, by presenting Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons from the East, in *Iliad*. And there is Savitri herself when she throws aside her veil of sufferance and patience and reveals herself as “an ocean of untrembling, virgin fire”. How can we ever forget the Agni-Vishvarupa in *Savitri* that puts an end to Ignorance, Inconscience, Death?

Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,
 Light was a luminous torture in his heart,
 Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves,
 His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze.

From Vyasa to Sri Aurobindo there were plentiful barrier-breakers, “the great creators with wide brows of calm”. Father absorbed them all, but pursued his own path, as directed by his creative fire. Hence, *Sati Saptakam* has often long passages of translation from original sources. Variations of several legends coalesce to produce a new vision of the known heroine. But nowhere is there any distortion. The author’s devotion-drenched heart adoring the Eternal Feminine, the Universal Mother, seeks to bring out the nobler elements in the heroines with a judicious mix of imaginative recreation and contemporary thrust.

A constant search for the glory and good of life and the goodness and simplicity in man make the tales cardinal lessons to achieve an ideal life-style. Our ancient sages were not renunciates, nor were they demons engaged in conspicuous consumption: “.they were householders of the middle path / steering clear of want and waste”. Devahuti receiving lessons in spirituality from her son Kapila is a charming vignette. What is spirituality but leading a blameless, simple life, always looking to the bright sunshine in the future? A housewife leading “the knife-edged householder’s life” is no less than a Rishi!

While the tales of Devahuti and Sukanya are like the calm waters in a silent mountain tarn, the stories of Devayani, Renuka, Draupadi and Kannaki toss with the terror and beauty of life in the raw. Man’s perfidy is brought to the foreground repeatedly. Look at the King Yayati who even descends to the treachery of drugging Devayani in this passage (not untypical of father’s style when re-telling secular legends) which zooms right into a contemporary scenario of flower-children and the like.

Securing a collection of choicest
 drugs and honeyed stimulants

flavoured and coloured, he fed her with these,
and soon made her an addict.

And when Devayani spoke at random
under the drugs' influence,
Yayati hurled abuses at her, and
placed her under sedation

Can one flame of a seven-tongued lamp be deemed brighter than the rest? Perhaps Renuka does achieve such an extra brightness, a russet glow full of terror and pity in *Sati Saptakam*. The *Hymn to Mother Renuka* by her son Vishvvasu, like the *Renuka Geetam* of Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni, achieves a mantric utterance and is no doubt modelled on the Devi Stuti in *Chandi*.

Forgive our trespasses, Mother, forgive
us your Sons, forgive also
our Father, forgive and redeem this time
of our blindness to the Light

Forty verses of breathless adoration of the Divine Mother, each verse getting a direct impulse from the writings of Sri Aurobindo! Vishvvasu at the feet of Ma Renuka is no doubt a spiritual recordation of the author surrendering at the feet of Sweet Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

One of the interesting battles of re-telling existing legends concerns the handling of the supernatural. Father never strains himself overmuch to thrust rationalist explanations for recorded miracles, but he definitely insinuates a rationalistic approach, as when the miracle-vessel in the hands of Manimekalai has to be described in action. According to the legend, Kannaki's spiritual daughter Manimekalai becomes a Buddhist renunciate and is given a nectar vessel, the Amuda Surabhi, which gives endless food to help Manimekalai assuage the hunger of the poor and the downtrodden. Father deftly makes Manimekalai a Mother Teresa in action, and the Amuda Surabhi is seen as a guardian amulet, an inspirer of good deeds, for it is the heart that makes everything possible:

Moving with an evangelical zeal
from place to place, from choultry
and market-place and other haunts of men
to Temple and state-prison

everywhere as flame-bright ambassador,
she both replenished her cup
with the gifts from the rich, and gave away
to the hungry and the poor.

It was natural that having triumphantly drawn the Rainbow Arc of Womanhood between *Sitayana* and *Sati Saptakam* (both the epic volumes have been receiving high praise from discerning critics since their publication), father should hear the enchanting notes of the Flute Player of Brindavan *Krishna-Geetam: Delight of Existence* (1994) is also about the Divine Mother. Father obviously feels that it is Radha who is at the forefront, the Prakriti, the Nature Soul. Without Radha, Krishna, his flute and the flute's melody must ever remain unmanifest! The dedication, *Descent of Radha*, brings this home to us

Hark! 'tis Venu Ganam, Krishna-Geetam,
but cascading from, O where?
Adya Shakti's willed descent as Radha
spellbinding the earth-atmosphere

And the melodies of the Magic Flute,
even when unstruck, unheard,
the airs of paradisaal Brindavan
are greatedened by Radha's Grace.

An insightful, brief Preface precedes the re-telling of Krishna's tale as found in the Tenth Book of the Bhagavat. Apart from Bhagavat, father also adventured in the enormous Krishna literature that has been accumulated down the ages. The Krishna theme is truly ageless for it has inspired wondrous spiritual personalities like Goda Devi, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Princess Meera and the Mother. After a detailed introduction, *Krishna and Radha—Lights from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, we have a prologue, six Books on Krishna's manifestation and ministry, a Book on the wondrous personalities who have helped man achieve self-liberation (this includes Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha) and an 'envoi', *Ananda Yoga*. A fascinating epic-telling which leads us to Mother Mirra at Pondicherry and her epic struggle:

Mirra testified also to the fact
of Krishna-Aurobindo's
continuing ministry, with sanction
direct from the Supreme Lord.

And in her own, the World Mother's body,
its billions of cells waging
the double war of the transformation
of the self and of the world.

with Mirra never resting, relaxing,
but fighting the Past that tried

to endure, and inviting Next Future
to take full charge of the Earth

and having willed the City of the Dawn
and Matrimandir its Soul,
she too—Mirra, Radha, Goda, Meera—
withdrew to the Transcendent

Krishna-Geetam was written at a time when my parents were undergoing the most anxious period in their lives and one can almost say that writing the epic became father's prayerful act of Mahaviswasa, great faith And the Divine Mother's answering Grace became a reality. What other call can disturb a person who has really heard the Flute Player of Brindavan? Seeing the page-proofs and affixing his initials for the strike order, father had completed his creative task with regard to the poem Now came to him the experience of the great Tamil Vaishnava hymnologist, Tiruppan, who had had a total vision of Ranganatha as Krishna and had taken his fill of the entire image of the All-Beautiful. So Tiruppan indited a decade on Ranganatha and stated in his tenth verse.

He is the Lord with a complexion
Rivalling the monsoon-cloud,
He ate butter as a cowherd
And stole my heart away,
He is the Lord of Immortals
Residing in beautiful Srirangam,
Having seen him, my Nectar,
My eyes shall see nought else

As an epigraph for *Krishna-Geetam*, father affixed the Matri-Mantra with Sri Aurobindo's translation

AUM
Anandamayi
Chaitanyamayi
Satyamayi
Parame!

AUM
She, the Delight
She, the Consciousness
She, the Truth
the Supreme!

It is beautiful to hear father repeat the Matri-Mantra through the hours of the night these days Having traversed the legend-rich heritage of India, perhaps this is the truth he has realised and the truth we all need to know. The Mother, who is All-Ananda, the Mother who is All-Chaitanya, the Mother who is All-Satya The Supreme Mother to whom we all turn prayerfully,

To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.
All here shall be one day her sweetness's home .

(Concluded)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

TWO POEMS

WHEN YOU COME

WHEN you come the plane-tree drops a leaf
in the sun And knowing the dumb world as you do
you walk on unaccompanied
towards the musical spirals through
the dissolving lightness of the day.
I come, a dark heart held between
my thumb and my forefinger
and know that love is an empty scene
before the appearance of the singer.

AN OLD THEME

The rose is an old theme
but I love the rose
because it reminds me of you.

I love the tuberose and the carnation too
but above all the rose is dear to me
because it reminds me of you.

It is not weary of day,
it is not weary of night,
it is the flower I love most
because it reminds me of you.
Unfading rose, I love you
therefore I love your image too.

RANAJIT SARKAR

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE MEANING AND CONTENT OF TRUE EDUCATION

(Continued from the issue of April 1999)

JUST now we have spoken *inter alia* of the process of 'evoking knowledge from within'. The idea may perhaps sound queer to those readers who are not well acquainted with the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo, the propounder of the Yoga of Integral Self-perfection. Time and space do not allow us to elaborate this topic further here. However, we may content ourselves with mentioning in brief a few salient principles the Master-Yogi has recommended for making education luminous and efficient.

First Principle We must know that all knowledge is within and has to be evoked by education rather than instilled from outside. In this view the teacher's role is altogether different from what is normally thought of. In Sri Aurobindo's vision the teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is just a helper and guide. "His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface." (SABCL, Vol 17, p 204)

Now, the question is, how to evoke the knowledge that is within? Sri Aurobindo has adumbrated the process in chapter III of his opusculum *The Brain of India*. The inquisitive reader may refer to the relevant passages there. We quote here only one significant sentence indicating the beneficial result of the process. "The highest reach of the sattwic development is when one can dispense often or habitually with outside aids, the teacher or the text book, grammar and dictionary and learn a subject largely or wholly from within." (*Ibid*, 1955 edition, p 20)

Second Principle It should never be forgotten that every one has his own *svabhāva* and *svadharmā*, his intrinsic self-nature and the characteristic turn of his being. He has something divine in him, something his own, a chance of perfection and fulfilment in whatever sphere the Divine offers him to take or refuse. The chief aim of education should be to discover it, develop it and use it to the maximum extent possible. The teacher should try to help the child to draw out that in him which is best and noble and make it perfect for a worthy use. And for this the mind of the student has to be consulted in its own growth. The teacher must not seek to hammer the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher: the student himself must be induced to expand according to his own nature. Otherwise, if we try to disregard the child's *svadharmā* or self-nature and attempt to bring him up in a way not congenial to his divinely ordained turn and temperament, the results can only be disastrous to a great extent. As Sri Aurobindo has warned us:

There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. (*SABCL*, Vol 17, p 204)

Third Principle Every child is, in his characteristic fashion, full of various *samskāras* or impressions both inborn and acquired. The teacher has to be cognisant of this ground reality, take the child as he is and begin his teaching from there. For, the principle of effective and creative teaching is to “work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be.” Therefore, the teacher in his hasty and rash ignorance should not try to lift and divorce the child from his natural soil and milieu and transplant him in an imported atmosphere. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. (*SABCL*, Vol 17, p 205)

Fourth Principle: Education has to be national but not parochial and sectarian. A superficial consideration may easily lead one to believe that to speak of a “national education” is to talk arrant nonsense. For, is not education something universal in nature transcending the borders of any particular country? Mankind and its needs, one may aver, are the same everywhere and truth and knowledge also are one and have no country. How can then one talk of offering any ‘national’ education to a child?

A deeper consideration will not fail to expose the fallacious nature of this line of reasoning. A nation or a people is not, let us remember, just a geographical unit or an arbitrary conglomerate of an assemblage of men brought about by the vagaries of history. A veritable nation is a specific soul-manifestation of the universal Spirit just as every individual human being is. It has uniqueness of its own just as it has some commonness with the other nations of the world. It is expected to play a distinct role in the comity of nations and bring its own rich contribution to the total multi-aspected flowering of humanity as a whole.

And, according to Sri Aurobindo, India is such a nation and if the citizens have to fulfil their intended creative roles and enrich the composite but harmoniously blended civilisation of the world, Indians should be afforded a national education which will be truly ‘national’ in spirit but at the same time organically imbibing and assimilating

every possible positive and constructive element derived from other nations' educational efforts

Thus Indian 'national education' does not mean on the one hand an obscurantist retrogression to the past forms that were once a living frame of our culture but are now dead or dying things, nor the taking over of any foreign patterns—however suitable to other countries—only with certain differences, additions, subtractions, modifications of detail and curriculum and giving it a gloss of Indian colour. A rightly conceived Indian 'national education' will be one which will be faithful to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit. It has to take its foundation on our own being, our own mind and our own spirit.

Thus, when Sri Aurobindo speaks of Indian national education, it is then not a question between modernism and antiquity but between an imported civilisation and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future, not a return to the fifth century but an imitation of the centuries to come, not a reversion but a break forward away from a present artificial falsity to her own greater innate potentialities (*SABCL*, Vol. 17, p. 194)

Fifth Principle We have to change the focus of our educational efforts from the 'furnishing' of knowledge to the adequate building up of the faculties of knowledge and the strengthening of the moral fabric of the student, of each individual student. We should not try, as we habitually do now, to erect a huge superstructure of 'knowledge' in the mind of the student without first preparing a solid foundation to sustain that 'knowledge'. We have to encourage the student to have the play of his intelligent attentive thought on the subject of his study, we must correct the habit of spoiling his instruments of knowledge by the adoption of false methods. We should bear in mind that "Information cannot be the foundation of intelligence, it can only be part of the material out of which the knower builds knowledge, the starting-point, the nucleus of fresh discovery and enlarged creation. An education that confines itself to imparting knowledge is no education." (Sri Aurobindo, *The Brain of India*, 1955 edition, p. 11)

Therefore, instead of thinking that our task is over once we provide the student with an ever-increasing store of knowledge and skill in various fields of study, we have to devise a great and unique discipline involving a perfect 'education' of the soul and mind of the child and for that we have first to find the secret of success in a profound knowledge of the working of consciousness in man. The teacher must know how to train and develop in the child his various faculties of memory, imagination, perception, reasoning, judgment, concentration, etc., which help to build the edifice of thought and knowledge for the knower. These faculties must not only be equipped with sufficient tools and materials supplied from outside but clairvoyantly trained to bring into play fresh materials and use skilfully those of which they are in possession.

The teacher has to know how to handle and develop the innate powers of the four layers of man's mind or *antahkarana*. (i) *Chitta* or the basic storehouse of memory, (ii) *Manas* or mind proper—the so-called 'sixth sense', (iii) *Buddhi* or intellect—the real

instrument of thought, and (iv) *Bodhi* or the faculty of direct knowledge

The teacher has to fulfil another important task. Since the foundation of the ever-growing structure of knowledge can be sustained with solid stability only if the student is provided with a sufficient fund of energy—sufficient to bear the demands of a continually growing activity of the memory, judgment and creative power—the teacher should be capable of helping the child to discover the source of infinite energy and tap its resources as and when the demands arise. For, we should not forget that “The source of life and energy is not material but spiritual, but the basis, the foundation on which the life and energy stand and work, is physical.. To raise up the physical to the spiritual is Brahmacharya, for by the meeting of the two the energy which starts from one and produces the other is enhanced and fulfils itself” (*Ibid*, p. 14)

Sixth Principle. It needs no emphasising that the development of intellect and the culture of mental faculties alone cannot enable the child to grow into full manhood. His ethical-aesthetic nature too has to be developed at the same time. When we say so, we are surely not referring to any conventional ‘moral training’ with the help of moral textbooks lifelessly imparted by the teacher who acts as a ‘hired instructor’ or a ‘benevolent policeman’ without any correspondence to his own personal conduct. That sort of moral training cannot but make the child insincere and a hypocrite, mechanically and artificially professing high things but never caring to put them into effective practice. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out “You can impose a certain discipline on children, dress them into a certain mould, lash them into a desired path, but unless you can get their hearts and natures on your side, the conformity to this imposed rule becomes a hypocritical and heartless, a conventional, often a cowardly compliance” (*SABCL*, Vol. 17, p. 209)

Yet it is an axiomatic truth that the education of the intellect divorced from the perfection of the moral and emotional nature is patently injurious to human progress. But this perfection can be brought about in the child’s nature, only if the teacher becomes perfect in the matter and sets a living personal example before his student. He should act as a wise friend and guide and helper to the student and draw the latter to the right path of development by silent but potent suggestion, and the best method of suggestion, let us repeat, is the personal example of the teacher. To be worthy of bearing the title, a ‘teacher’ should be able to help a child under his tutelage to develop in himself the following qualities.

Thirst for knowledge, purity of thought and feeling and action, courage, ardour, nobility, beneficence, skill, industry, good taste, balance, sense of proportion, lofty strength and steadfastness of will, self-discipline, etc

In Sri Aurobindo’s words. “The children should be helped to grow up into straightforward, frank, upright and honourable human beings ready to develop into divine nature.”

These few last words “ready to develop into divine nature” lead us to the consideration of the seventh and last principle, the principle of future education

Seventh Principle We cannot stop at the borders of ordinary humanity with all its

basic insufficiencies and limitations. And education cannot be allowed to confine itself to the sole task of catering to the needs of the sensational, economic, rational or political man. Commercialism has been the bane of modern civilisation, a sensational activism is still its driving force. Modern education has not been able to redeem the sensational man who still lives in the vital substratum, but only wants it to be stimulated from above. As a result thought and art and literature have been cheapened, and talent and genius have been made to run in the grooves of popular success.

Or, at times, education is given another dimension but its main object and form have been conceived to be not so much cultural but scientific, utilitarian and economic. The education's value in that case lies not so much in the building up of a noble specimen of humanity but in the preparation of the efficient individual unit to take his appointed place in the body of the economic organisation.

Or, at its best, education is planned to turn the mostly infrarational human being into a rational creature, and the disordered human group into a rationalised human society. But this hope has been belied; right ideas, right information and right training alone have not been able to solve the problems of man. For, as Sri Aurobindo has so aptly observed: "it has not been found in experience, whatever might have once been hoped, that education and intellectual training by itself can change man, it only provides the human individual and collective ego with better information and a more efficient machinery for its self-affirmation, but leaves it the same unchanged human ego." (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol 19, pp. 1057-58)

Where do we go then from here? And how to come out of this cul-de-sac? What is needed for this is a large and profound view of human life and destiny, and a solid foundation in a rightly conceived education different in nature and scope from what it is now. We must penetrate down to the fundamentals with an effort of clear, sound and luminous thinking and know precisely what are the fundamentals and what the accessories of true education. If our new educational venture has to succeed when others of the past or even of the present have failed in the task of the regeneration of man, it has to disengage itself from all ambiguities and be clear about its essential sense, its primary aim and basic procedure.

About the pitfalls inherent in starting new educational experiments without precise clarity about the basics, what Sri Aurobindo has said with some poignant wit is worth pondering:

To be satisfied with a trick of this kind is to perform a somersault round our centre of intellectual gravity, land ourselves where we were before and think we have got into quite another country,—obviously a very unsatisfactory proceeding... nothing is easier than to start off on a false but specious cry or from an unsound starting-point and travel far away from the right path on a tangent that will lead us to no goal but only to emptiness and failure. (*SABCL*, Vol 17, pp 192-93)

The basic assumptions guiding the new education of the future,—and these are not

mere intellectually cogitated assumptions but wise insights born of spiritual experience,—are, in the language adapted from Sri Aurobindo

(1) All life, even the vital and material life, is indeed a manifestation of the universal Power in the individual but veiled in a disguising Maya, and to pursue the lower life for its own sake is to persist in a stumbling path and to enthrone our nature's obscure ignorance and not at all find the true truth and complete law of existence (*Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol 13, pp 549-50)

(2) The pursuit of intellectual, ethical and social standards, the mind that insists on salvation by the observance of moral law, social duty and function or the solutions of the liberated intelligence, is indeed a very necessary stage of human development, but it is not the complete and last truth of existence. The soul of man has to go beyond to some more absolute standard of man's spiritual and immortal nature (*Ibid.*, p 550)

(3) One has to rise beyond the mere terrestrial preoccupation; for, supreme and arduous self-fulfilment by self-exceeding is the goal of human endeavour. The spiritual life is a nobler thing than the life of external power and enjoyment. The thinker is greater than the man of action but the spiritual man greater than the thinker. "The soul that lives in God is more perfect than the soul that lives only in outward mind or only for the claims and joys of thinking and living matter" (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, 1988 edition, p. 70)

(4) Once the individual has built the substructure, when he has paid his debt to society, filled well and admirably his place in its life, helped its maintenance and continuity and taken from it his legitimate and desired satisfactions, there still remains the greatest thing of all, his own self, the inner being, the soul which is a spiritual portion of the Infinite, one in its essence with the Eternal. This self, this soul he has to find, he is here upon earth for that. He has to come out of his ego-imprisonment and become a universal soul, one with all existence. Then two different possibilities will open up for him: he can either act in divine liberty for the good of all living things or else turn to enjoy in solitude the bliss of eternity and transcendence (*Ibid.*, pp 114-15)

(5) But not a withdrawal into supracosmic transcendence nor a dwelling in some supraterrrestrial heavens, but an attainment of divine perfection of human being and living here upon earth is the central aim of our existence. All life is a secret Yoga, an obscure growth of Nature towards the discovery and fulfilment of the divine principle hidden in her which becomes progressively less obscure, more self-conscious and luminous, more self-possessed in the human being by the opening of all his instruments of knowledge, will, action, life to the Spirit within him and the world. Mind, life and body are the means of this growth, but they can find their last perfection only by opening out to the Divine. The education of the future should be designed to help man in fulfilling this ideal of integral perfection. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol 21, pp. 590-91)

So we see that education changes its meaning and content in Sri Aurobindo's vision of the education of the future. The revealing and finding of the divine Self in man should in Sri Aurobindo's view, be "the whole first aim of all its [the spiritualised

society's] activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure'' (*The Human Cycle*, SABCL, Vol 15, p 240)

But how to fulfil this aim? Surely not by any external manipulation of human nature or through the artifice of externally contrived education and social machinery. No social machinery can possibly cut human mind and life into perfection, for mind and life are only instruments of the soul and unless this soul is given a lead in the matter, nothing tangible or permanent can be achieved. Every teacher has to realise that there is a soul or psychical entity in every individual behind his physical-vital-mental parts and this represents the fundamental truth of his existence, the individual self-manifesting divinity within him. He should know that the evocation of this psychical entity, the real man within, is the most rewarding object of education and indeed of all human life if it would find and live according to the deepest truth and law of its own being.

And what will be the contribution of this psychic being if it is made to come out into the open? Sri Aurobindo assures us.

It is not yet realised what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with child or man, is to help him to find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more if we call it into the foreground as 'the leader of the march set in our front', will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or forming any conception (*SABCL*, Vol. 15, p 28)

Will the élite of to-day pay any heed to these words of Sri Aurobindo? Most probably not. Because the ideas may seem to them too outlandish and the hope of change of human nature by this inner means too chimerical a dream. But whether they believe it or not, Sri Aurobindo assures us that what is demanded of us is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and therefore radically impossible. For "what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it: what evolutionary Nature presses for, is an awakening to the knowledge of self, the discovery of self, the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and the release of its self-knowledge, its self-power, its native self-instrumentation." (*The Life Divine*, p. 1059)

And this possibility can surely enter the domain of practicability only if we can shake off from ourselves the disabling clings of past notions and habits and arm ourselves with an active faith and robust optimism in the divine possibility of man. What is necessary for the success of this new educational venture of the future for the birth of a new humanity is that "there should be a turn in humanity felt by some or many towards the vision of this change, a feeling of its imperative need, the sense of its

possibility, the will to make it possible . and to find the way '' (*Ibid* , p 1060)

Is it too much to expect in this Hour of God that some of us who are actively involved in the task of finding the right kind of education for the children of the future, admit the new truth revealed by the Master-Yogi, turn our mind to this "new knowledge of self and others and world and God and soul and Nature, a knowledge of oneness, a knowledge of universal Divinity" and make this new knowledge and vision the sole motive of all our action for the sake of the divine fulfilment upon earth?

Let us close this long essay on Sri Aurobindo's thoughts and insights on education by quoting a significant passage from the Master-Yogi who has been a distinguished educationist at the same time

This is an hour in which, for India as for all the world, its future destiny and the turn of its steps for a century are being powerfully decided, and for no ordinary century, but one which is itself a great turning-point, an immense turn-over in the inner and outer history of mankind. As we act now, so shall the reward of our Karma be meted out to us, and each call of this kind at such an hour is at once an opportunity, a choice, and a test offered to the spirit of our people. Let it be said that it rose in each to the full height of its being and deserved the visible intervention of the Master of Destiny in its favour (*SABCL*, Vol. 27, pp. 506-7)

(Concluded)

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

PEOPLE AROUND US—ENCOUNTERS—GUESTS

SWAMIJI

SHANTA IS old enough to get married. For the last 8 years she has been the main secretary in our workshop. She knows English and can type, and never makes a mistake with bills or lists. Her family lives in one of the traditional Tamil houses we have rented. It has three successive courtyards and faces the prevailing wind so that it is always ventilated by cool breezes. Both her parents, like Shanta herself, are skeletally thin. A sister, brother-in-law and grandmother complete the family, and then there are two beautiful white cows and their calves which live in the last courtyard.

Shanta's father suddenly fell ill, and cancer was diagnosed. We suggested a diet of fruit juices, complemented by mud baths and other cleansing processes. We consulted a wise man, a Swami, a person who can be approached for advice in all sorts of situations. A drive of three quarters of an hour brings us to his house, which stands right on the main road. Buses roar past with their horns blaring, but the house is shaded by trees. Plants grow around it, and a thatched hut that has been built around the stone building seems to reduce the noise considerably, we pass through an outer wall of palm-leaves, and then through the door in the thick walls—two houses in one!

The consultation room is a tiny chamber with a mud floor; a dark ceiling of bamboo and palm-leaves arches over it like a tent, emanating coolness. The far wall is covered from top to bottom with portraits of Indian saints and sages of all epochs—including Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—lit by small lamps. We sit on the floor. The atmosphere is very welcoming and pleasant. The Swami himself is a good-looking man with dark hair and a fine beard. He radiates friendliness. The talk reveals something surprising that concerns Shanta.

The following obstacle is obstructing her marriage, which they have been trying to arrange for years: on a pilgrimage to the temple of Venkateshwar, her parents had promised a gift, but had not fulfilled their promise—according to the Swami, who has never met any of us before—and he is right.

So the gift will have to be delivered to the temple as soon as possible, in order to rectify the disharmony in the universal vibrations that has been caused by its omission. Only then will the way be open to find a good husband who will also keep his promises!

The father—yes, the Swami knows he is very ill: there is a dark place in his abdomen, he can perceive it quite clearly. As the fruit juice regimen has been going on for some time, it is now only a small spot, and not very dangerous. Shall we take the father to the hospital for an operation, as he himself is urgently requesting? The Swami says yes: "Two doctors will operate. One of them is only an assistant. The operation will go well. You will see a man."

Everything went as planned. Mother and daughter are waiting during the operation. They are dozing, tired and inattentive—they hardly noticed that a man in

ordinary clothing—shirt and dhoti—went past them into the operating theatre

The next day we learned that the chief surgeon and an assistant had operated. Apparently, the surgeon had started without looking at the X-ray. He had made more than one incision, but at first could not find the tumour. Then suddenly he heard a voice telling him where it was situated. In his haste he didn't notice that his assistant had not spoken, nor had the departmental doctor who was also acquainted with the case entered—some sort of spirit voice had instructed him.

The father survived the operation but then complications set in, he was literally neglected, and two days later his earthly passage ended. When he was carried home the family found that he had arranged all his personal belongings and left the house as if prepared for the last journey from which no one returns. We took leave of him, and sensed something of the peace that he had gained in place of a life full of cares and anxieties.

*

DEVRAHA BABA

Sharmaji and I were in Delhi, and it must have been around the time when Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister declared a State of Emergency in the country. I have a clear remembrance of how the huge noisy city full of traffic became from one day to the next quieter and more disciplined. Something changed perceptibly in the atmosphere, and to us this seemed a positive thing. Around that time Sharmaji happened to overhear two of the hotel boys talking together, and learned that the famous Yogi from Bihar, Devraha Baba, was staying in Brindaban.

We went there to meet him. This Yogi, it seemed to me, had become a legend in his own lifetime—he was said to be 180 years old. His followers used to build him a hut raised up on poles on a riverbank, where he would stay for a while. When we reached the bank of the Jamuna we could see this construction from a great distance, and a crowd of people on the wide bank. Coming nearer, one could see only the face of the Yogi, looking out over a wall of planks at the crowd of devotees. Devraha Baba lived in complete harmony with nature, and wore no clothes. He was sitting there behind a wooden balustrade. A ladder went down from the hut to the water. From time to time he would take a brief bath in the river, shielded from view by a thick fence of woven palm-leaves. We made our taxi wait and joined the stream of people going towards the "machan" or hut, to get within hearing distance. Sharmaji went in front of me, but the Yogi had already spied us and called out, "She should come also." When he learned that we came from the Ashram in Pondicherry he said, "Oh, Sri Aurobindo! You come from the Ashram of a great Yogi!"

He raised his hands in blessing and we bowed down. Then he called his assistant and said, "Give them both prasad, lots of prasad!" One of them came to us. He wore only a dhoti, his hair, uncut and uncombed for years, towered up in a high matted mass on the crown of his head. He filled our hands with *batashe*—fragile white sugar-wafers

The sadhus carried these in a knotted cloth over one shoulder, to distribute to the devotees as consecrated food.

When we visited the Kumbha Mela in Hardwar in 1972 we had another opportunity to see Devraha Baba. The scene was similar to the first one. I was allowed to photograph the hut on poles from a distance, and in the photo the Yogi's face appears as a tiny white dot.

This time he saw us when we were still far off in the crowd, and called us to him. Sharmaji asked him, "When will Pakistan go?" He said, "Where is Pakistan?" and indicated with a gesture that Pakistan was for him no more than an ephemeral appearance.

Again the sadhus brought prasad and gave us more than we could hold. We tied the precious gift into big handkerchiefs. Then came the moment when the Yogi rubbed his hands and cried, "Now you can all go," for now he wanted to take his dip in the river—this time it was the Ganges on whose broad bank we stood.

Back in Pondicherry we could tell the Mother that we had seen Devraha Baba. "Oh!" she said, "Devraha Baba! That is a great Yogi!" Very soon afterwards Devraha Baba left this earthly existence. We are ever grateful that we were able to meet him. There is a Centre in Bihar that publishes a monthly journal in his name, in which we have read reports about his life and doings that place him among the few unique personalities of the land. His life ended in *jalsamadhi*: he entered the water (*jal*) of the Ganges and was found no more. "Samadhi" means entering immortality.

SIBYLLE SHARMA-HABLIK

ON SPEED AND MODERN PERFORMANCES OF WESTERN MUSIC

THERE seems to be a growing conviction amongst more and more people that the recent performances of music from previous periods and especially of the solo-repertoire, have become too fast at the cost of the musical values. This seems to be especially the case with young artists who tend to drift more and more into the direction of virtuosity, instead of identifying with the music.

We are living in a period of our history in which speed in every aspect of life seems to be pushed towards extremes and the limits of speed as such seem to fade into the unknown. This dominant feature of our lives is responsible for an ever-increasing tension. It may be one of the outward signs of our accelerating evolution. Regarding the performance of music it is evident that too much speed leads to mere virtuosity and mere virtuosity is superficiality.

Under these conditions it has become very difficult for us to imagine the tempo of life in societies in which speed was of another type and character. We know, but cannot really imagine, what it means, that virtually from the beginning of our civilisation, all through our history, till about the second half of the 19th century, the tempo of life was determined by the only source of speed available—the horse! The average speed of a trotting horse is about 18 kms per hour!

In comparison with our times this must have put a stamp of tranquillity, of ease, of a natural feeling of ‘having time’ and of considerable less tension in everyday life. It is virtually impossible for us to understand that the people of previous ages could not even imagine a speed exceeding that of the horse, for it had not yet manifested.

We should not underestimate the impact the horse has made on the consciousness and the subconscious of the race. For the great Rishis of the Vedas he was, as Sri Aurobindo explains, the symbol of the great dynamic force of Life, of the vital and nervous energies and was constantly coupled with other symbols that symbolise the consciousness. For the Greeks, who were very close to their horses and still had an occult knowledge, the winged horse Pegasus was the symbol of inspiration. Throughout the ages we meet his image in countless marvellous works of art and literature,—Shakespeare’s immortal “a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” (*Richard III*) He gallops through our dreams as “the symbol of Power”, according to Sri Aurobindo. We find his mark on our languages in the many proverbs and sayings centred around him. How happily our children still ride their rocking-horses! And for grown-up equestrians the world over, and not only for them, this magnificent animal is still a source of joy and affection.

Back to Music! The Arts have always reflected and expressed the essence of our various cultural periods, ‘das Lebensgefühl’ of an epoch, and served as pointers towards the future.

When we, in the context of the above, try to look at the issue—music-speed in the

course of previous ages—we could start with the still much-performed polyphonic, mainly vocal music, that wonderful expression of a society in which God was still an overall reality. The too fast performances in our times seem to go straight against the grain of it. This music needs calm performances, without a glimmer of too much rapidity, in which the whole magnificent structure of the music clearly stands out, massive and yet light, as a gothic cathedral, expressing a quiet certainty and timeless, peaceful joy, which still has the power to guide us towards the Infinite and Eternal.

Baroque Music: the performances of this music, too fast on the whole, do not seem to take into account the essence of its basic, stable quiet, expressed by the basso continuo, which, often as a merely figured bass, gave the performer the freedom to work the harmonies out, evidently not at a breathtaking speed. Then there are the ornaments, this graceful, ludique expression of a society in which everything seemed in place. The performer could easily play and introduce any ornaments, something which also does not seem to ask for high speed! There is a movement to play Baroque-music on the instruments of the epoch, but doing so—with our ideas about tempi—still takes this music out of its context. And when one listens to the tone of the viola da gamba, a solid, strong tone without the natural flexibility of the violin, it is evident that rapidity was not its natural element. This is the period in which the great Italian composers for the violin, like Corelli, Tartini and foremost Vivaldi appear front stage, playing the instruments as developed by the great Amatis—Stradivarius and Guarneri—and paving the way for the ‘career of the violin’. They are the virtuosos of their times, but here we have to clearly understand that their idea of tempi was not ours. This is clear when one listens to the too-tight, too-fast performances of Vivaldi’s music in which both instrumentalists and singers are pushed towards the limits of their capacity, creating a kind of tension which is not inherent in the music. To play Bach in these too fast tempi comes near to a kind of violation, especially with his magistral fugues. The tempi in which Suites are performed often take away the inherent grace of this dance-music of courts and aristocracy in a society which *qua* speed may be characterised as an ‘andante’-society against our ‘presto-prestissimo’.² The horse still dominated the scene! The difficulty is that we are now so accustomed to these too fast tempi that we are not even aware any more that something may have gone wrong.

Follow the great Classics. To complete the picture, it seems unlikely that Haydn felt the incentive to exceed the fastness of the established musical tempi during his virtual seclusion from 1766-1791 on the Esterhazy Estates, where he loved to ride and hunt. ‘The father of the quartet’ does not seem to be served too well by the fastness in performances of this music, especially by young, new ensembles. This seems to go not only against the usual tempi of the epoch, but also against the then established practice. These quartets were composed for music-loving, more or less well-trained members of the aristocracy, who played them in their homes for the sheer joy of playing music and

1 Andante a moderate tempo

2 Presto prestissimo the fastest tempo

who were not trained virtuosi. Our too fast playing requires a virtuosity which they most likely did not have.

Yehudi Menuhin: "Bach, Handel and Haydn were all three musicians who knew faith and good fortune. They all attributed their inspiration to God and had a certainty of expression which was never dogmatic. In looking at their scores we recognise the quality of uninterrupted fluency, the absence of corrections, even in the most complex works. Their works convey a sense of health and balance, a flow of invention of the surprising and unexpected, especially in Haydn—the nearest a human being can surely approach the divine!" How out of place our often too showy, ergo egocentric performances are in comparison with these works!

Then Mozart appears on the scene. If anyone, it is he who has been very much aware of the speed of the horse in his life, having spent all his life, weeks on end, travelling in horse-drawn carriages over the roads of Europe! He loved horses and riding, but stopped when he got afraid of possible accidents.

A great genius often not only perfects existing forms but also 'forefeels' the inherent changes of the future. Mozart was not only a great composer, he was also a great performer. He perfected the then emerging form of the concerto, paving the way for Beethoven and others. It is beyond any doubt that his concertos require a considerably increased virtuosity—it is known that he liked to play his Allegros rather fast. But 'the singing Allegro' was very dear to him, an aspect that may get damaged by the utmost rapidity of recent performances. But it is interesting to note that during his lifetime virtuosity comes to the fore—Clementi being one of the most well-known virtuosos of those times. In a contest between him and Mozart, organised by the Emperor, Mozart lost. Why? Because he played music and the other one demonstrated fireworks. In a letter to his father he appreciates Clementi's technique, criticises some aspects and states: "but musically he is a stockfish!" He also writes in one of his letters: "Too fast playing is at the cost of the musical value of the notes." May his voice be heard again in our speed-hypnotised time!

After Mozart, Beethoven dominated the scene. In him we witness the transition from classical to romantic music. Although he kept to the classical form till virtually the last years of his life, the contents became increasingly emotional to such an extent that the form could not hold the flow any more and he burst its limits. Deeper, intense and in his case universal emotions created more tension than was usual in classical music with its harmonious equilibrium. More tension can find expression and release in faster speed until speed itself exceeds certain limits and becomes a cause of tension, as we witness in our days. Beethoven most likely inwardly heard for his works faster tempo than usual in his society, which was after all still an 'andante'-society with horses all over the place! His need for faster performances was met by the development of the piano by Pleyel in which he had a hand. We never think of the fact, except for Paul Badura Skoda, that the Stein and Walterpiano of Haydn's, Mozart's and the early Beethoven's time had a much more gentle and much less aggressive tone than ours. When one listens to the utmost rapidity and often a kind of banging along on the

instrument in modern performances of his piano music, one feels that this is too much for even this volcanic character who nevertheless seems to have been extremely calm when he played, according to witnesses.

What seems to be likely with Beethoven seems also to be valid for the Romantics. Music as the expression of intense personal emotions required faster tempi, ergo more virtuosity as evident in the piano music of Schubert, Chopin, Liszt and for the violin with Pablo de Sarasate and others, after Paganini paved the way. Now it is most interesting that during this period of the Romantics with faster tempi in music, a development occurs which began to set the whole of society literally into motion, a movement which has still not come to a halt. Steam becomes the next source of speed and energy, for ever eliminating the horse after his service to humanity for ages. Nevertheless we still talk of motors with such and such horsepower!

Steam was already used as a source of power for pumps to pump water out of mines. Even the Greeks were already aware of the power of steam. But only in the developing 19th Century does steam become the source of speed. It is interesting to compare the following lists, although incomplete:

Haydn (1731-1809)	Development of railways due to the steam-locomotive
Mozart (1756-1791)	England first short rail line in 1801, rapid development into many lines between 1825-1860
Beethoven (1770-1827) Paganini (1782-1840) Schubert (1797-1828)	Germany first line in 1835, rapid development after 1860
Mendelssohn (1809-1847)	France rapid development after 1860
Schumann (1810-1856) Chopin (1810-1849)	Holland first line in 1839, line Amsterdam-Arnheim-Emmerich in 1856
Liszt (1811-1886)	America transcontinental railroad completed in 1869
Brahms (1833-1897) César Franck (1822-1890) Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908)	First steamboat crossing the Atlantic 1819

It is also interesting to note the outburst of discoveries and developments in the second half of the 19th Century.

- 1844 Morse's telegraphic reforms
- Edison with his many inventions

- 1859: Darwin's *Origin of Species*
- 1864. Louis Pasteur and his germ-theory
- 1865 Gregor Mendel heredity laws
- 1866: Alfred Nobel invention of dynamite
- 1869. Opening the Suez Canal
- 1872: Heinrich Schliemann starts his excavations of Troy
- 1876. Bell patents the telephone
- 1876-85 Internal combustion engine running on gasoline fuel in Germany
- 1885: First automobile
- 1898: the Curies find two new radioactive elements

It is striking that the Mother in a vision of the rapidity,—(like an arrow!)—with which humanity through all its phases and periods returns to the Divine,—saw that this vision started with the second half of the 19th Century

Of course the introduction of steam in society as the source of speed does not mean that the whole of society changed immediately—there are transition periods, *in casu* the co-existence of horse and steam-engine, but it means that another concept, another awareness of speed had entered man's consciousness.

It goes without saying that an evaluation of the various cultural epochs needs an integral approach, taking into account the developments and interactions of many aspects, we can never isolate one aspect Nevertheless there seems to be a clear indication that the development of an accelerated speed in the material world and the accelerated pace of evolution are related The evolutionary force drives humanity all over the globe in an ever increasing speed through a transition period towards our next epoch What this really means only the gods know Most likely after perhaps a hundred years our whole history will have to be rewritten from another angle, from another level

Of the Arts, music is most related to speed It may be that we, both in the exaggerated rapidity of our musical performances and in athletics, are physically driven towards the ultimate of our capacity as exponents of our racing movement towards the point of ultimate speed and tension, which may be the point at which speed turns into its opposite, a turning-point where humanity will start rediscovering old essential values and the true essence of peace and quiet on the next level of our spiralling evolution. The 'unofficial' New Age music seems to search in this direction

What has a great musician like Yehudi Menuhin* to say about our situation? "Today we have lost this blessed confidence in the world around us Composers as creators no longer owe their inspiration to the One above them, but to their own personality, character and environment There are few who can transcend these superficialities, nor can they dispel anxiety

* Yehudi Menuhin passed away on 12 March 1999 A tribute to him by the present author is appearing in the next issue of *Mother India* Quotations from Yehudi Menuhin are from his book *The Violin* —Editor

“Modern composers face almost unlimited choices. Their music can be acoustic one day, electronic the next and ‘musique concrète’ the day after. It may also develop as collages of different kinds of sound. The range of folkmusic on which composers are now able to draw is immense. Thanks to recordings they are familiar with the music of India, Cuba, Africa or South America. It is as if music today were trying to explore the gaps between the rigid categories of the past, like a painter who goes beyond the basic colours to experiment with the full range of shades. In this never-ending search, in this continual state of agitation, it is very hard to find stability and calm. This is why modern music so often lacks serenity, elegance and devotion—in short everything that is also missing from our world—although there is a religious fervour, solidly rooted in the spirit of its inhabitants, that still inspires the creation of masses and oratorios in Poland, and also provides isolated examples of these feelings we cannot find in our cities.”

Then, where is our music going? We find an indication in the Mother’s comment (29 June 1966) on the music of Sunil-da

Very often, while listening to Sunil’s music, a door is immediately opened onto the region of universal harmony, where you hear the origin of sounds, and with an extraordinary emotion and intensity, something that pulls you out of yourself. It is something very high, but very universal, and with tremendous power: a creative power. Well, this music opens the door. Now people ask for permission to copy it and all have the same impression tomorrow’s music

WILHELMINA VAN VLIET

TECHNOLOGY, SYNERGY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

I FEEL greatly honoured on being invited to deliver the Convocation Address of this premier institution of higher learning in Bihar. This Institute is the symbol of the vision of Shri B. M. Birla for an industrially strong India. Rapid national development requires that India stays in the forefront of world science and technology and we need individual initiatives like the one that created this institution to supplement Government action in sustaining and growing institutions of higher learning if we are to succeed in this challenging task.

Bihar is also the place where we have our major uranium mining facility and, when we say that India is one of the few countries in the world with a comprehensive capability in the nuclear fuel cycle, the starting-point is the Jaduguda and Narwapahar Mines of the Uranium Corporation of India in Bihar.

Our achievements in all areas related to nuclear technology are world-class and that is why, in the international community, we are considered a 'developed' country rather than a 'developing' country in this field. Today our nuclear capability extends to designing and building our reactors—construction of two Units of 500 MWe Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors of totally indigenous design at Tarapur has started last month, the high-flux indigenous 100 MWe DHRUVA research reactor in Trombay has been working very well for more than a decade providing a world-class research facility as well as producing a hundred varieties of isotopes for use in agriculture, health care and industry and the technology development of the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder reactor is in progress—our capabilities extend to operating our power reactors at high capacity factors comparable to international standards and to carrying out maintenance and repairs of operating reactors exemplified by the en masse coolant channel replacement in the second unit of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station. Of course, we have also carried out nuclear tests needed for national security.

We have a vision of reaching 20,000 MWe by the year 2020; more than half of this will be through our self-reliant programme of Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors and Fast Breeder Reactors backed by thorium utilisation. The balance will be through imported Light Water Reactors (LWR) accompanied by development of this technology; a beginning has been made by signing an agreement with the Russian Federation for the construction of two advanced LWRs VVER-1000 of 1000 MWe each at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu.

The per capita electricity consumption in India should go up by a factor of 8 to 10 if the poorest among us are to have a reasonable quality of life and such a growth in electricity production cannot take place without nuclear energy playing an increasingly important role. This is true, in fact, for all developing countries and that is why the International Atomic Energy Agency sponsored last month in Mumbai at the Bhabha

* Convocation address at Birla Institute of Technology, Ranchi, delivered on 7 November 1998

Atomic Research Centre an International Conference on “Nuclear Power in Developing Countries Its Potential Role and the Strategies for its Deployment”

Lokamanya Tilak, after declaring that “Swaraj is my birth-right and I will have it”, also described the control by the industrialized countries over the markets of the developing countries as modern imperialism. We still see this continuing in the form of Technology Control Regimes and in the coercive strategy of sanctions. We cannot allow outside forces to lay down *our* national priorities. Considering the very wide foundation we have laid in Science & Technology in the country since independence and the successes we have had in the programmes of the Mission-oriented Agencies in the fields of Atomic Energy, Space and Defence Research, I am confident that the technology development in this country will continue to accelerate in spite of sanctions. After our first nuclear test in 1974, the Canadians walked off half-way through the construction of the second unit of the nuclear power station in Rajasthan and it was completed by our scientists and engineers. In fact, the present situation should be treated as an excellent opportunity to strengthen our self-reliance through emphasis on indigenous R & D and as a challenge for all of us to work in synergy—the National Laboratory System, the academic institutions and the industry—to fill the existing gaps in high technology areas. And in achieving this, Institutes of Technology like the Birla Institute of Technology have an important role to play.

The Pokhran tests of May 1998 have been referred to by some Western experts as “sophisticated tests of modern nuclear devices”. I consider them an expression of our extensive scientific and technological capability in the nuclear field on the one hand and an important example of synergy in the Indian S & T System on the other because there was excellent co-operation between the large teams of the Department of Atomic Energy with those of the Defence Research & Development Organisation which were involved in carrying out the tests—with wide-ranging logistics support from the Army. *I have called the devices we tested as being of '98 vintage* because they are based on today’s knowledge of physics, engineering and electronics. They included a fission device of 15 kilotons, a thermonuclear device of 45 kilotons and three sub-kiloton (1 e. less than 1 kiloton) devices and they are all based on robust designs.

The tests have provided us with the necessary data required for a credible nuclear deterrent.

The following points are worthy of mention.

- (1) The number of tests a country carries out is obviously proportional to the number of types of devices you want to build up—the U.S. for example, developed 70-80 types of devices. We went in for three robust designs whose yields you can control, and, therefore, we needed much fewer tests. Also, if you had started testing in the fifties, say, your design would be based on the knowledge of physics, engineering and electronics available at that time. As knowledge in these areas advanced in the next few years, you would test again, but basically it would be the same design. This situation would be repeated every few years until today. So, each one of our tests carried out in

May this year should be considered equivalent to several carried out by the other Nuclear Weapon States over decades. The tests achieved all our mission objectives. Every new idea or component we tried out worked “perfectly”, to use an expression of my friend, Dr Anil Kakodkar, Director, BARC.

- (2) Designing a device and predicting accurately its yield are two different aspects in nuclear testing. The computer design calculation requires physics inputs from chemical explosive ballistics, high pressure physics, condensed matter physics, neutron physics and neutron kinetics. It is an iterative calculation in the time domain. This is for the fission device. In the thermonuclear device—popularly known as the hydrogen bomb—there are two stages. The first stage is a fission device which provides the radiation for detonating the second stage. For getting enhanced radiation density, the first stage in the thermonuclear device we tested was a fusion-boosted fission device.
- (3) The sub-kiloton devices, 1 e , when the yield is less than one kiloton, were also fission devices and they were designed to go marginally supercritical. This is in a way more difficult than designing a standard fission device. In any fission device, you start from a subcritical configuration and either assemble parts of fissile material or increase its density as in an implosion device or both so that you go to a supercritical configuration. At the correct moment, you introduce a neutron source and start off a chain reaction. The higher the supercriticality achieved the higher is the yield. In such a device, if you make a small mistake in calculation, the device will still work but you will get a lower yield. In a sub-kiloton device, on the other hand, when you go marginally supercritical, you cannot afford to make a mistake in the calculation. Because, in the case of a mistake, you may have a fizzle, 1 e , no yield at all. In our case of the May '98 tests, all the three sub-kiloton tests gave a perfect match between the calculated and the measured yields which is important. In case you sign the CTBT, you cannot carry out tests which release any nuclear yield. If you can predict accurately the yield of a device whose yield is only a few hundred tons, you can also guarantee the design of an experiment where the fissile material in its optimum configuration will go close to criticality and still stay subcritical. Thus, our sub-kiloton tests have also given us a capability to carry out subcritical tests, if we consider them necessary. I must add that we have no plans at the moment to carry out subcritical tests. The so-called subcritical tests carried out by the U.S.A. are said to be part of their National Safety and Stockpile Stewardship & Management Programme and, from the announced quantities of plutonium used, appear far from criticality.
- (4) They talk of computer simulation also, once the CTBT comes into force then actual nuclear tests are not possible. There is actually no difference in the computer programme used for nuclear explosive design and for computer simulation. This is obvious because the same physics has to go into both. In the early days, in the fifties and the sixties, the actual yields, I am told, were

off from the calculated values by factors of two or more for fission devices and for thermonuclear devices the unpredictability was even more. But today we are in '98, our knowledge of physics is on par with the best in the world. In all the devices, there was a perfect match between the calculated and the measured yields. So, our tests have given us the capability to carry out successful computer simulation, if necessary, once CTBT comes into force and if we become a signatory.

The Prime Minister of India has declared India as a Nuclear Weapon State. The Prime Minister has stated: "India's nuclear tests were not intended for offence but for self-defence. We have stated that we will not be the first to use nuclear weapons. . We are a responsible nuclear weapon State. We are also the largest democracy in the world. Our non-proliferation credentials are impeccable. We have never violated any Treaty obligation. We have declared a moratorium on tests and said we are ready to convert this into a *de jure* obligation. I reiterate that we shall continue to work towards elimination of nuclear weapons from the world in a time-bound framework and earnestly hope that a nuclear-weapon-free and peaceful world will one day be a reality. We also hope that in such a world the 'developing' countries will progress on the path to prosperity and become 'developed'. For this to happen, nuclear energy will have to play its due role."

It is important that the growth of nuclear power in developing countries is not hindered by arbitrary and politically motivated technology control regimes. The hesitation in developing countries to initiate a nuclear power programme has been due to unfamiliarity with the steps needed for it. This does not apply to India which already has an advanced programme. A situation must not be created where the leadership and the public in developing countries, planning to introduce nuclear power for the first time, feel frightened by safety and feel threatened by safeguards.

International scientific co-operation is important today. We should participate in international mega-science projects but this should be on an "equal partner" basis. International co-operation should help to introduce new scientific ideas or new technologies into the country and, at the same time, the collaborating institution abroad should feel it is also gaining in equal measure. Only such co-operation can be stable; co-operation perceived by the other side as being on a donor-recipient basis can make India vulnerable to pressures. As India has advanced over the decades, much of our scientific co-operation has indeed been on "equal partner" basis and Indian scientists are welcomed abroad because of their abilities.

When his biographer Kameshwer C. Wali asked the great astrophysicist Chandrasekhar how was it that in the 20s and 30s, India produced a number of great scientists like Raman, Bose, Saha and Chandrasekhar himself, he said that those days, "There was need for self-expression as a part of the national movement.... To show the West that in their own realm, we were equal to them." Things have changed and today, as we look at the challenges ahead, we have to realise that the motivation for young people to take to a career in science should be pride in participating in this national development.

Only a technologically developed India can ensure political and economic freedom to its citizens

Technology control regimes that are operating now in strategic areas of high technology, which deny India some kinds of equipment and technology, also serve the commercial interests of rich and developed countries. As long as Indian industry in non-strategic areas tends to use yesterday's technology, they will be free from control regimes. But as India becomes globally more competitive, Indian industry will find such regimes becoming operational for commercial reasons also and outside sources of technology will dry up. That is when the Indian Industry will begin to feel more and more the need for indigenous R & D support

We should plan for rapid development of the country and we should aim at self-reliance in all fields, like what we have achieved in the nuclear field. Today, in my opinion, self-reliance means developing a globally competitive product, whether it is a drug, an automobile or a nuclear reactor. To do this Indian Industry must concentrate on quality, price competitiveness and speedy development of new products and all of us must take pride in using "Indian" products. Self-reliance today must be defined not as self-sufficiency per se but self-sufficiency in the sense of immunity against technology denial. If something—I am now talking only of high technological areas—is denied to us in the name of so-called Technology Control Regimes, we should have the capability to design and build it ourselves, as we have done in the nuclear technology area.

Let me conclude with a quotation of Einstein, who once said "Most people think that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong, it is the character." This does not mean that anyone can do great science. Of course, high intellect is necessary, but not sufficient. The definition of character is, however, not easy. Character means integrity; it means pursuit of excellence, it means perseverance in the face of adversity, it means commitment to national and social causes, and it means also a commitment to justice and societal equity. I am optimistic about our country's future and my optimism is based on the quality of our manpower, reflected in the young men and women assembled in this Convocation function. India today is a country of opportunities and challenges. Let me wish all the students graduating today enjoyable and productive future careers and wish that you will contribute towards accelerating the progress of the country in the years to come.

R CHIDAMBARAM

THE PEOPLE ON THE BRIDGE

A STRANGE planet with strange inhabitants
They are subject to time but won't admit it
And they have means to express their protest—
for instance—painting pictures like this one

Nothing special at first glance
We see water
We see the river bank.
We see a boat laboriously sailing upstream.
We see a bridge and on it the people.
People are obviously hurrying
because out of the black cloud
a heavy shower is falling

The point is that nothing more happens.
The cloud doesn't change colour or shape
The rain neither increases nor stops.
The boat sails without movement.
The people on the bridge are running
on exactly the same spot as before.

It's difficult to avoid a commentary:
this is not at all an innocent little picture
Time has been arrested here
We have stopped paying attention to its laws,
it has been deprived of influence on the course of events.
We have ignored and insulted time.

All this because of a rebel,
one Hiroshige Uttagawa
(who naturally enough
passed away long ago, as one ought to,)
time stumbled and fell

Perhaps this is just a trifling prank,
a joke on the scale of a few galaxies.
All the same, just in case,
let us add the following.
For generations it has been fashionable
to appreciate highly this little picture,
to enthuse and be moved by it.

For some even this is not enough
They hear the patter of the rain,
feel the cold drops on their necks and shoulders;
they look at the bridge and the people on it,
as if they saw themselves there,
taking part in the never-ending race,
a journey to be completed on the endless road;
and they have the audacity to believe
that this is reality.

WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA

(Translated from the Polish by Marta Guha)

THE WANDERER

A STROLL IN THE POETIC WORLD

BABU was a born wanderer. At school, studies interested him little, for his first love was to be in tune with Nature, green paddy-fields, trees covered with emerald leaves, glorious sunrise and equally majestic sunset, multi-coloured flowers, birds soaring high into infinite space, the rainbow joining earth and sky. The evening sky flooded with rainbow hues, the night sky studded with twinkling stars and the moon outpouring its "silver sheen" on the sleeping earth, the vast ocean in its various moods and forms ever drew him towards them.

Nature was his home. Let it rain and he would play truant and walk down to the Red Hills or the Lake in pouring rain, along with a few friends. On the way he would recite ecstatically

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills
(Wordsworth, *The Daffodils*)

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky
(Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up*)

Yes, he enjoyed loitering. He loved

The fresh Earth in new leaves drest
And the starry night,
Autumn evening, and the morn
When the golden mists are born.
. Waves, and winds and storms,
Everything almost
Which is Nature's....
(Shelley, *Invocation*)

Rain-bathed Nature,

meadow, grove, and stream
The earth and every common sight

seemed to Babu

Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
(Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*)

He looked with wonder at the

. .laughing assault
Of emerald rapture pearled with tears of dew
(Sri Aurobindo, *The Inner Fields*)

And every leaf, and every flower
Pearled with the self-same shower
(Keats, *The Realm of Fancy*)

Babu rambled through the mud-mounded pathways of freshly dew-bathed green paddy-fields in the early hours of the morning and enjoyed watching the wavy dance of the paddy-fields in the rhythmic movement of the breeze. He loved lazing on a grassy bed and watching the dew trickle down a blade of grass, and observing

The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air
(Wordsworth, *Written in Early Spring*)

He would remember the great experience of the poet Rabindranath who toured high hills and vast oceans in search of Beauty, but failed to realise that Beauty was right at his doorstep. A couple of steps away from his house he saw with amazement, "A drop of dew on a blade of grass." Inspired poets have the inner vision to see an ocean in a dew-drop, or

. .a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower
(Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*)

Beauty is everywhere, in and around everything. Beauty is, in fact, a divine quality. It is the soul that appreciates a thing of beauty and seeing it man feels happy.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever
(Keats, *Endymion*)

Beauty, Love, Truth and Delight are all soul-felt qualities. They are interlinked,

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,
(Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*)

and each therefore "a joy for ever"

The subjects that were near and dear to Babu were Literature and Philosophy

Whenever he went on an outing, either on cycle or walking, he would try to recapitulate the poems he had studied at school and tried to fathom their meaning and suggestion. Wordsworth's *The Daffodils* inspired him to observe everything in Nature like a poet. The joy the poet experienced when he saw

A host of golden daffodils,
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,

is renewed and revived when

In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Psychic experiences come in flashes. As the soul, "that inward eye", is conscious it gets hold of the delightful experience. But to sustain this inner experience man must have constant contact with his soul. Before this contact is permanently established, he should try to recollect and relive these beautiful and delightful experiences which help him in his spiritual quest and progress. Wordsworth had some inner experiences in his childhood, but then slowly they weakened as he grew up. A child lives in his own world of beautiful dreams and imaginations:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
(Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations*)

The child sees Nature apparelled in celestial light, because he is still near to God:

Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home
(*Ibid.*)

Then gradually this "celestial light" fades away as the soul of man gets closed in the "prison house" of his triple lower being. In order to maintain constantly "the glory and the freshness" man must become an eternal child who sees the world with wonder and is simply happy. Free thus from the snares of life and its ugly moods he remains happy and always open to Beauty and Delight.

Delight and liberty, the simple creed of childhood.
(*Ibid.*)

Babu enjoyed wandering in order to keep alive and renew

Fresh childhood in the obscured heart of man.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *To the Cuckoo*)

Because

Ye open the eastern windows,
 That look towards the sun,
 Where thoughts are singing swallows,
 And the brooks of morning run
 In your heart are the birds and the sunshine,
 In your thoughts the brooklets flow.
 (H W Longfellow, *Children*)

God remembers in thy bosom
 All the wonders that He wrought.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *A Child's Imagination*)

The Supreme Himself is an eternal Wanderer-in-Chief! He is strolling all around the universe, in the countless endless stars and planets and galaxies, as well as in the infinite-finite forms and names. He created this Cosmos out of delight to play with, to enjoy Himself in the stars and galaxies. Then He created the Earth to enjoy the ceaseless game of evolution. Entering into the unending dark pit of the Inconscient He wandered in progressive steps towards the region of inert unconscious Matter; He made His abode even in the sand, in stones and pebbles. Then He sauntered further up into the domain of Life. Here He created vast oceans and mighty rivers to support the countless species produced by Nature in her aeonic labours, from microscopic amoebas to giant inhabitants of land and sea and air; countless species of plants and trees and flowers, insects and birds and animals. Afterwards the eternal Explorer rambled towards the regions of Mind. Here, after innumerable experiments, He created man, the thinking creature. The supreme Vagabond found man a fit vehicle with whose conscious collaboration and co-operation He could loiter onward into still higher evolutionary regions.

For aeons the Supreme has been wandering, apparently at random, but truly speaking with a conscious aim in view. Our human vagabond, Babu, was quite aware of the meaning of human life,—a precious gift of God,—to awaken and realise the Divine within him and to see Him everywhere by an awakened inner vision. But he was not at all in a hurry to reach the final goal. He enjoyed this beautiful green earth and he did not find any urge to make trips to the inner fields, which are far more beautiful and greener than this material earth.

This green Earth is the habitation of the Supreme. He is everywhere, in and around everything. The whole of Nature is the artistic work of the divine Painter.

In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,
 Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Who*)

Blue sky and ocean, green forests and paddy-fields, high hills and tall trees, rainbow-hued butterflies, multi-coloured flowers, symbols of selfless beauty, emitting fragrance of love and joy, a peacock opening its lovely fan-shaped blue-green plumes, a waterfall adorned by a rainbow, sun-rays filtering through a cluster of aspiring trees, birds soaring towards “sun-flamed skies”, night-sky revealing twinkling stars, trees alive at night by the intermittent light of the glowworms, all, all is the handiwork of the supreme Artist.

All Nature was at beauty’s festival,
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 352)

Beauty is the joyous offering of Nature.
 (The Mother, *Education*, CWM, Vol 12, p 235)

Rustling of leaves and swaying of trees, wavy dance of paddy-field and blades of grass, hissing and lapping or roaring of waves, clouds floating and racing with one another, multi-designed sand-dunes—are movements of the supreme Player,

When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,
 Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Who*)

The Wind-God is the messenger of the Supreme whose Grace and Blessings are carried and strewn far and wide into the world by the breeze, those who are open and receptive experience the Infinite’s all-embracing peace, love, grace and delight. For them the air is

. a vibrant link between earth and heaven.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p 4)

Babu was quite aware that in rare moments a person can experience the soothing breezy touch coming from the inner realms

The Grace softly kisses the awakened man:
 And the winds whose wings spread balm
 On the uplifted soul....
 (Shelley, *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*)

A breath is felt from the eternal spheres.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p 612)

The winds come to me from the fields of sleep.
 (Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations*)

Nature is a great teacher and an eye-opener. A tree teaches man to yearn for the heavens:

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
 Holds up its topmost boughs
 Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
 Earth-bound, heaven-amorous
 (Sri Aurobindo, *A Tree*)

The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 4)

And the hills and the mountains

In bareness seek the blue sky's infinite room.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *On the Mountain*)

They try but are immovably bound to the earth and unable to rise further up. The privilege to soar freely into deep recesses of the skies is given only to the birds. Thus a bird symbolises the soul, free from the clutches of human egoistic nature. For the poet a bird represents

No bird, but an invisible thing,
 A voice, a mystery.
 (Wordsworth, *To the Cuckoo*)

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky
 (Wordsworth, *To the Skylark*)

...light-winged Dryad of the trees.
 (Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*)

. . . priest and summoner of these melodies.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *To the Cuckoo*)

Our wanderer, Babu, loved watching birds soaring in gay abandon in the azure—those

blue-winged embodiments of freedom and delight, winged poets that “shower a rain of melody”. Such birds are the poets: they soar high on the wings of inspiration and imagination, transcribing the Truth, Beauty, Love and Delight that they experience in those regions and pour them into poetic forms stirring into action the reader’s inner being.

Higher still and higher,
 From the earth thou springest
 Like a cloud of fire
 The blue deep thou wingest
 And singing still doth soar, and soaring ever singest
 (Shelley, *To a Skylark*)

The higher the level of consciousness attained by the poet the greater is the power of his word-rhythm. Sri Aurobindo used *Savitri* “as a means of ascension .each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level.” Each revision was made “to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry ”

I am the bird of God in His blue;
 Divinely high and clear
 I sing the notes of the sweet and the true
 For the god’s and the seraph’s ear.

I rise like a fire from the mortal’s earth
 Into a griefless sky
 And drop in the suffering soil of his birth
 Fire-seeds of ecstasy.

My pinions soar beyond Time and Space
 Into unfading Light,
 I bring the bliss of the Eternal’s face
 And the boon of the Spirit’s sight.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *The Blue Bird*)

The transformed heart begins to beat in ecstasy as it prepares to discover the Infinite who has hidden Himself in man as the immortal psychic flame A “spontaneous prayer which suddenly springs up from the depths of the being like an intense call.. brings down the Grace and changes the course of things.” (CWM, Vol. 9, p. 280)

All Nature, in man and in the universe, will thus exceed itself: trees, hills and mountains yearning to reach the skies, rivers following a tortuous course to meet the ocean, buds opening their soft petals to receive the light, birds flying high to remain in the heavens

The desire of the moth for the star
 Of the night for the morrow,
 The devotion to something afar
 From the sphere of our sorrow
 (Shelley, *One Word is Too Often Profaned*)

And darkness yearning towards the eternal light.
 (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p 416)

Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
 Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
 Outpoured the revelation and the flame
 (*Ibid.*, p. 3)

The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
 (*Ibid* , p 352)

The adventurous spirit in Babu and his love for wandering into the unknown has goaded him to climb the mountain of Truth. It matters not if the summit is not reached, but at least from a certain height he enjoys a wider and vaster view of the beautiful green world, and he gazes with wonder at the horizon,—the sky leaning down to embrace the earth and the sun rising from the eastern horizons and flooding the heavens and the earth with its golden hue.

ARVINDBABU

K. D. SETHNA: THE PROSE WRITER

ON RAMAKRISHNA AND VIVEKANANDA AS NATION-BUILDERS

(Continued from the issue of January 1999)

IN *India and the World Scene*, Sethna has written three masterful paragraphs on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda with reference to the national awakening of India. He has virtually summed up a book's material in those three paragraphs. He begins with well-known observations, but chooses the essence in his three introductory sentences:

Here was one altogether innocent of western formulas, one who seemed akin at the same time to the two specimens thought possible of sheer Indianness and who still was entirely different from them and carried a tremendous conquering creativity. Before him bowed down the finest flower of educated Bengal. In him the Westernised Indians saw authentic India stand up, clear of every colour of the west, clear even of every tinge of what typical India appeared to be in that age—a representative was he of some hidden essence of the national being, the country's very soul in pure power (p. 55)

The last sentence in the passage is the climax of the unit. The phrases "authentic India", "hidden essence", "the country's very soul" and "national being" speak of the interpreter's class. An inferior writer would have been baffled in finding the central idea of the presence called Ramakrishna.

Instances of such writing abound in the Bengali language. Young people in present-day Bengal have rejected Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, because there is no proper focus on the real worth of these two great figures. Many such Bengali critics are funnily referred to as "cutting-collectors". Their fat books are full of newspaper-clippings and quotations with no effort to find out the essence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Sethna being an Aurobindonian knows these figures far more intimately than those so-called "Vivekananda scholars" who do not know English enough to translate properly a passage from Sri Aurobindo into Bengali. Nirodbaran has already exposed such a blind "scholar".

Let us turn to Sethna again for his great summing-up.

Ramakrishna, the illiterate man from the temple of conventional Kali-worship, was a veritable colossus of mystical experience. In him direct and immediate realisation of the Divine Being reached an intensity and variety which made him a marvellous summing-up of the whole spiritual history of India, with a face carrying the first gleam of a new age of the human soul—the age that will be known as the Aurobindonian (p. 55)

This is how Sethna establishes the right link between Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo. Then he goes on to characterise the rich spiritual status of the earlier Master

The Divine Being and the Divine Force that he called the Mother were a presence with him at all times—from deep within him, from near and far around him, from some absolute transcendence high above. His feelings were not of the ordinary emotional kind but radiant with the true spontaneous psyche which is an everlasting spark of the Supreme, a child of the World-Mother. His thoughts were not of the brain-mind but luminous with an intuitive perception which was in contact with the inward as well as the outward. Apparently ignorant but wise beyond measure, frail and helpless to an initial view yet a powerhouse that could move the world, poor and ascetic yet holding the thrill of the Beauty that is immortal, he sat day after day at Dakshineswar with the most educated men of Calcutta about him together with simple village folk. And from his strange spiritual personality the true Indian Nationalism was born. (p. 56)

I have never seen a better commentary on the genius of Ramakrishna except for Sri Aurobindo's words on the Master. The link between the inner and the outer is a sign of the new Yoga. Sethna has drawn our notice to that vital point, which links the two Masters. The suspension of the intellectual mind in order to see properly is another significant characteristic which unites the two spiritual giants.

What Sethna says of Vivekananda in this connection is perhaps more important for the future of Vivekananda criticism!

The very fact that Ramakrishna's chosen instrument for world-work was Vivekananda, a complex passionate analytic mind, a highly cultured master of system and organization, a richly endowed physical nature, shows that India moves instinctively to grip earth no less than heaven. (p. 56)

This is another indication of Sethna's power of exactly interpreting the genius of Vivekananda with reference to Ramakrishna. Earth had already caught the eye of those two earlier Masters, the neglected Earth that had to be affianced to Heaven.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

Students' Section

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAYANTILAL-DA

How did you come to the Ashram?

I came to the Ashram in November 1934 at the age of twenty-one. While studying in Shantiniketan I used to read Sri Aurobindo's books. One day while reading the *Arya* I came across a sentence that I liked very much. The sentence was something like this.

. .the three most important things are oneself, the world outside and God

This sentence pulled me towards Sri Aurobindo and that is how I decided to come and stay in the Ashram. When I came here and saw the Mother I liked Her. I had already visited the Ashram twice or thrice before. Once in 1928 and once in the months of May-June, when I had gone with Tagore and his batch to Ceylon, on the way back from there I stopped over at Villipuram and came to the Ashram and met Krishnalal, who used to study with me at Shantiniketan. I left Pondy the same night and joined Tagore the next day at Madras. The next time when I came I stayed in a hotel, which is now a part of Milli-di's house.

What work were you doing when you came to the Ashram?

I was a painter but when I came to the Ashram I told the Mother that I didn't want to paint, so She gave me work in the Dining Room. I lifted vessels there. At that time the Ashram had only about a hundred-fifty sadhaks. One day I sketched the park in front of the Dining Room and sent it to the Mother. Seeing it She was very happy and She said: "I am happy you have taken to painting again." So I continued painting and drawing and sent my pictures to Her. Later I told Her how I came to the Ashram and about the sentence and She said "Yes, that is the basis of life."

How did the Archives start?

After the Dining Room I was given work at the Press. It used to mainly print the *Bulletin*, which was quite thin at that time. It consisted of an article of the Mother, an article of Sri Aurobindo and some illustrations. I went once to Bombay to get Gujarati blocks for printing. Then the question of publishing the complete works of Sri Aurobindo arose. The Mother asked us if it was possible to publish them here in the Ashram. We said that it could be done here if two machines were kept aside only for this work. So two machines were set apart for that purpose and the work began. It was completed by 1973. After its completion I told the Mother that I would like to make a collection of Sri Aurobindo's works. The Mother agreed. So I left the Press and with

the help of some others started this new work. This is how the Archives came into being. Two years later we started the Archives' magazine in which we brought to light all the new findings of Sri Aurobindo's writings.

What do you exactly do in the Archives?

We collect the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's writings, we microfilm them and preserve them. This is basically what we do in the Archives, and now with the use of computers the work has become easier.

VIGNESHWAR DUNDUR

(Vigneshwar had, as a part of his School assignment, interviewed Jayantilal on 9 March 1994. The transcription of the interview was seen and approved by Jayantilal.)

THE HIDDEN CHAMBER OF THE VEDIC TRUTH

VEDIC CHANTING

Introduction

You are all very familiar with mantric chanting blaring from the temple loud-speakers. You might have even cursed the priests under your breath for their inconsideration. I confess that I too had the same reactions until one day I felt the curiosity to find out if there existed some deeper meaning behind that seeming noise.

Moreover, being a student of Sanskrit, I often found references to the Vedas made in our literature, as in the Gita, the Upanishads and several dramas. These were always spoken of with a lot of reverence and gave the impression of being the ultimate books of wisdom.

All these things put together, I felt the need to know more about the Vedas. And I couldn't find a better guide than our master Sri Aurobindo himself. I picked up his seldom-read book, *The Secret of the Vedas* and, as I read page after page, I found myself marvelling more and more at the world's most ancient record of man's earliest quest for truth—the Vedas.

Yet it is only when I read a passage from an essay *Hinduism and the Mission of India* by Sri Aurobindo that I understood the true importance of those sacred and forgotten works. I request you to listen carefully to what is going to follow.

I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of it by explaining it all as human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man's history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment. I seek a materialism that shall recognize matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, "Be blind, O man, and see!" In short, I seek not science, not religion, not theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth

which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijnate sarvam vijnatam*

When I read this passage I felt compelled to probe deeper into this subject in search of a lost treasure. During my preparations I came across several interesting facts about the Vedas and these I would like to share with you. So today I ask you to join me with an open mind on a long journey back in time—to an India of some 10,000 years ago.

Moreover, this subject is too vast to be justly dealt with in a short span of time. Yet I sincerely hope that the few drops of light that I shall share with you will sufficiently arouse your curiosity and make you take a plunge in the vast ocean of invaluable wealth that lies hidden in the Vedas. First, I'll acquaint you with the technical side of the work and then move on to its subtler implications.

Technical Aspect

I will not enter too deeply into this aspect of the Vedas because firstly I don't have sufficient knowledge in that field and, secondly, it is divided into so many complex categories that one would need several years of dedicated study to be familiar with their different facets.

Nothing is sure about the antiquity of these works. Some historians date it beyond 10,000 BC. Others more conservative, perhaps too conservative, believe it to be about 2,000 BC.

An American and a very keen scholar of the Vedas, David Frawley, in his book *Gods, Sages and Kings* traces the antiquity of the Vedas conclusively to at least 3,000 BC. From his research of the Vedic calendar based upon astronomical sightings relative to the equinoctial positions, he concludes that they belong to the age from Taurus to Cancer *i.e.* from 6,000 to 2,000 BC.

Moreover Mr. Frawley, or Vamadev as he calls himself after a Vedic Rishi, certifies on archeological evidence that the Vedic period came before the Indus Valley civilization which is dated from 3,000 to 1,500 BC. For, he says, the extensive Indus Valley culture is located right in the Saraswati river area described in the Veda. The river went dry before the end of the Indus Valley culture. So the Vedic people could not have known of a river that went dry before they had supposedly entered that region. Therefore, he concludes, the Vedic civilization is prior to that of the Indus Valley.

Sri Aurobindo believes that the Rig-Veda, which is the oldest Veda, is only the last fraction of a lost knowledge. In addition, the authors of the Veda mention *purvabhya pitarah* meaning "forefathers". We have no definite estimation of how far back they imply.

Thus the age of the Vedas still remains a mystery to us, but even more astonishing is the fact that they have survived almost unaltered these vast aeons of time and are still looked upon with a lot of respect by the Hindus. Till today for the Hindus, their whole life from conception till the last funeral rite has to be sanctified by the recitation of

Vedic mantras The word 'veda' comes from the Sanskrit verb *vid*, "to know"; thus Veda literally means "Knowledge", "Supreme Knowledge" The Vedic literature consists of the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, and Puranas

For thousands of years the Vedas were passed orally from generation to generation until they were classified by Veda-Vyasa Please note that this Vyasa is not the same one who wrote the Mahabharata. Our history records 24 Vyasas Therefore Vyasa must have been the family name coming from a great sage.

Anyway, Vyasa classified the Vedas into 4 parts: The Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda

According to a Vedic etymologist and one of India's most reputable lawgivers, Apastambha, the Vedas are divided in two parts—one, the Samhitas and, two, the Brahmanas and Aranyakas put together

The Samhitas and the Brahmanas are loosely designated as *Karma-kaṇḍa* (i.e. portions pertaining to the rituals) and the Aranyakas as *Upasana-kaṇḍa* (i.e. portions dealing with meditation). The Upanishads are known as *Jñāna-kaṇḍa* (i.e. portions dealing with supreme knowledge)

The Upanishads and the Aranyakas are collectively called the Vedanta They elaborate in a more comprehensive way the core of the Vedic teachings which is found in the Rig-Veda

The *Rig-Veda*, meaning "illuminated knowledge", is considered to be the oldest of the Vedas. Also, from the internal evidence one can conclude that the other Vedas are more or less enlargements of this Veda. It is made up of 10,580 Riks which are grouped into 1,017 Hymns; these in turn are collected in 10 Mandalas Except for the first and tenth Mandalas, which are collections of hymns by various Rishis, each Mandala is ascribed to a particular Rishi. Some of the well known Vedic Rishis are Vishwamitra, Vasistha, Vamadeva, Atri, Bharadvaja, Kanva, etc. We often come across these surnames in our midst, little realizing the antiquity of their ancestry! The third Mandala of this Veda is by Vishwamitra. It contains the famous and oft repeated Gayatri Mantra

Sacrifice is the principal institution and symbol of the Vedic tradition, and also of knowledge The priest who performed the ritualistic aspect of the sacrifices is known as the Adhvaryu. The mantras recited by him constitute the Yajur-Veda which is mainly in prose. This Veda is divided in two parts—the Shukla and the Krishna Yajur-Veda The well known Isha Upanishad is from the last part of the Shukla Yajur-Veda We find detailed descriptions of the Rajasuya and the Ashvamedha Yajnas in the Krishna Yajur-Veda. These Yajnas as you all know played important roles in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Apart from the Adhvaryu there is also a person known as the Udgata in a sacrifice who sang certain specific Mantras. The Sama-Veda is the collection of the Mantras sung by him. It is considered to be the origin of Indian classical music

Next comes the Atharva-Veda. It is named after the Rishi Atharva whose hymns form the bulk of this work Many don't consider this as a Veda, because several of its Mantras deal with black magic Other Mantras relate to the cure of diseases and such

things. Some say that Ayurveda has its origin in the Atharva-Veda.

In order to understand the Vedas fully,—as they have many complex divisions,—one has to be well versed in the six related studies known as Vedangas. Vedangas, as the word suggests, mean aspects or parts of the Veda. They are *shuksha* (Phonetics), *kalpa* (Ritual), *vyakarana* (Grammar), *nirukta* (Etymology), *chhanda* (Metre), and *jyotisha* (Astronomy).

A lot of importance was given to the pronunciation of the words; but I will deal with that later in my text. However, it is interesting to know that the Rishis were so particular that they even had some specific hand-gestures or *mudras* to accompany their chanting.

Having seen the broad categories of the Vedic texts I will now move on to their interpretation.

(To be continued)

ANURADHA CHOUDRY

ORIGIN AND FATE OF THE UNIVERSE

AT LEAST sometimes in our lives most of us have looked up to the heavens and exclaimed. "What a bewildering world we live in!" Some of us may have also made an effort, howsoever rudimentary it might have been, to find answers to the questions that have risen in our mind about this bewilderment. But the unimaginable vastness and complexity of the universe might have frightened us and forced us to leave our investigations unfinished. I shall now endeavour to convince both the science and the non-science readers that the universe might be vast, but it is not as incomprehensible as we might have previously believed. Let us then right away proceed with the task and look at the stars and the galaxies and discover the forces that send them spinning through heaven.

But before we probe into the moment of creation of this vast spinning universe or before we try and foresee the events in which our universe might end, let us get ourselves briefly acquainted with the large scale structure of the universe. The more clear our idea of the universe will become the more we shall begin to realise how insignificant our little earth really is. But, strangely, the deeper we shall look into the mysteries of the universe the more will we begin to realise how finely tuned all the processes in the universe are. Indeed these seem to be so finely tuned that they make it possible for the existence of beings like us, we who can then ask the question "Why and how are we here?"

Let us begin by trying to understand the large scale structure of the universe.

The nearest star to the earth,—if we exclude the sun, of course,—is called Proxima Centauri. It is at a distance of about 4.2 lightyears.¹ Most stars which are visible to the naked eye lie within a few hundred light-years from us. But with the help of telescopes we can probe farther into space. The stars close to us all lie in a single disk like configuration we now call a spiral galaxy. Our galaxy is called the Milky Way. It is a hundred-thousand lightyears across and its spiral arms are slowly rotating once every several hundred million years. Our galaxy contains about a hundred billion stars and our sun is just an ordinary average-sized yellow star near the inner edge of one of the spiral arms.

Like our galaxy, there are about a hundred-billion galaxies spread out evenly all over the observable universe. The nearest one to us, which is a part of the local galactic cluster, is called the Andromeda Galaxy and it is at a distance of about 2.2 million lightyears. And the farthest are at a distance of about 12 billion lightyears on the edge of the universe!¹ What is interesting about looking at objects so far away is that, when we look at them we are really looking into the past. The light that is reaching us now left those distant stars some 12 billion years ago. What happened over there at that time we are coming to know now. We can therefore effectively say that we are covering

¹ 1 lightyear is the distance light travels in one year, the speed of light being 3 hundred-thousand km per second, or about 10 trillion km. That means our sun is just eight lightminutes away.

about 80% of the way back to the beginning of time. We have certainly come a long way since Aristotle and Ptolemy, who thought that the earth was the centre of the universe!

Let us now turn our attention to the stars.

Stars are so far away that they appear to us to be just pinpoints of light. They all look similar to us in their size or shape. So, how do we distinguish one star from another? For the vast majority of stars there is only one characteristic feature that we can really observe—that is the colour of their light. Newton discovered that if sunlight passes through a prism it breaks up into its component colours, which we call the sun's spectrum. Different stars have different spectra, depending upon their temperature and the elements present in them. It has been found that each element absorbs a characteristic set of colours. Therefore, depending on the chemical composition of the star, a very specific set of colours will be missing from the star's spectrum. Astronomers by studying these missing colours can thus determine quantitatively as well as qualitatively the elements present in the star.

In the 1920s a systematic study was for the first time undertaken to look for the spectra of stars in other galaxies. By then quite a few different galaxies had been identified. To their relief the astronomers found that the same characteristic set of colours were missing in the stars of other galaxies also, as were in the stars of our galaxy. This proved that the stars in those galaxies were made up of the same elements as the stars in our galaxy. But to their consternation they discovered that the missing colours were all shifted by the same relative amount towards the red end of the spectrum! This phenomenon we now call the red shift phenomenon. To understand it we must first understand the Doppler effect.

Now let us imagine a source of light at a given distance from us, such as a star, emitting light waves at a given frequency.² Obviously the frequency of the waves we receive will be the same as the frequency at which it is emitted by the star. Suppose now that the source, in our case that given star, starts moving away from us. Every time the star emits the next wave-crest it has gone a little farther away from us. Therefore the time taken for the wave-crest to reach us is more than when the star was at an earlier stage. This means that the time interval between the arrival of the two wave-crests has increased. The consequence is that the frequency of the incoming light has decreased. As frequency and wavelength are inversely proportional, a decrease in frequency corresponds to an increase in wavelength and this phenomenon is what we call the red shift.

Therefore the light of a star being red-shifted means that it is receding from us. On the other hand, if the light is blue-shifted it means that the star is moving towards us. I would like to point out here that when I say that the light is red-shifted I do not mean that the light has become reddish; it only implies that its wavelength has increased. This phenomenon is called the red shift because in the visible spectrum red has the longest wavelength.

2 Frequency is the number of waves passing across a given point in a single second

Among the astronomers studying the red-shift phenomenon, it was the American astronomer Edwin Hubble who made one of the most astounding discoveries of this century. In the early 1920s it was Hubble who from his Mt. Palomar observatory discovered the existence of galaxies other than our own. In the years following his proof of the existence of other galaxies, Hubble spent his time cataloguing their distances and observing their spectra. At that time most astronomers expected the galaxies to be moving around in quite a random way and so expected to find as many blue-shifted as the red-shifted ones.

This is perfectly understandable if we consider the universe to be of the same nature all around us, with nothing to distinguish it in one direction or another. The expectation of equal blue-shift and red-shift is therefore rationally quite a sound assumption. If we put in a closed box a hundred particles moving randomly in all directions we would expect, statistically speaking, at any given moment of time half of the number of particles in relation to any single particle in the box, to be receding from it and the other half approaching it. We would not expect, although it is statistically feasible, that at any given moment all the particles would be receding from our reference particle. Indeed, the identity of all the particles would not make any particle special to provide this preference.

But to Hubble's great surprise this is exactly what he found. Nearly all the galaxies, in fact 93% of them, appeared red-shifted. This unmistakably suggested that all these galaxies were moving away from us¹. More surprising still was the discovery that Hubble published in 1929; it stated that even the size of a galaxy's red-shift is not random but is directly proportional to the galaxy's distance from us. In other words, the further the galaxy is from us the faster it is moving away¹. And this meant the universe could not be static like a closed box, but was in fact expanding³.

- (To be continued)

JAPA GHOSH

³ It may be asserted here that, with all due respect to Galileo and Kepler, it is Edwin Hubble who should be considered as the father of modern astronomy. It is therefore only appropriate that the world's first space telescope should have been named after him.