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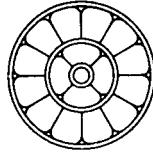
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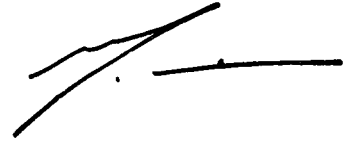


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LII

No. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THEN SHALL THE WORLD-REDEEMER'S TASK BE DONE

ONE yet may come armoured, invincible,
His will immobile meets the mobile hour;
The world's blows cannot bend that victor head;
Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night,
The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace,
He turns not to high voices in the Night
He asks no aid from the inferior gods;
His eyes are fixed on the immutable aim ...
The ineffable planes already have felt his tread,
He has made heaven and earth his instruments,
But the limits fall from him of earth and heaven,
Their law he transcends but uses as his means.
He has seized life's hands, he has mastered his own heart
The feints of Nature mislead not his sight,
Inflexible his look towards Truth's far end;
Fate's deaf resistance cannot break his will.
In the dreadful passages, the fatal paths,
Invulnerable his soul, his heart unslain,
He lives through the opposition of earth's Powers
And Nature's ambushes and the world's attacks
His spirit stature transcending pain and bliss
He fronts evil and good with calm and equal eyes.
He too must grapple with the riddling Sphinx
And plunge into her long obscurity.
He has broken into the Inconscient's depths
That veil themselves even from their own regard:
He has seen God's slumber shape these magic worlds.
He has watched the dumb God fashioning Matter's frame,
Dreaming the dreams of its unknowing sleep,
And watched the unconscious Force that built the stars.
He has learnt the Inconscient's workings and its law...
Its somnolence founded the universe,
Its obscure waking makes the world seem vain.
Arisen from Nothingness and towards Nothingness turned
Its dark and potent nescience was earth's start,
It is the waste stuff from which all was made,
Into its deeps creation can collapse.
Its opposition clogs the march of the soul,
It is the mother of our ignorance.

He must call light into its dark abysms,
 Else never can Truth conquer Matter's sleep
 And all earth look into the eyes of God.
 All things obscure his knowledge must relume,
 All things perverse his power must unknot.
 He must pass to the other shore of falsehood's sea,
 He must enter the world's dark to bring there light.
 The heart of evil must be bared to his eyes,
 He must learn its cosmic dark necessity,
 Its right and its dire roots in Nature's soil.
 He must know the thought that moves the demon act
 And justifies the Titan's erring pride
 And the falsehood lurking in earth's crooked dreams:
 He must enter the eternity of Night
 And know God's darkness as he knows his Sun.
 For this he must go down into the pit,
 For this he must invade the dolorous Vasts.
 Imperishable and wise and infinite,
 He still must travel Hell the world to save
 Into the eternal Light he shall emerge
 On borders of the meeting of all worlds..
 There meet and clasp the eternal opposites.
 There pain becomes a violent fiery joy;
 Evil turns back to its original good,
 And sorrow lies upon the breasts of Bliss.
 She has learnt to weep glad tears of happiness;
 Her gaze is charged with a wistful ecstasy.
 Then shall be ended here the Law of Pain.
 Earth shall be made a home of Heaven's light,
 A seer heaven-born shall lodge in human breasts;
 The superconscient beam shall touch men's eyes
 And the truth-conscious world come down to earth
 Invading Matter with the Spirit's ray,
 Awaking its silence to immortal thoughts,
 Awaking the dumb heart to the living Word.
 This mortal life shall house Eternity's bliss,
 The body's self taste immortality.
 Then shall the world-redeemer's task be done.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 449-51)

A FEW ESSAYS ON THE GITA IN BENGALI

(Continued from the issue of May 1999)

THE LISTENER

THE recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita is the mighty hero, Arjuna, son of the great god Indra and the best of the Pandavas. Just as it is difficult to discover the aim of the Gita and its hidden meaning by ignoring the Speaker, similarly that meaning would suffer by ignoring the listener.

Arjuna is Sri Krishna's intimate associate. Those who are Sri Krishna's contemporaries and have come down to the same field of work establish various kinds of relations with the Supreme Purushottama in human form, in accordance with their respective capacity and previous acts. Uddhava is Sri Krishna's devotee, Satyakı is a faithful follower and companion, King Yudhisthira is a relative and friend who is moved by His counsel, but none could establish with Sri Krishna a relation as intimate as Arjuna. All the close and endearing relations possible between two men of the same age were present in the case of Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Arjuna is Sri Krishna's brother, His closest friend, and husband of His sister Subhadra dear to Him as His own heart. In the fourth chapter the Lord has pointed to this intimacy as the reason for choosing Arjuna as the one person fit to hear the supreme secret of the Gita:

*sa evāyam mayā te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ
bhakto'si me sakhā ceti rahasyam hyetaduttamam*

“I have revealed this old and forgotten yoga to you this day, because you are my intimate friend and devotee; for this yoga is the best and the ultimate secret of the world.” In Chapter Eighteen too there has been a repetition of this statement while explaining the keynote of Karmayoga which is as if the pivotal point of the Gita:

*sarva-guhyatamam bhūyaḥ śrnu me paramam vacaḥ
iṣṭo'si me dṛḍhamiti tato vaksyāmi te hitam*

“Once again you listen to my supreme Word, the most secret of all. You are extremely dear to me, therefore I shall speak to you about this, the best of all paths.” These two verses are in their substance on the lines of the Vedic scriptures, as for example, the Katha Upanishad, which says:

*nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena
yameva eṣa vṛnute tena labhyas—
tasyaisa ātmā vṛnute tanūm svām*

“This Supreme Self is not to be won through the philosopher’s commentary, nor by brain-power, nor again through a wide knowledge of scripture. He alone can win Him who is chosen by God; to him alone this Supreme Self reveals His own body.” Therefore, it is he who is capable of establishing with God sweet relations like those of friendship and the rest is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita.

This implies another thing of great importance. God chose Arjuna because he embodied in himself both devotee and friend. There are many kinds of devotees. Normally, a devotee brings to mind a teacher-disciple relationship. Love is no doubt there behind such devotion, but ordinarily obedience, respect and a blind devotedness are its special characteristics. But friend does not show respect to friend. They joke and play and have fun together, use endearing terms; for the sake of the play they may taunt and even show disrespect, use abusive language, make undue demands on each other. Friend is not always obedient to friend, and even though one may act according to a friend’s advice out of admiration for his deep wisdom and sincere goodwill that is not done blindly. One argues with him, expresses doubts, at times even protests against his views. The first lesson in the relation of friends is the giving up of all fear, to give up all outward show of respect is its second lesson; love is its first and last word. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita who understands this world-movement as a sweet and mysterious game full of love and bliss, elects God as his playmate and can bind Him to himself in a tie of friendship. He is the fit recipient of the knowledge given in the Gita who realises the greatness and the power of God, the depth of His wisdom and even His awfulness, and yet is not overwhelmed and plays with Him without fear and with a smiling face.

The relationship of friendship may include as part of the game all other kinds of relationship. The teacher-disciple relation—if based on friendship—becomes a very sweet one; such precisely was the relation which Arjuna established with Sri Krishna at the commencement of the Gita’s discourse, “You are my best well-wisher and friend, in whom else shall I take refuge? I have lost my power of thought, I am frightened by the weight of responsibility, I am swayed by doubts as to what I should do, overwhelmed by acute sorrow. You save me, give me advice. I leave in your hands all responsibility for my weal in this world and beyond.” In this spirit did Arjuna approach the Friend and Helper of mankind with the object of receiving knowledge. The relation of mother and child too becomes part of friendship. One older in age and superior in wisdom loves a younger and less enlightened friend as a mother does, gives him protection and care, always holds him in his lap and saves him from danger and evil. Sri Krishna manifests his side of motherly love as well to one who establishes friendship with Him. Friendship may bring with it not only the depths of motherly love but also the keenness and acute joy of married love. Friends crave each other’s companionship always, pine at separation, are delighted at the endearing touch, and feel a joy in even giving up one’s life for the other’s sake. The relation of service too becomes very sweet when it forms part of friendship. As has been said above, the more the endearing relationships one can establish with the Supreme Godhead, the more does the

friendship blossom, the more does one gain in capacity to receive the knowledge of the Gita.

Arjuna, the friend of Krishna, is the principal actor in the Mahabharata; in the Gita the teaching about the yoga of works is the primary teaching. Knowledge, devotion and works, these three paths are not mutually contradictory. In the path of works, to do works founded on knowledge and in the power given by devotion, to act for the purpose of God, at His bidding and in union with Him, this is the teaching of the Gita. Those who are frightened by the sorrows of the world, tormented by the distaste for life, *vairāgya*, those who have lost interest in this play of God, are desirous of hiding themselves in the lap of Infinity and leave this play, theirs is a different path. No such feeling or desire was there in Arjuna, the mighty warrior and the bravest of heroic men. Sri Krishna has not revealed this supreme secret to a quiet ascetic or wise philosopher, has not elected any Brahmin vowed to non-violence as the recipient of this teaching, a Kshatriya warrior of tremendous might and prowess was considered to be the fit receptacle for obtaining this incomparable knowledge. He alone is capable of entry into the deepest secrets of this teaching who can remain undisturbed by victories or defeats in the battle of life. This Self is not to be won by one who lacks in strength *nāyam-ātma balahūnena labhyah*. He alone who cherishes an aspiration to find God in preference to a desire for liberation, *mumukṣutva*, can have a taste of the proximity of God, realise himself as eternally free in his true nature, and will be capable of rejecting the desire for liberation as being the last resort of the Ignorance. He alone is capable of passing beyond the modes of Nature, *gunātīta*, who after rejecting the tamasic and rajasic forms of egoism is unwilling to remain bound even by an egoism of the sattwic type. Arjuna has fulfilled his rajasic propensities by following the law of the Kshatriya, and has, at the same time, given the power of *rajas* a turn towards *sattva*, by accepting the sattwic ideal. Such a person is an excellent receptacle for the Gita's teaching.

Arjuna was not the best among his great contemporaries. In spiritual knowledge, Vyasa was the greatest; in all kinds of worldly knowledge of that epoch, Bhishma was the best, in the thirst for knowledge king Dhritarashtra and Vidura led the rest, in saintliness and sattwic qualities Yudhishtira was the best; in devotion there was none equal to Uddhava and Akrura, his eldest brother Karna, the mighty warrior, led in inborn strength and courage. And yet, it was Arjuna whom the Lord of the worlds elected: it was in his hands that He placed divine weapons like the Gandiva bow and gave to him eternal victory; it was through him that thousands upon thousands of India's world-renowned fighters were made to fall; and He founded for Yudhishtira his undisputed empire as a gift of Arjuna's prowess. Above all, it was Arjuna whom He decided as being the one fit recipient of the supreme knowledge given in the Gita. It was Arjuna alone who is the hero and the principal actor in the Mahabharata, every section of that poem proclaims the fame and the glory of him alone. This is no undue partiality on the part of the Supreme Divine or of the great Vyasa the author of the Mahabharata. This high position derives from complete faith and self-surrender. He who surrenders to the Supreme with complete faith and dependence and without

making any claims, all responsibility for his own good or harm, weal or woe, virtue or sin; he who wants to act according to His behests instead of being attached to works dear to his own heart; who accepts the impulses received from Him instead of satisfying his own propensities; who puts to use in His work the qualities and inspirations given by Him instead of eagerly hugging the qualities admired by himself—it is that selfless and faithful Karmayogin who becomes the Supreme's dearest friend and the best vehicle of His Power, through him is accomplished flawlessly a stupendous work for the world. Muhammad the founder of Islam was a supreme yogin of this type. Arjuna too was ever on the alert to make an effort at this self-surrender; this effort was the cause of Sri Krishna's love and satisfaction. He alone who makes a serious effort at self-surrender is the best fitted to receive the Gita's teaching. Sri Krishna becomes his Teacher and Friend and takes over all responsibility for him in this world and in the next.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated by Sanat K Banerji)

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of May 1999)

My dear Mother,

Until now it has never happened that I have lost money. But the money is stolen; even before I came here to my room it had been stolen. It looks to me like somebody is making mischief

It is unconscious movements from the subconscious which allow this mischief to happen. But when these movements come to the surface they can be enlightened and then the mischief has no more hold.

Always with you.

19 July 1936

My dear Mother,

I saw M delivering a long speech to N and it did not look pleasant. N told me afterwards that it was about the Ashram lemons—they are small in size and without juice, etc.

I suppose there is only to pay no attention to his speech. The best thing is not to answer, not to discuss and not even to listen!...

These are the days for peace; I pray for peace and some tolerance.

When the heart and the mind are at peace the rest naturally follows.

26 July 1936

My dear Mother,

What is the matter with P? He looks all right, he moves about and yet he is unable to go for his food!

As far as I know it is a dangerous illness: laziness.

And R also

R is truly unwell with fever, etc...

30 July 1936

My dear Mother,

I hope that we shall pass these busy days quietly. No doubt attacks will come to me, yet I have eternal hope.

To be calm and quiet is the first necessity, and for that do not worry too much about details during these days. I am sure each one will do his best and more can be asked from nobody. Evidently this ‘best’ must progress and become better but that takes time and cannot be expected at once

Always with you, my dear child

5 August 1936

My dear Mother,

This noon food for 69 persons was sent to their rooms

I have nothing to say, if you want to do it—but I find that it is those who are doing nothing all day who ought to go for their food in Aroumé.

20 September 1936

My dear Mother,

I wish the day would come when You can use me as an instrument in worlds other than this material world. You go into other worlds, worlds of the subconscious, and fight there and conquer and spread the kingdom of light. Is it not possible for us to be Your soldiers even in those dark lands?

There is nothing impossible in the realisation of what you are asking for—a patient, strong, steady and absolutely sincere aspiration can conquer all obstacles—but it takes time.

Always with you

3 October 1936

My dear Mother,

There is a rivalry between S and T—each claims to be the head of the Granary One comes and tells me something and the other comes and tells me something else. How to pull on, dear Mother?

You might remind them that both yoga and work suffer by such miserable little currents.

10 October 1936

My dear Mother,

Dr U will talk with V about her treatment tonight; there is some fear in her mind The same fear was in X. All these people may be talking and gossiping on the subject and supporting the fear in one another This whole recent wave of illness in the Ashram is perhaps due to this fear and nothing more.

You are quite right It is all due to fear and nothing else It is a wave of fear and falsehood that has passed over the Ashram and each one is answering according to his or her nature Very few are those who can stand firm on the rock of their faith and trust in the Divine and reject the wave altogether

11 October 1936

My dear Mother,

It is my humble confession that a wave of fear and falsehood attacked me This wave wanted me to be very angry with Y But to all the suggestions and attacks of the hostile forces, I had one answer: "It is impossible; I know all of you very well How can I be faithless to the love of my dear Mother?" And in gratitude my heart took shelter more and more in Your Love.

I am indeed very happy to hear that you have passed successfully through the experience. Your answer to the attack was the right one. You have only to keep up this attitude and after several attempts the attacks are bound to stop

All love and blessings to you, my dear child

12 October 1936

My dear Mother,

Z wrote me a letter She wants to come here and is thinking of using a trick She will agree to marriage on one condition: that her family allows her to come to Pondicherry before the wedding; then she will not return to Gujarat She puts this trick idea before You and asks for Your advice

I do not approve of tricks like that—they can only bring trouble

13 October 1936

My dear Mother,

When You ask me about something, how should I answer You? I was not pleased with my answer today Not only today but almost always I feel a shortcoming

The best thing to do is to give me the correct, precise and complete information about

the matter. It is what I am asking from you, to have a ground for my decision.
Love and blessings to my dear child.

30 October 1936

My dear Mother,

What shall I say about B's disturbance today in the D R.? The reports differ and I wait for a little more clarity. In any case a life of peace and harmony is also worth living, and anger thrown out falls back upon the thrower and clouds his soul

I know nothing more silly than this habit of always quarrelling—it is miles away from yoga

All love and blessings to you, my dear child.

5 November 1936

(To be continued)

SOUND IN SILENCE

ALONE with Thee again I snare Thy silence,
Midst resounding peal of temple bells,
In the depths of mind's deepest hells
They sing Thy all-pervading Presence,
Uplifting to an ever higher pitch my sense
Of Thee in all. That sound in silence tells
Me all and comforts, strengthens, swells
My heart to concentrated quietude immense.

Why challenge the silence, O friendly din?
Is He in need of music in His Chamber's core?
Art Thou the soul's companion to the flame within?
Does Thy intensity betray His secret door?

Now the veil is rent, my eyes can see;
This sound is but another face of Thee.

ARYAMAN

AN IMAGE OF THE PSYCHE

WATER softly swirling
In sea cave,
Shadowlessly furling
Tainture of the grave,
Utterly revealing
The strewn pearl,
And the blue fish wheeling
Waver and curl;
In their swift bright motion
They glint and feel
The wild and surge of ocean
Moment-meal.

March 3, 1934

ARJAVA

ARJAVA: Does the lengthening-out of the penultimate line contribute a satisfying effect for the close (the previous feminine-ending lines having been catalectic)?

SRI AUROBINDO. Yes, the effect is very good.

ARJAVA: Is any distinctive effect produced by carrying on an echo of the feminine rhymes into the masculine rhyme of the succeeding quatrain—e.g. furling-pearl, wheeling-feel?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it gives a sense of delicate interwovenness of rhythmic scheme and suggestion to the poem.

TRUE MEDITATION

What do you do in meditation? You know the Japanese story of the three monkey sages? One says I will not see anything, the second says I will not hear anything and the third says I will not speak anything

We can say the same thing in a little different way I will not see anything but the vision of the Mother, I will not hear anything but the voice of the Mother, I will not say anything but Her name This is what true meditation is...and it is not difficult

On the other hand the Mother is always seeing you, hearing you and speaking to you

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(From a talk to school children on 22 2 74)

ON TRANSLATING SAVITRI

SAVITRI, the great epic by Sri Aurobindo, is an unparalleled storehouse of spiritual wisdom that comes in the form of what the ancients called Mantra. Mantra is borne to us in sound-waves; not simply the luminous sense, but also the harmonious verbal embodiment of it is important. The poetry that is *Savitri* is inseparable from the spirituality of this master-work of Sri Aurobindo and the latter cannot be appreciated and assimilated in a living manner unless we are responsive to the mode of vision, the cast of word, the mould of rhythm—the Spirit’s varied poetic Avatar. The heart of *Savitri*—the mystery from which the poem has sprung—yields its pulsations most intimately when we approach it with sensitiveness to the art of *Savitri*. There is an intellectual element too in this poem, that is why Sri Aurobindo says that in its final form *Savitri* is “a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life”

All this makes translation of *Savitri* a great challenge, for not only is the meaning to be conveyed, the idioms and metaphors adequately depicted in the cultural context of the particular language, but a rhythm has also to be created. The purpose of a translation is not only to introduce *Savitri* to a reader in his own mother-tongue but a kind of Sadhana, a spiritual effort and not only a literary one for the translator. It is only when one enjoys by the ear and understands by the mind and heart the Mantric rhythm and the spiritual adventure of *Savitri* in the original, and has also a mastery over the language, its rhythm and nuances and culture, in which one is translating, that a translation is likely to be fairly successful. That there is a need is clear from the translations already available in various languages, Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Marathi and other Indian languages and French, German and Italian amongst the European ones.

Savitri’s most creative function is to kindle in us a flame burning at all times so that we may build up in ourselves the living presence of that Master-Yogi and through the illumining art of this Epic of the Spirit quicken at each moment with the invocation

O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe,
Creatrix, the Eternal’s artist Bride

If any translation can achieve a little of this, it is very much worth its weight in gold

AMAL KIRAN and DINKAR D PALANDE

(An extract from a letter written to a translator of *Savitri*)

ON WHAT AUTHORITY WERE CHANGES MADE IN SAVITRI?

SRI AUROBINDO'S manuscripts are the main authority for the changes.

What Sri Aurobindo wrote has not been changed anywhere in the new edition. What have been corrected are mistakes of various kinds that occurred when his lines were copied, typed and printed. Our idea was that *Savitri* should consist of Sri Aurobindo's own words as far as possible. Some people may disagree with this, but it is the principle on which the work has been based.

Corrections have been made in every edition of *Savitri*, so there is nothing alarmingly new about what has been done in the Revised Edition. The complete epic first appeared in two volumes in 1950-51. But this edition was soon found to contain mistakes. When the University Edition (1954) was being prepared, Nirod asked the Mother if he could take Amal's help in detecting errors. She gave her approval. Several dozen corrections were carried out in that edition. In the Centenary Edition (1970), another hundred or so corrections were introduced. But there were also typographical errors in both these editions. Some such mistakes in the Centenary Edition were corrected in the 1976 reprint. When people say "*Savitri* should not have been changed," it is not clear which edition should not have been changed.

The preparatory work for the Revised Edition of *Savitri* was done by the Archives. But its chief editors were Nirod and Amal, who have been responsible for all editions of *Savitri* up to the present. The Revised Edition (1993) may be considered the continuation and culmination of Nirod's and Amal's effort to eliminate errors from the text of *Savitri*. The difference is that this time they have had the help of the Archives. The result has been the most meticulously prepared and error-free edition to date. It is also the first time a list of the changes has been published. This is perhaps the main reason for the controversy.

The Archives' work on *Savitri* began in the late seventies under Nirod's supervision. Before that, Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts of the poem had been consulted now and then to decide doubtful points that came up. But nobody had thought of systematically comparing the manuscripts with the various copies, typescripts and printed texts. This was the exacting and time-consuming procedure that now began. After one phase of this work was finished, I asked Nolini if corrections could be made in view of certain discrepancies that had been noticed. His reply was simple and straightforward: "You can make the changes if Nirod approves of them."

Those who have read *Savitri* only in a printed form can have little idea of the complexity of the process that led from Sri Aurobindo's last handwritten version to the published text. Nirod had first-hand experience of all this. Being well aware of the numerous possibilities of error, he readily agreed to the Archives' idea of checking the text. This meant tracing the history of each line, sometimes through six or seven stages. It was suggested that mistakes that were found to have occurred at one stage or another

should be corrected, unless Sri Aurobindo's later revision made it inadvisable to do so. Nirod approved of this principle, as did Amal

After the Archives had been working on *Savitri* for about seven years, a list of proposed changes in the printed text was published in the December 1986 issue of the *Archives and Research* journal. Both Nirod and Amal saw and approved of this list before it was published. But their confidence in the Archives was such that at this stage they did not take the time to look closely at the specific reasons for each change. They did so only in the next phase.

The list of suggested corrections aroused strong opposition in some quarters. In order to resolve the controversy, a series of discussions took place during the period 1988-92 at Amal's place. Nirod, Amal, Jugal and Deshpande took part initially. Later, Richard from the Archives was invited to join and Jugal discontinued.

This group went into all the points in minute detail. Richard brought the manuscripts and other documents to the meetings and submitted reports on the more complicated questions. Nirod and Amal examined the manuscripts before making the final decision on each point. Deshpande recorded the proceedings of the meetings. Occasionally when Amal and Nirod disagreed, Tehmī was asked to give her view, though she did not attend the meetings. But in fact there were very few substantive disagreements between Nirod and Amal. Long hours were spent discussing punctuation. But on more significant points, the evidence of the manuscript was almost always decisive and there was little room for differences of opinion. In doubtful cases, the text was left as it was.

Weekly meetings went on like this for about four years. Eventually a new list of changes was finalised, similar to the original list but slightly longer. Nirod and Amal gave their written permission.

A new edition incorporating the approved changes was brought out in 1993 and reprinted in a deluxe format the following year. A Supplement listing and explaining the differences between this edition and previous ones was issued separately.

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

(The above note was left behind by Jayantilal Parekh, the late in-charge of the Archives of the Ashram. He had prepared the note for publication sometime in August 1998 with the intention of giving the factual background regarding the historical evolution of the Revised Edition of *Savitri*. He was asked questions about it many times and he thought it fit to suitably publish the account. But for some reason or other it did not happen. However, just before leaving for Germany for medical treatment, in the third week of January 1999, he left instructions with his colleagues to get it published.—Editor)

THE MYSTERY OF SRI AUROBINDO'S 'DEPARTURE' VIS-À-VIS THE IDEAL OF PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION

It is quite obvious that the earthly existence is upon the face of it a rather flawed existence. All terrestrial life without exception is afflicted with diverse ills and ultimately visited by its inexorable Doom of decay and death. And what of the life of man, so far the greatest product of biological evolution? Is there anyone who is not poignantly aware of the dismal fact that, in spite of many brilliant victories scored by the consciousness of man, the life of this mental being dwelling in a living material body and lifting its head ever upward towards the far sky is always dogged by various kinds of defects and foibles such as limitations and imperfections and perversions, fervid desires and blind impulses, and deplorable incapacities of different sorts, and is finally faced by the totally frustrating experience of physical dissolution? All this has naturally led every sensitive soul to be disenchanted with this brief, alas! all too brief, sombre episode of earthly adventure, and most accredited spiritual seekers, whether of ancient times or of our present day, aver with one voice that man's life upon earth is not at all meant for his ulterior fulfilment here itself but for making an inner preparation of consciousness up to a point of sufficient development so as to permit him to drop his physical frame once for all and depart to some supraphysical world of unqualified fulfilment or, better still, to go beyond that world of higher or highest manifestation and merge one's personal self irretrievably into the spaceless and timeless Silence of the absolute Transcendence

But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have, for the first time in human history and in a most consistent and persistent way, raised their powerful voice against this universal condemnation of earthly life and the disparagement of Matter and the physical principle. They have philosophically demonstrated and justified through their lifelong spiritual exploration and experience that man's life upon earth is endowed with a sure-to-be-realised glorious prospect of utter fulfilment here upon earth itself in a material body, and that the present negative traits of the earthly manifestation, however unacceptable they may seem to us, are nothing but the attendant ills of an as-yet-incomplete forward journey of man which has reached only its middle transitional stage of development, these sure-to-pass-away imperfections need not and should not and must not invalidate the promise of a future divine flowering of life upon our planet.

And what is more important, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not content themselves with the playing of the roles of mere prophets of the life divine. They set themselves in all seriousness to the seemingly impossible task of actually realising this very life divine here and now in their own lives and not merely postponing the promise to some vague and indeterminate far-off future. And being the first serious pioneers in this great venture of herculean dimensions, they were quite explicit in defining their pivotal roles in this matter. Thus, while speaking about himself Sri Aurobindo wrote:

‘I have no intention of achieving the Supermind* for myself only—I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and *if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others*. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth-consciousness.’

While referring to Sri Aurobindo the Mother mentioned in 1961: ‘Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world that man is not the last creation and that there is another superior creation to come. And he did not say so because he merely knew, he said so because he felt it to be so. And he has begun to realise it.’

And this is what the Mother wrote in the birth centenary year of Sri Aurobindo, on 17 June 1972 to be precise: ‘Sri Aurobindo is an emanation of the Supreme who came on earth to announce the manifestation of a new race and the new world, the Supramental. Let us prepare for it in all sincerity and eagerness.’

Now about the Mother. While specifying her role Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter as far back as 1935: ‘The Mother comes in order to bring down the Supramental and it is the descent which makes her full manifestation here possible.’ Also: ‘Her embodiment is a chance for the earth-consciousness to receive the Supramental into it and to undergo first the transformation necessary for that to be possible. Afterwards there will be a further transformation by the Supramental.’

And here is what the Mother has to say about herself: ‘There is only one thing about which I am absolutely sure, and that is who I am. Sri Aurobindo also knew it and declared it. Even the doubts of the whole of humanity would change nothing to this fact.’

More specifically she remarked in the year 1961: ‘Well, I have been sent here [upon earth] to accomplish the thing and I am trying to do it, that’s all.’

On 4 May 1968 the Mother became much more explicit about the nature of the Work she was doing and the words came, according to the Mother’s statement, from Sri Aurobindo himself. This is how her account goes:

‘T. F. expressed in her letter her impression about who I am. And at the end she put it like this: ‘Is it truly so or, perhaps, I am mistaken?’ Then, in response to her query Sri Aurobindo came to say:

‘The divine life in the process of its evolution,
the divine consciousness at work in Matter,
this is, so to say, what Mother’s existence represents.’

Such being the case, given the key roles of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the matter of supramentalisation of earth-life leading to the divinisation of man’s mental, vital and physical existence, the sudden and totally unexpected ‘Departure’ of Sri Aurobindo in December 1950 left most of his disciples absolutely shell-shocked. They wondered with dismay: ‘Sri Aurobindo ‘passing away’! How is that possible? We

* We shall have occasion to explain in course of this essay what ‘Supermind’, ‘supramental’ and ‘supramentalisation’ connote in the Yoga-philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

thought and believed that Sri Aurobindo and physical death do not at all go together. Then?"

Such was indeed the shock of disbelief all around. Even now, after the lapse of almost fifty years since that momentous Event of 5 December 1950, many of Sri Aurobindo's disciples have not been able to shake off from their mind the sense of utter puzzlement at this Master-Yogi's physical passing.

And this puzzlement is quite understandable. For the real reason behind Sri Aurobindo's decision to drop his physical body is, according to the Mother, too profound to comprehend even on the part of the most acute intelligence or for a person of sufficiently developed Yogic knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo's demise is indeed too paradoxical an event to be acceptable as a settled fact. But the Mother has warned us in another context:

"For me everything, absolutely everything, is possible, even the things that appear on the face of it most contradictory. I have no possibility of raising any objection, mental, logical or according to common sense, that something should not happen this way or that way. The real issue is to unite with the Will of the supreme Lord in order to know it."

On another occasion the Mother remarked: "How one clearly sees and knows that [regarding Sri Aurobindo's passing] even the highest and the most luminous intelligence can understand nothing, nothing—it is therefore foolish to try to do so."

We may recall in this connection a very interesting and meaningful incident. Just after the passing of Sri Aurobindo, when his body was still lying in state on his bed, an old disciple of the Master distributed among the Ashramites a printed pamphlet in which he had ventured to speculate that a serious disablement of Sri Aurobindo's body was hampering the effectivity of his action and that this in turn led to the abandonment of the Master's body. The Mother, when she came to know of the content of this pamphlet, became very displeased and addressed to the ignorant and indiscreet disciple the following terse but incisive note.

"Sri Aurobindo was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality. And when one cannot understand, the only thing to do is to keep a respectful silence."

Thus the Mother's recommendation to all her disciples has been never to try to seek through the exercise of one's intellect some plausible explanation behind the physical dissolution of Sri Aurobindo's body. The only right thing to do, according to her, is to ascertain *what* the supreme Lord wanted and not *why* he wanted it. And as the true truth is always crystal-clear to the supreme Consciousness although it may remain a dark riddle to human mentality, it is always wise to refer oneself to this highest Consciousness to enlighten us in the matter.

And this is what we are going to do in the present essay. It goes without saying that the views expressed in this writing and their sequential concatenation are entirely the author's. But at the same time it may be intimated to the readers at the very outset that most of what follows is based on the actual words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

pronounced on different occasions, and many of the Mother's in the years following Sri Aurobindo's physical Departure. And whatever the Mother has said in the matter has come from her own occult-spiritual experience and not arising out of any mental theorising. It is worth recalling here before we proceed further what the Mother herself has said about the nature of her pronouncements. This is what she remarked in 1961:

“All my certitudes—all without exception—have *never* come through the mind. The intellectual comprehension has followed a long time afterward. Each one of these experiences has been ‘understood’ long afterward .. I am not speaking of what one knows philosophically; that has no value to me, that is nothing but the erudite's conjuring trick. That does not interest me at all. I am referring to the comprehension above; and that ‘intellectual’ comprehension has come to me a long time after my experience. And this type of experience has come since my early infancy in a massive way: that seizes you and you have no need for believing or not believing, of knowing or not knowing, nothing of that sort, it comes and there is nothing to say, you are in front of a *fact*.”

So we are going to base our essay on whatever the Mother has said in the light of her occult-spiritual experiences concerning the great paradox of Sri Aurobindo's passing.

(To be continued)

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

NAGIN-BHAI TELLS ME

(Continued from the issue of May 1999)

11:05:1994

I WAS in the body of the Supreme Mother. I could very clearly see that, that I was in her; I was in her but then I could not see her face,—I do not know whether it was there.

I looked so small in her; I was so small in her

She did her work in me. I do not know what work, but she did it in me.

Afterwards, while coming back, I told her that she should mould herself into my human groove I told her that I find it difficult to be in her. She agreed to mould herself into my human groove That was the only way by which she could do the work

Next time she came down in that way, to do the work in me. I felt so happy. But I could not hold it, that happiness My body was shaking and trembling for a long time; yes, it continued quivering even after she left it. In fact, in the night, before going to bed I had to take a sleeping tablet.

Next day I took some flowers and went to Sri Aurobindo's Room.

I do not know who in me had asked the Supreme Mother to mould herself and come into my human groove? the psychic being or the spirit?

Must be the psychic being.

14:05:1994

Remain in Pure Existence. The work is being done at the base.

What is this base? The whole of Nature, Prakriti I suppose, including the subconscious on an individual level.

Pure Existence should mean the Self, Atman The work is in the base and it can be done best in that state, by remaining in the Self.

Who could have spoken about Pure Existence, I mean who could have given this phrase to my outward awareness? What for was it used? I do not know It might have been the spirit that translated it into our language, the language known to the outer personality.

15:05:1994

The Essence is descending. Remain in the base.

18:05:1994

I was told that the impersonal work was going on I saw neither Sri Aurobindo nor the Mother. Also, I did not notice my psychic being; nor the spirit, none

On the first day, it was just going on, the impersonal work, but without my being told about it I just allowed it to go on, simply to let it happen

Next day I was told that it was the impersonal work which was being done.

It means basically that nature is being tackled,—perhaps first the inner nature.
 Can I say that I am liberated? Am I liberated?
 Not quite.

21:05:1994

I am told now about the 'physical' appearance of Sri Aurobindo I had experienced at the Samadhi sometime ago when I was offering my Pranam there.

It was psychological and was very necessary for the work.

I am physically very weak and, in fact, I had a nervous breakdown in the past. The Mother had advised me to get treated by Dr. Surya.

My physical would not have been able to bear the impact of the work that was going on at that time. That would have been difficult, risky also perhaps.

This, they know it well, they know my condition well and they do take all the precautions.

It is for this that Sri Aurobindo had come 'physically' to prepare me.

I am told about it now.

28:05:1994

I was told that the work is over. My consciousness is free, free from the lower nature.

This was done by the Supreme Mother.

When I went to the Samadhi, I saw the consciousness going up from the crown of my head, rising up, yes, going up. It went high, very high,—I do not know where. I have no idea.

06:06:1994

I should not have done that, but it happened.

I interrupted my meditation to see people who had come from my place, Bhavanagar.

For the next two or three days I did not get anything. Everything had stopped, everything.

There was some obstacle.

I prayed for the grace; I prayed to the higher and yet higher grace. I went on praying so, in that manner.

I was told that I must ask for the supramental grace.

I did. It came down. I was surprised. Yes, it did come down.

The obstacle was removed.

The work was going on. I was told that it is the supramental force working, working step by step from above down to the vital-physical centre.

But as my higher parts are also weak, I asked for the work to be done directly in the vital-physical, not gradually down below. And it happened so.

As the work was going on, I saw Sri Aurobindo present there.

My usual duration of meditation was coming to a close, but then I decided to let the work go on. How could I stop when Sri Aurobindo was present there?

I stood at the Samadhi for one hour, up to 8 in the evening. In spite of standing there for such a long time, I did not feel tired. I usually stand for 30 to 45 minutes, this time it was for one hour and there was no fatigue whatsoever.

The spirit was present above the vital-physical centre, watching from above. It must have told my external being about the experience.

I was told that this could happen, my unusually long meditation, because the Being of Ananda had come down earlier

Otherwise I could not have stood there for such a length of time.

Later, when Sri Aurobindo was not there, I stopped the meditation. I did not see the Mother but, certainly, she must have been doing the whole work.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

LOVE'S LEAP

Up to the mountain ridge
Once a one-eyed doe strayed;
But there was a lonely hut
Where a lonely hunter stayed.

She could not see the valley
That deepened on her right;
But then felt an arrow whiz,—
She knew her mate in fright.

Swifter than death's weapon
She leaped beyond the cloud:
In a sky where burn stars of love
Doe-eyed souls to her bowed

R Y DESHPANDE

SRI AUROBINDO ON BHARTRIHARI

Introduction

SRI AUROBINDO had a great admiration for Bhartrihari, the author of the three *śatakas*—*Nītiśataka*, *Śṛṅgāraśataka* and *Vairāgyaśataka*. It was the distinct poetic style and personality of Bhartrihari that attracted Sri Aurobindo and inspired him to render 126 verses of *Nītiśataka* into free English verses. He did not write much about Bhartrihari except a few notes here and there. Yet these notes are enlightening and inspire us to approach Bhartrihari from a different angle.

Bhartrihari: His Life and Personality

Due to the absence of authentic chronology it is difficult to say anything concrete of Bhartrihari's life. Today he is a legendary figure. Tradition tells us that Kalidasa and Bhartrihari were contemporaries. Some say that Bhartrihari was the elder brother of Vikramaditya to whom he transferred his crown. Sometimes he is identified as a devotee of Shiva; sometimes as a follower of Buddha. Some say that he was a Brahmin, some others call him a Kshatriya, yet others put the stamp of Shudra on him. Thus, tragically, Bhartrihari's personality has become enigmatic, engulfed in the dense fibre of legends, fantasies and conjectures.

SRI Aurobindo recognised Bhartrihari as a Kshatriya and says, "He was evidently a Kshatriya; for all his poetry breathes that proud, grandiose, arrogantly noble spirit of that old magnanimous Indian aristocracy, extreme in its self-assertion, equally extreme in its self-abnegation..."¹ Further he explains that this "savour of the Kshatriya spirit in Bhartrihari is of the most personal, intimate kind, not the purely poetic and appreciative delight of Kalidasa.... It expresses itself even in his *vairāgya* by the fiery and ardent, almost fierce spirit which inspires his asceticism,—how different from the fine quietism of the Brahmin!"²

SRI Aurobindo was fascinated by the striking personality of Bhartrihari as it appeared in the Centuries or *śatakas*. So he writes about Bhartrihari's personality as observed in the *Nītiśataka*: "He has the true heroic turn of mind and turn of speech; he breathes a large and puissant atmosphere. High-spirited, high-minded, high of temper, keen in his sympathies, admiring courage, firmness and daring inspiration above all things, thrilling to impulses of humanity, kindness and self-sacrifice in spite of his rugged strength, dowered with a trenchant power of scorn and sombre irony, and occasionally of stern invective, but sweetening this masculine severity of character with varied culture and the old high Indian worship of knowledge, goodness and wisdom, such is the man who emerges from the one hundred and odd verses of the *Shataka*."³

In this single breathless sentence Sri Aurobindo has highlighted almost all the important features of Bhartrihari's personality and inspires us to look at Bhartrihari more keenly.

Bhartrihari: His Work and Poetic Genius

Bhartrihari was a versatile genius. He was a poet, a grammarian and a philosopher of high repute. The three *śatakas*—*Nītiśataka*, *Śṛṅgāraśataka* and *Vairāgyaśataka*—bear the testimony to Bhartrihari being a poet of high excellence. His other work *Vākyapadīya*, a grammatico-philosophical work, proves him to be a grammarian as well as a philosopher. But Sri Aurobindo discovers him only as the author of the three *śatakas*. He writes: “There are three centuries or Shatakas of his sentences, the first expressing high ethical thought or worldly wisdom or brief criticisms of aspects of life, the second concerned with erotic passion, much less effective because it is the fruit of curiosity and the environment rather than the poet’s own temperament and genius, and the third proclaiming an ascetic weariness and recoil from the world.”⁴ These *śatakas*, according to Sri Aurobindo, are significant as they underline “...the three leading motives of the mind of the age, its reflective interest in life and turn for high and strong and minute thinking, its preoccupation with the enjoyment of the senses, and its ascetic spiritual turn...”⁵ He further says that, “Bhartrihari’s centuries are important to us as the finished expression of a thoroughly typical Aryan personality in the most splendid epoch of Indian culture.”⁶

Of these three *śatakas* of Bhartrihari it was *Nītiśataka* that specially delighted Sri Aurobindo, as it was the one expressing the poet’s own temperament and genius. This *śataka* of Bhartrihari forms, as Sri Aurobindo states, “a series of poetical epigrams or rather *sentences* upon human life and conduct grouped loosely round a few central ideas...” and “stands as the first of three similar works by one master.”⁷

Sri Aurobindo writes that the classical Sanskrit poetry of Bhartrihari’s age was characterized by “a sort of lucid density of literary structure; in style a careful blending of curious richness with concentrated force and directness of expression, in thought and matter a crowded vividness and pregnant lucidity.”⁸

The infinite harmonic variation of the four-lined stanza, as provided by the classical prosody, gave the poet of the age ample scope and opportunity to express some vivid and beautiful picture, “some great or apposite thought, some fine-edged sentiment.... If a picture, it might be crowded with felicitous detail, if a thought, with pregnant suggestion; if a sentiment, with shades of feeling...”⁹ A poem that successfully achieved the above manner of expression was called by the ancients a *subhāṣita*. A *subhāṣita* may be defined as a “thing well said and therefore memorable.” Sri Aurobindo explains that in a successful *subhāṣita* there is “the instantaneous concentration of vision”, “the carefully created luminousness and crowded lucidity of separate detail in the clear-cut unity of the picture.”¹⁰ Bhartrihari’s *Nītiśataka* belongs to this category of poetry. In the verses of *Nītiśataka* Bhartrihari has distinctively unravelled the whole picture of human life, nature and conduct and also the world outside. Sri Aurobindo admires this charming and invaluable composition of Bhartrihari and says that it is an “incomplete poetic rendering of the great stock of morality...”¹¹

Some European scholars doubt the authorship of Bhartrihari and imagine that he

“was a mere compiler of other people’s Subhashitas.” But according to Sri Aurobindo this imagination “is not much better inspired” He further elaborates this point and remarks, “Undoubtedly, spurious verses were introduced and a few bear the mark of their extraneous origin; but I think no one who has acquired a feeling for Sanskrit style or is readily responsive to the subtle spirit in poetry can fail to perceive that the majority are by one master-craftsman There are collections of Subhashitas in plenty, but the style of Bhartrihari is a distinct style and the personality of Bhartrihari is a distinct personality There is nothing of that infinite variety of tone, note, personal attitude. which stamp a collection; there is one characteristic tone, a note strong and unmistakable, the persistent self-repetition of an individual manner. All is mint of a single mind.”¹²

Leaving aside the interpolations and additions, the *Nītisataka* is a fine product of its age and has the touch of Bhartrihari’s extraordinary genius. Bhartrihari, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “writes not only with the thought but with emotion, with what might be called a moved intellectuality of the feeling and an intimate experience that gives great potency and sometimes poignancy to his utterance.”¹³

It is this distinct style of Bhartrihari that makes him stand apart, in spite of innumerable interpolations and additions.

The Century of Life: Sri Aurobindo’s English Rendering of Nītisataka

In the beginning of this century when Sri Aurobindo was in Baroda, he rendered 126 verses of *Nītisataka* into free English verses. Later this translation was revised by him and was brought out in book form in 1924 under the title *The Century of Life*

Though a *sataka* (hundred) should necessarily comprise 100 verses here the excess is, according to Sri Aurobindo, “. . . due to accretion and the mistaken ascription to Bhartrihari of verses not of his making but cast in his spirit and manner.”¹⁴

In this translation Sri Aurobindo has faithfully presented the thought, spirit and images of the original But he has utilized the full licence of a poetical rendering¹⁵ He has “made no attempt to render the distinctive features of Bhartrihari’s style” or “to preserve the peculiar qualities of the subhashita”.¹⁶ He has rendered the verses of Bhartrihari in a looser and freer style and sometimes he has expanded the verses to considerable dimensions in order to explain fully what is implicit in the original. In his own words: “Bhartrihari’s often crowded couplets and quatrains have been perforce dissolved into a looser and freer style and in the process have sometimes expanded to considerable dimensions. Lines of cunningly wrought gold have had to be beaten out into some tenuity Otherwise the finer associations and suggestions of the original would have been lost or blurred.”¹⁷ Some of the translations of Sri Aurobindo along with the original Sanskrit verses of Bhartrihari have been given as an appendix to this article.

Throughout his translations Sri Aurobindo faithfully brought out the spirit of the poetry He holds “it more pardonable in poetical translation to unstring the language

than to dwarf the spirit and mutilate the thought.”¹⁸ He further writes that “in poetry it is the verbal substance that we seek from the report or rendering of foreign masterpieces, we desire rather the spiritual substance, the soul of the poet and the soul of his poetry”¹⁹

Nīṭisāta has been renamed in various translations. For example, Abraham Roger who translated *Nīṭisāta* for the first time in a European language in 1651 A.D., named it as *The Reasonable Conduct of Man*. It also has been named by others as *Centum of Polity*, *Century of Human Conduct*, *Hundred Verses on Policy*, and so on. But Sri Aurobindo has added a new life to *Nīṭisāta* by renaming it as *The Century of Life*. The Sanskrit word *nīti* has several meanings, such as guidance, conduct, propriety, policy, wisdom, plan, politics, righteousness, morals, etc. So in this case one has to depend upon the inner message of the whole work and give a suitable name. Initially Sri Aurobindo had named it as *The Century of Morals*. Then he changed it into *The Century of Life*. This name sounds more appropriate as the *Nīṭisāta* of Bhartrihari is not confined to verses of mere moral conduct, rather it unravels the picture of human life. This work abounds in authentic factual material on the life of the people and is an integral part of the cultural life of ancient India. To quote Sri Aurobindo “I had first entitled the translation *The Century of Morals*, but the Sanskrit word *Niti* has a more complex sense. It includes also policy and worldly wisdom, the rule of successful as well as the law of ideal conduct and gives scope for observation of all the turns and forces determining the movement of human character and action”²⁰

Bhartrihari speaks of various aspects of human life, behaviour and values. He speaks of fools, of the learned, of valour, of wealth, of the wicked, of the virtuous, of service, of firmness, of fate, of karma and so on. So, the name *The Century of Life* is more suitable than the other.

Conclusion

As a translator Sri Aurobindo had at his disposal all the necessary requisites needed for rendering Bhartrihari into English, a wonderful command over Sanskrit and English with a deep insight into Indian culture. His notes and comments on Bhartrihari’s life and work are, therefore, elevating and enriching. Moreover, his poetical translation of the *Nīṭisāta* is unique. It adds more clarity to the expression of Bhartrihari and helps to penetrate deeply into the spirit of the poetry of a master-poet of classical Sanskrit.

SAMPADANANDA MISHRA

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 12 *Ibid*, p 26
 13 Sri Aurobindo *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol 14, p 304
 14 Sri Aurobindo *Translations*, SABCL, Vol 8, p 159
 15 Sri Aurobindo *Archives and Research*, Vol 1, No 1, p 29
 16 *Ibid*, p 30
 17 *Ibid*
 18 *Ibid*
 19 *Ibid*
 20 Sri Aurobindo *Translations*, SABCL, Vol 8, p 159

APPENDIX

(Some of the Sanskrit verses with Sri Aurobindo's translations in English)

1. BODIES WITHOUT MIND

साहित्यसङ्गीतकलाविहीनः साक्षात् पशुः पुच्छविषाणहीनः ।
 तृणं न खादन्नपि जीवमानस्तद् भागधेयं परमं पशूनाम् ॥

(उपजाति छन्दः)

Some minds there are to Art and Beauty dead,
 Music and Poetry on whose dull ear
 Fall barren. Horns grace not their brutish head,
 Tails too they lack, yet is their beasthood clear.
 That Heaven ordained not upon grass their feasts,
 Good fortune is this for the other beasts

2. THE REAL ORNAMENT

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

(शार्दूलविक्रीडित छन्दः)

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.

3. GREAT AND MEANER SPIRITS

प्रारभ्यते न खलु विघ्नभयेन नीचैः प्रारभ्य विघ्नविहता विरमन्ति मध्याः ।
 विघ्नैः पुनः पुनरपि प्रतिहन्यमाना प्रारब्धमुत्तमगुणा न परित्यजन्ति ॥

(वसन्ततिलका छन्दः)

Some from high action through base fear refrain;
 The path is difficult, the way not plain.
 Others more noble to begin, are stayed
 By a few failures. Great spirits undismayed
 Abandon never what once to do they swore.
 Baffled and beaten back, they spring once more,
 Buffeted and borne down, rise up again,
 And, full of wounds, come on like iron men

4. WEALTH THE SORCERER

यस्यास्ति वित्तं स नरः कुलीनः स पण्डितः स श्रुतवान् गुणज्ञः ।
 स एव वक्ता स च दर्शनीयः सर्वे गुणाः काञ्चनमाश्रयन्ति ॥

(उपजाति छन्दः)

He who has wealth, has birth, gold who can spill,
 Is scholar, doctor, critic, what you will,
 For who has golden coin, has golden tongue,
 Is glorious, gracious, beautiful and young;
 All virtues, talents, fames to gold repair
 And lodge in gold leaving the poor man bare.

5 THE IMMUTABLE COURAGE

निन्दन्तु नीतिनिपुणा यदि वा स्तुवन्तु लक्ष्मी समाविशतु गच्छतु वा यथेष्टम् ।
 अद्यैव वा मरणमस्तु युगान्तरे वा न्याय्यात् पथः प्रविचलन्ति पद न धीराः ॥

(वसन्ततिलका छन्दः)

If men praise thee, O man, 'tis well; nor ill,
 If they condemn. Let fortune curst or boon
 Enter thy doors or leave them as she will;
 Though death expect thee ere yon sinking moon
 Vanish or wait till unborn stars give light,
 The firm high soul remains immutable
 Nor by one step will deviate from the right.

RICH IS THE SOURCE

THE way of foolishness, alas, is not forbidden,
 In spite of Buddha's joke that's very funny:
 "Until the bad act gives its fruit so bitter,
 A fool-man thinks that he indeed eats honey."

If words are alive, if letters there breathe,
 For any chatter close your mouth
 "Let that one listen who has ears,"
 The words of Jesus Christ suggest to us.

Good luck to men whom good advices profit,
 And who may take them in their heart at will
 Behold, a mountain is going to the Prophet,
 While Mohammed calls it, standing still.

Rich is the source of heaven's purification,
 And all that's needed is to see and mark.
 And Krishna takes his novel incarnation
 To brighten up all things that were so dark.

VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO

(Translated from the Russian by Gleb Nesterov)

MATERNAL LOVE

(ACHARYA Shankara in a Hymn to the Divine Mother praises Her love and states that there is a possibility of there being a bad son but never a possibility of there being a bad mother: कुपुत्रो जायेत, कुमाता न भवति.)

Had he merely hymned the Supreme Mother
As the Acharya does in haunting rhythms
One could with delight turn above
And soak one's little self in Her Love

But he generalises about mothers!
“Bad sons,” he says, “always there could be,
But bad mothers, no, never!”
Asserting as if it were a truth for ever.

The mighty Sage knows little of mothers,
Their egoistic partialities,
Preferring one child to another
For reasons unknown to the Divine Mother.

The District Collector is a Prince,
His brother Bill Collector is a slave!
Yet suckled by the same mother's breasts
And brought up too by the same behests.

One wouldn't risk going against one's mother's Will
Or devote oneself to another's heart,
To him alone she would be a mother
Who would worship her and none other!

“Maternal love!”—is it not proverbial?
It is a great half-truth as all proverbs are;
A powerful sentiment but all too brittle,
Before Divine Love, it is all too little

K B SITARAMAYYA

AN APPROACH TO THE POETRY OF SRI AUROBINDO

WHILE reviewing *The Collected Poems and Plays* of Sri Aurobindo (1942), William Saunders wrote in the Edinburgh paper *Peebleshire News* the following ‘‘To divinise the human, immortalise the mortal, spiritualise the material—that is the professed ideal of Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest poets and the most profound, yet crystal clear philosopher that India has ever produced.’’ This critique, written as early as 1942, still holds good

Sri Aurobindo the poet is but one of the many facets of his personality as patriot, revolutionary, philosopher, pioneer of the future poetry, sage and seer. Sri Aurobindo started writing poems from his student days at Cambridge, *i e*, from 1890, a few days before his voluntary passing away in 1950, he dictated a magnificent passage of seventy-two lines, to be included in the second canto of the *Book of Fate* in his magnum opus, *Savitri*. Thus his poetic career covered a period of sixty years. During his stay at Cambridge (1890-1893) Sri Aurobindo attempted his first essay in English verse. His juvenile efforts were collected under the title *Songs to Myrtilla*, printed in 1895, at Baroda, meant for private circulation. These poems are sensuous and full of evocations of sound and colour, and are impassioned to a high degree. What can be more Keatsian than these lines?

Beauty’s boons and nectarous leisure,
Lips, the honeycombs of pleasure,
Cheeks enrosed, Love’s natal soil,
Breasts, the ardent conqueror’s spoil

Not only sensuous beauty but also other themes like politics and careers of poets and politicians claimed the attention of Sri Aurobindo’s early Muse. As a consequence came brilliant poetic effusions, like Hic Jacet, Charles Stewart, Parnell, Goethe and Madhusudan Dutt. But the time was fast approaching when Sri Aurobindo would no longer be an exile in England. For fourteen years he had lived there, completely steeped in the best of European culture, European thought, language and literature. He was coming back to India to serve under the then Gaekwar of Baroda. He bade farewell to Europe thus:

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow

Sri Aurobindo lived in Baroda for a period of thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906. During his stay there he was full of herculean activities, Baroda became the foster-

mother of his Muse and moulded him in a magnificent poetic cast. Here he studied our scriptures and epics in Sanskrit, Bengali and other Indian languages were mastered by him, the vast and brilliant panorama of our ancient civilization now held him spellbound

In the midst of his studies and exacting office-duties, Sri Aurobindo started translating the Bengali poems of Chandidas and Chittaranjan Das and some of the works of Kalidasa. Sri Aurobindo's translations are not mere verse-renderings they read as a rule like original compositions, poems in their own right. Let us take a few lines from his *Songs of the Sea*—a translation of Chittaranjan Das's *Sagar Sangit*

This shore and that shore,—I am tired, they pall
Where thou art shoreless, take me from it all.
I am mad for thee, O king of mysteries .
Pilot eternal, friend unknown embraced,
O, take me to thy shoreless self at last

For the Baroda college magazine he translated Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka* in epigrammatic, sharply-phrased and memorably-dictioned English verse. This translation was published in 1924 as *The Century of Life*. Though the poems in this volume are didactic in nature, yet they are full of intense imagination and high poetic artistry. The following lines will show how the verses are crystal-clear

But one God to worship, hermit Shiv or puissant Vishnu high;
But one friend to clasp, the first of men or proud Philosophy,
But one home to live in. Earth's imperial city or the wild.
But one wife to kiss, Earth's sweetest face or nature. God's own child

Sri Aurobindo also produced a long narrative poem, *Urvashi*, in a highly flexible blank verse of great beauty. It is a brilliant and captivating epyllion. How vividly he paints the lovers' mood in these lines:

She, o'erborne,
Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,
Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.
Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met

Master craftsman as he is, in another narrative poem he paints an exquisite idyll:

Fresh-cheeked and dew-eyed white Priyumvada
Opened her budded heart of crimson bloom

To love, to Ruru; Ruru, a happy flood
 Of passion round a lotus dancing thrilled,
 Blinded with his soul's waves Priyumvada.

(*Love and Death*)

Blank verse in Sri Aurobindo's hands has become highly flexible as well as sonorous. This is but one aspect of his poetry. In his "gloried fields of trance" he has given us lavishly his poetic gems. Who can ever forget lilting lines like these?

I claim for men the peace that shall not fail,
 I claim for earth the unsorrowing timeless bliss,
 I seek God-strength for souls that suffer in hell,
 God-light to fill the ignorant Abyss

(*The Fire-King and the Messenger*)

The Baroda period of Sri Aurobindo's life completely unfolded the poet in him. From Baroda he came to Calcutta at the call of the country. During his stay there, for a period of four years (1906-1910), he composed *Ahana*, in rhymed hexametrical verse. In another poem, *The Mother of Dreams* in long lines of double rhymes, he reveals to us the Mother—who is the home of us all.

Then comes Sri Aurobindo's Pondicherry period of poetic creation. For a span of forty years (1910-1950), he was deeply immersed in the development of his "Integral Yoga". From the fields of his Yogic experiences the poetry world has harvested a golden crop of sonnets, epics, poems in rhymed and unrhymed quantitative hexametres. Finally, to crown it all, came out, after several revisions, his majestic epic, *Savitri*—"the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision," as the Mother has pointed out.

Sri Aurobindo's poems are the self-revelatory Mantra of the Real, far-flung in vision, intense in emotion, and architecturally vast in rhythmic range and movement. The poet has fronted the ever-present Reality; and, therefore, he celebrates it in beautiful imagery:

In some faint dawn,
 In some dim eve,
 Like a gesture of Light,
 Like a dream of delight
 Thou comst nearer and nearer to me.

Sri Aurobindo is an adept of the mysteries. He has not only reached the cherished mystical goal but has become one with it. His sonnets are replete with such experiences:

The body burns with Thy rapture's sacred fire,
 Pure, passionate, holy, virgin of desire

(Divine Sense)

My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;
 Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,
 Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.

(The Divine Worker)

In Sri Aurobindo's poetry we are face to face with the much-sought Word, the inspiring voice, and the mighty Mantra which penetrates "Truth's inmost cabin of privacy," and takes us into the presence of God and illumines all the obscurities of life. There is not an aspect of life which Sri Aurobindo has not touched; for the first time, things transcendent have been clearly revealed to our gaze. What Sri Aurobindo's poetry has achieved can be summed up by quoting a few lines from his epic, *Savitri*:

The Ineffable puts on a robe of speech
 Where all its words are woven like magic threads
 Moving with beauty, inspiring with their gleam,
 And every thought takes up its destined place
 Recorded in the memory of the world.

KAMALAKANTO

INVOCATIONS

Usha

THE Goddess human in mortals
Sees with the eyes of the Sun
Joy like a shining silver thread
Through thought's drab pattern run

Agni

When there is no more dreaming,
When there is no more striving,
Flare up, O Flame, revealing
The straight steep path.
Then Dawn is achieved in one bound.

The Ashwins

The white horse and the red horse
Run together side by side
Swiftly to the goal
Only in pastures ruled by mind
The white horse weakens,
The red runs blind

Aditi

If in your terrible strength
You but leaned on a moment.
Time would shatter like glass,
Become litter of days—
How shall we ever be still enough,
Small enough to endure
The weight of the hurtling worlds
And your mighty ways?

The Human Fathers

Travellers of the ancient way,
Did you see the holy fire
Leaping light, leaping bright,
To the heaven beyond desire?

Herdsmen of the radiant kine
 That pasture on those fields of light,
 Did you cut the threefold knot
 That binds us in the caves of night?

What word of power unsheathed the Will,
 The naked blade of pure intent?
 What outcry urged the steeds of life
 To one last perilous ascent?

Poets of old, there is no end
 Or ever will be to your quest.
 While Agni burns within our hearts
 And Indra will not let us rest

Saraswati

Saraswati slender river,
 Sparkling fall
 Through fissures of Mind;
 Water with joy the roots of being,
 Water with Truth the Spirit's seeing,
 River of Light

Mitra

A lover's radiant glance,
 Imperious—tender yet;
 An infant's solemn kiss
 Has sealed our sacrament.
 In life after life our tale retold
 Is ever again begun,
 At play in all the seven worlds
 Apart, close-clasped, and One

Surya

One in the mind, who listens
 To the tiresome babbler, thought,
 One in the heart
 Who sings and sighs in tune;
 One in the body, who sustains it—
 One, beyond all, is All

POET NISHIKANTO

1

THE odd spectacle in the suburbs, of a small girl rubbing a clay lamp on the floor in a lonely backyard, and a boy watching the scene and the process discreetly from a distance, may appear comical to any onlooker but not to the girl whose facial muscles and hand have become taut with strain

The boy assured his credulous niece that rubbing the lamp in that way would result in the appearance of geni. . She believed in it and tried Feeling exhausted, the naive girl would go and find the boy, then describe to him her effort and report the non-appearance of the darned geni. He would gravely encourage her to patiently try again, and again This puckish boy is none other than Nishikanto or the very lovable 'moon-poet' of Rabindranath Tagore

When writing about Nishikanto Roychowdhury one can't but begin with the laureate Tagore. Because out of the sixty-four-year span of his life, about twenty of the growing or formative years were spent with the latter and his associates Nothing to wonder at that he too became one of the well-known poets writing in Bengali. The environment in which he spent his infancy is also to be taken into account At an age when most kids play with bat and ball in their backyards, Nishikanto used to walk down to a place which was desolate and even used as a graveyard As he sat there contemplating the natural beauty, the peace of the surroundings would penetrate his being and he would murmur verses, or get inspiration to write poetry

He lived, till the age of about five years, in this site which is now in the zone of 24 Parganas in West Bengal. The green meadows which rolled endlessly in front of him, the small tributary of a river, and a huge banian tree on one side which sheltered twittering birds,—he breathed there an atmosphere which linked him with nature's beauty and rhythm of which his poetry and art were to speak later on.

Born in 1909 as the child of Mr. V. K. Roychowdhury when he had nearly attained the age of sixty-five years, Nishikanto—motherless from childhood—grew up mostly under the care of two persons while his father practised law in distant U.P. One was his aunt, and the other his elder brother, who, from before Nishikanto's birth, used to live in Birbhum, a man quite well off named Sudhakanto, connected with Shantiniketan.

Nishikanto's father used to come down to Bengal to meet his sons. During one such visit kid Nishi had heard two names from him with which he was to develop later deep connections One was Rabindranath Tagore and the other Sri Aurobindo He afterwards heard again of the latter in Shantiniketan

He addressed his aunt as mom and along with her daughter he was part of the Roy family When Sudhakanto Roychowdhury took him to Birbhum to get him admitted to Shantiniketan, she too went there with him But they spent the summer vacation and holidays at the aunt's. We come to know much about him through his cousin with whom he had a lifelong relation For example, she related that when he thus came

during the holidays he would resume his old habit of carrying a notebook under his arm and sneak away to that haunted area under the banian tree for tasting the Pierian spring and, may be, to write poetry. Sometimes when he was not seen anywhere around, the solitary boy would be found sitting in that place, either lisping in numbers by himself or in a state of absorption, oblivious of the time of day, even into the dark hours. Was all this actually the beginning of his spiritual awakening?

Nishikanto's account of his first meeting with Rabindranath Tagore makes interesting reading. According to his statements made from childhood recollections, he had first met Tagore on the eve of the latter's receiving the Nobel Prize. He was then a well-known figure whose verses and pronouncements were considered to be major literary events. Nishikanto was hardly three years old. He went to Shantiniketan with his elders via Calcutta, where the big mansions and trunk roads created for him the image of Baghdad of which city he had heard and seen pictures in a volume of the Arabian Nights' Tales. Whereas the fields, the green meadows, sparse buildings, small paths of Bolpur presented to his mind quite a contrasting image.

A peculiarity of this infant, the trace of which lingered on till later years was that while all the rest addressed Tagore as *gurudeva* (revered Master), Nishikanto wouldn't. He at the most was willing to call him 'Kaviguru' (master-poet). It was because of the dress. In the imagination of the child a *gurudeva* was someone wearing a priestly garb, with 'namabali' (sacred names in Sanskrit) printed on it, just as the Brahmin next door habitually wears. Tagore was seen in a pyjama, and not dhoti, over it a long plain cloak which reached down to the feet. Therefore more possibly for Nishikanto, no surely, Tagore had to be the Caliph of Baghdad about whom he heard stories and of whose appearance he had seen illustrations in the books.

For the tiny tot this tall and fair person who stood in front of him was none other than that king, only he was now in disguise.

And when after some time Nishikanto was five years old he was brought again to the kingdom of the Caliph; this time for staying. However, he soon felt it wasn't too heavenly either, so far as his health was concerned. For his diseases 'expressed' themselves now and then here also just as at home. This was because both his parents had weak constitutions. His mother had died of T.B. when he was but a babe. Probably that's why he too couldn't avoid having illnesses.

This fact is connected with the issue of how Nishikanto became a poet. It's a question that one is likely to ask when one meets a reputed versifier. In reply to this Nishikanto had said that he started writing poems when still a boy. As a small kid he used to suffer often from various illnesses, and so had to remain at home. He spent all his time turning the pages of books, mostly of poetry and stories. His interest in poetry began from this early age. He couldn't always understand all that he read. But he liked poetry. Sometimes he would learn it by heart. He stated that his elder uncle was also a poet (Satischandra Roy). That explains how he could become a poet right from a very early age.

In Shantiniketan though he had been admitted to the young boys' group (Path

Bhavan) Nishikanto was somewhat different from them. To the amazement of all it didn't take long for his innate poetic faculty to develop and gradually find expression in the congenial atmosphere. But despite the poetic nature, the love for art, he wasn't a sober elf of quiet disposition or gentle behaviour. In fact, he was known as an outrageous practical joker. Many were the pranks of the little 'devil' and many the causes for ire. But in general Tagore and with his suggestion the rest of them had to constrain themselves in order not to hamper his creative urge. So he moved about and lived more or less freely without any fear.

Here I mention only one anecdote as a typical example of Nishikanto's childish pranks. There was a certain young teacher named Kalicharan. Now one meaning of this word 'Kali' is ink. One morning as he was walking down the street, the kid Nishikanto emptied a whole bottle of ink on his impeccably white freshly ironed garment. The man was naturally annoyed and talked about it with some other men. The story reached Tagore's ears. The next day at an appointed time when the group gathered in the open lawn he questioned the boy about the ink-throwing incident among other similar things. Nishikanto explained: "Since the man's name is *kali* (ink) therefore I wanted to see how he would look with ink splashed all over him." The spectators around listened quietly, suppressing their giggles. The head of the group scolded him a little and explained the uselessness of such acts.

I would give three reasons why Tagore took a special liking to him. First he was the brother of Sudhakanto Roychowdhury,^{*} who was a capable secretary and well known for being an attendant of Tagore. The other reason was the poetic bond, Nishikanto gave signs of a poetic temperament even at an early age. And the third, he was fearless and enjoyably mischievous. Sometimes even his poetry (like his mischievous deeds) consisted of making spontaneous caricatures of distinguished men through nonsense rhymes which had the victim as well as the listeners break into hearty laughter. He was quite spritely and jocose. These two traits of his character remained almost throughout his life, especially the latter.

This young and, in spite of the illnesses, energetic boy probably sought for, consciously or unconsciously, other means of expression, as if poetry alone were not enough. His creative talent now found a new channel as he also got interested in the fine arts for which Shantiniketan had then acquired a position of distinction in the whole of India. In this too his progress and individual way of expression were notable. He early developed a style of his own. Abanindranath Tagore was the head of the Art section. His principal follower, the well-known painter Nandalal Bose, was the tutor of Nishikanto.

A brief digression at this point will not be out of place. Nishikanto used to relate interesting accounts of his student days. The following will give an idea of them to the

^{*} Having mentioned Sudhakanto's importance as Tagore's P.A. it may be noted that *ipso facto* he is one of those rare and lucky men who without being literary birds have yet got their names imprinted in Bengali literature. Besides references in Tagore's own correspondences his name could be found in articles written by well-known writers like Pronabi, Nolini, Kanto Sarkar, etc.

readers. Once an art exhibition was held to celebrate Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary, in which all the art pieces gifted to him by the students were displayed without giving the names of the artists, and the in-charge was asked to name the students who painted them. Abanindranath looked closely at all the works and one by one he correctly guessed the names of the artists. It was not too difficult for him to do so, because he was familiar with all the students and their individual styles. But when he came to the pictures drawn by Nishikanto he stood looking at them silently, and when the attendant asked him to name the artist he said, "Wait," and went on to look at the other pictures. At the end he came back to the pictures drawn by Nishikanto. "Saptasurya" (seven suns) was the title of the seven pictures submitted by him. The paintings consisted of scenes depicting the sunrise. After pausing before the pictures for a while, he said pointing to Nishikanto "It is by that fellow, isn't it?" He further remarked, "He has a way of his own, let him pursue it freely, don't insist on his following the 'Shantiniketan style'." This story the poet used to recount with joy in his advanced age.

"Thus I acquired the freedom to paint as it pleased me, even as I wrote poems the way I liked," reminisced Nishikanto. "However, a difference was there: one cannot put any restrictions for writing poetry. Whereas in the practice of painting I was told I could paint as it pleased me, but using only two colours. So they used to supply me with only two colours at a time for every session of painting. Gradually I recognized the value of this method, and I could learn very well the proper use of colours. Thus, while playing with them, I discovered that each colour has its own 'Message'." The scientists would go only as far as to call it 'Vibes'.

Whereas Abanindranath as a man was probably given less to levity, Rabindranath being a poet was rather different. Quite jocose, Nishikanto had developed an amicable relationship with him with the passing years. Chand-kobi (moon-poet), a virtuous title and not far from his own name, was how the grown-up boy was affectionately called by Rabindranath (mainly, and by a few others). 'Nishi' means the night, and Nishikanto means the moon. Gradually the brightness of his talents shone over his personality and made him a favourite of Tagore. The latter gave attention particularly to the development of his poetic talent, showed interest in every poem that his moon-poet produced. And perhaps he grew also a little possessive as a patron. "If you feel like publishing any of your creations I can arrange for it," he had assured. As it happens, word about the talent of the young poetling now started reaching the ears of some editors as well, for quite a few such persons visited Shantiniketan.

There's a well-known story in this connection which is mixed with humour. Hardly had Tagore pronounced his assurance when soon one day a woman editor of a well-known journal came to him with a request for a poem. Nishikanto informed her about Tagore's advice in this regard. This made the woman play a trick to get a poem from him. She was aware of his gourmet interests. She went away with a plan in her mind and came back with a platter of savouries which the youth had hardly the strength to refuse. "Queer cuss!" he thought while tasting the items. In compliance he

contributed a good poem which was published soon after under the odd guise of 'Gaganbehari'. Be it for the odd pseudonym or the nature of the poem, there doesn't seem to have been any talk about it, except for Tagore who was a reader of this journal. It did not escape his scrutiny, nor the unfamiliar name of its author. Having been too familiar with his student's style, it did not take him long to figure out who the actual writer was. It appears clear therefore that both Abanindranath and Rabindranath had the uncanny capacity to recognize the creators unmistakably from their creations, even if their names were not mentioned

The poet laureate sent his valet to inform Nishikanto that he would like to see him. But, the man could not trace Nishikanto for a couple of days. Then soon one day the valet found him calmly sitting under a tree in a contemplative mood, and informed him about Tagore's desire to see him.

Nishikanto helpfully enquired: "Why, what's the reason?" The chap only shrugged his shoulders. Then Nishikanto facetiously tried to guess. "Dinner perhaps?" But the ignorant fellow could not quite clarify. Having therefore no idea as to the reason for the call, Nishikanto accompanied the escort.

(To be concluded)

ANONYMOUS

JUST YOU

I HAVE prayed that You be the goal of my longing,
 I have hoped that You be the journey called life
 I have desired that You be the companion during my wondering,
 I have wished that You be the path of my quest.

Oh, but there is one request
 Why don't You be me, You everything?
 As if the sun discovering its own day,
 A mute silence recognising its inner rhythm,
 A self realising its truth of existence?

ARUN VAIDYA

“I HAD SRI AUROBINDO’S DARSHAN”

Introduction

It seems it was destiny that some books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were there in our house. Through them Their presence must have been working on me since my childhood I was breathing the air of the nationalistic Swadeshi movement for independence invoked by Sri Aurobindo. A spirited atmosphere was growing around me. The concepts of Balmandir, physical education for girls, equality for boys and girls, creative activities in khadi and handicrafts, etc., were becoming stronger.

It became possible for me to get a qualification in Sir J. J. School of Arts, Mumbai, for painting. During my hostel life I found time to read books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. *The National Value of Art, Conversations with the Mother, etc.*, which greatly influenced my mind I resolved to go to Pondicherry as soon as possible.

After twenty-three years of sadhana in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, S.J. Ambubhai Purani came out of Pondicherry for the first time and visited Surat. I took the first opportunity to attend his lectures. His dynamic personality impressed me and increased my resolve to go to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He encouraged me in my efforts in painting and my seeking in sadhana. Even afterwards he continued his support through his letters on Art and Sadhana. With his guidance I went to Pondicherry.

I experienced the charged atmosphere of the Ashram. Ambubhai introduced me to the Mother whose magnetic personality left me spellbound. She was giving blessings, balcony Darshan, playing tennis, conducting meditations and taking classes from morning till night every day. Her touch was everywhere and in everyone in the Ashram. I felt as if I was in a different world altogether.

My daily activity during the one month that I stayed in the Ashram was to see the Mother as many times as possible during the day. We were allowed to offer flowers to the Mother. She would take those flowers and give us a flower with concentration and blessings. Going back to my room I would begin sketching the Mother while holding that flower which had Her spiritual touch. In those days Her photographs were not available.

I realized that the flower the Mother had given me was not a common flower but with something added to it because of Her concentration and to remember Her and grow into that experience was a very interesting thing for me. Now plenty of photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are available. I feel Their protecting and all-enveloping presence in them and thus every day I paint from these photographs so that not only am I benefited with spiritual experiences but also I can share those experiences with many others. This is a real treasure which must grow more and more, and it brings much joy when someone opens out towards that experience.

Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

If we see the grandeur of all that is beautiful in this creation with all possible visual appeal and get the experiences ourselves in places of devotion through varieties of expressions such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance and literature which have eternally enriched and uplifted mankind, we then feel that the Lord has worked through some powerful personalities during that time, giving them the creative vision to lead humanity in breaking the rigid mould of the past in various aspects of life on earth.

When one is in search of the Supreme, one discovers forms of expression higher and more perfect through various mediums and materials in many possible ways. Humanity has worked ardently and sincerely towards higher and deeper realizations. There are substantially rich contributions in all fields of art and literature by those who were moved by some great inner presence of divine beauty and force. There is a rich treasure of such creations like temples, caves, churches, masjids and pagodas beautifully constructed in all countries to depict some revelation or aspiration of that time. One cannot doubt the sincerity of aim and execution in those creations.

Now coming to the Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In spite of the marvellous contribution of their innumerable writings giving a unique expression to their Ideals of realization, the physical Darshan of the Divine was something that was unheard of and unseen up to now. It was a leap towards something yet unmanifested.

In spiritual practice, through the Darshan of the Avatars one can manifest whatever one is invoking, aspiring for. A higher level of consciousness can thus be expressed through one's body. One who is receptive and gifted with the integral capacity of identity is uplifted in consciousness as the Vibhuti puts forth his full emanation that protects and guides the disciple and brings in a decisive change. One can then do what is required for the progress and for the realization of one's goals. It is like a new birth in which one can grow eternally. A glimpse, a vision, an understanding invoke a fire for sadhana, for progress, for fulfilment of one's existence. So Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Darshan meant that to me.

On the 24th of November 1946 I had the privilege to have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the first time. I saw them seated majestically. Each step I took towards them was like a suspense to me. Not only my mind, heart and nerves but my entire being was concentrated to draw the maximum from the experience. I still remember how He moved one eye slightly and how the Mother smiled sitting next to Him. It was unforgettable and beyond comparison. I got lost in them. I don't know what happened—it is beyond words.

Even today, when I am trying to put in words my experience of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Darshan, a tremendous silence presses down upon me. It is a pressure, it is a concrete silence with a weight of infinity, it is as if the whole of time was condensed into a single moment. Or is it a glimpse of what is beyond time, an invitation to a new adventure for more progress in life? The experience brings forth a resolution that can remould the present human substance, a will that cannot compromise with less than

perfect perfection, a demand on the sadhak for total surrender, a challenge for something which is above mind, a promise of a brighter life illumined with a new light. A Divine Love emanating from Them brings with it a tireless compassion for faltering humanity, blessings that smooth the path of our difficult adventures. That experience was a glory beyond imagination, something that had never ever occurred in my life before. It was a vision of the Almighty—Iswara and Iswari seated together giving Darshan.

A new creation from the old shall rise,
 A Knowledge unarticulate find speech,
 Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom,
 Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss
 A tongueless oracle shall speak at last,
 The Superconscious conscious grow on earth,
 The Eternal’s wonders join the dance of Time (*Savitri*, p 330)

Friends, Sri Aurobindo’s precious relics are here in these premises installed in a very modest way. They are installed in several other places also. They will be installed too at Ompuri on 11th November, 1998. The speciality of Ompuri is that the relics will be installed in an open area. An internationally acclaimed figure in the field of architecture has been inspired, he has visualised a design to construct something in a unique way at Ompuri.

Sri Aurobindo’s relics which are always charged with His Presence, Light and Force will be received, honoured and installed in a grand way. Sri Aurobindo Mahamandir is also a visualised model and it will be a privilege for us all to participate in this great adventure offering ourselves more and more so that more light, strength, joy and peace may spread all around. It will be rewarding beyond all our expectations to establish a true foundation for humanity and we would have only to work, collaborate and feel grateful for the opportunity given to us by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo on Darshan

Now we shall read what Sri Aurobindo writes in His letters about Darshan, to understand the occasion better. He says

The best way for Darshan is to keep oneself very collected and quiet and open to receive whatever the Mother gives (*SABCL*, Vol 25, p 287)

Sri Aurobindo’s light is not a light of the illumined mind—it is the divine Illumination which may act on any plane.

It [blue] is the basic light Sri Aurobindo manifests

(*SABCL*, Vol 26, pp 190-91)

It means that we act as we do because we take it as a fact that the Divine can manifest and is manifested in the human body.

(*Ibid* , p 448)

I am not aware of that But now also the Mother does not teach, she asks all to open and receive But she does not tell them and I don't think I told people to follow their own 'knowledge'

(*Ibid* , p 460)

Physical means [like Darshan and touch in the Pranam] can be and are used in the approach to divine love and worship; they have not been allowed merely as a concession to human weakness, nor is it the fact that in the psychic way there is no place for such things. On the contrary, they are one means of approaching the Divine and receiving the Light and materialising the psychic contact, and so long as it is done in the right spirit and they are used for the true purpose they have their place.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 25, pp. 286-87)

Adesh and Darshan are elements of a stage of sadhana in which there is still much distance from the closer state of union. The mind and vital seek the contact through Darshan and the guidance through Adesh. What we aim at in our yoga is the constant union and presence and control of the Divine at every moment. But on the mental and vital level this usually remains imperfect and there is much chance of error. It is by the supramentalisation that the perfect truth of this Divine union in action can come

(*SABCL*, Vol 23, p 779)

I suppose what you are thinking of is 'darshan', the self-revelation of the Deity to the devotee; but that is different, it is an unveiling of his presence, temporary or permanent, and may come as a vision or may come as a close feeling of his presence which is more intimate than sight and a frequent or constant communication with him, that happens by deepening of the being into its inner self and growth of consciousness or by growth of the intensity of bhakti. When the crust of external consciousness is sufficiently broken by the pressure of increasing and engrossing bhakti, the contact comes

(*Ibid.*, p 940)

BHAKTI SHAH

(Based on a talk given on 27 October 1998 at *Sahakar*, Mumbai)

ART OF LIVING

If you haven't a glow that always shines
In the raging storm that ever blows
And a fire of passion that never fears
To flout all hurdles as if they are trifles
And a heart that is widely open to infinite doors
To pour back their melody in added opulence

You better die immediately
For this isn't life any more.
Pass out now to return nevermore.

But, there is no need for the glow to strut in display
And take on the storm in a foolish abandon
Or, the fire to consume yourself and all around
Burning out in its dictatorial hegemony,
Or, the heart to rot in pitiless misery
Dragging you and the beloved in imbecile fancy

For, life is but an art
To realise the impossible
And not deflate on the way.

If you let your glow absorb from everywhere
And light other lamps as well, in plenty
And the fire learn wisdom to last for eternity
And not burn in a moment of fury and futile bounty
And the heart to know that a cool passion and a calm dynamics
Are also there to take you to the Himalayan heights,
You then needn't strut at all,
But just grow in silence to your Himalayan majesty
The world will come on its own in homage to you
And you won't care if it doesn't; for the loss is its,
And not yours. And thereby lies the art of living.

K H KRISHNAMURTHY

YEHUDI MENUHIN

A tribute on the occasion of his sudden death on 12-3-1999

YEHUDI Menuhin was not only the greatest violinist of our age and a great musician who was deeply admired the world over for 70 years, he was also a great, wonderful and absolutely dedicated idealist, convinced of the power of music to help in unifying mankind

The following text consists of his own words ¹

*

His Credo

Music, and in particular, the violin are for me threads that weave hearts and minds together, not only in symbolic ways but in ways that are very real and concrete. Music, and art in general, are not optional extras. One cannot think of them as useless *accessoires* to humanity: dance, song and other forms of expression have always been there to celebrate life's rituals, and the joys and values of living. The composers, painters and poets of yesterday and today show us that art, far from being an escape from reality, actually enables us to approach reality along a pure and direct path. Since the beginning of history, artists have tried to say that art was in fact more intense, more real than life, so that others, receiving a small part of their love and devotion, might cease hating and fighting.

I will never forget what I was once told by the dear French lady Rebecca, who gave me my first lessons in that most poetic language, when I was nine years old in San Francisco. "My dear," she said, "as long as there are men, there will be war." Such a statement was a terrible shock for me. In the world as I knew it then, it was impossible for me to share her resignation; the idea was appalling, and I have never ceased to fight against it. It seemed to me that with the violin I could act as a counterweight to that inexorable evil. I thought that I could bring peace to the world through and with music.

I realised as the years passed that I was a bit naive and that my actions could not possibly have such powerful, beneficial effects. Rebecca may well have been right. Yet I have never lost the idealism of my youth. I firmly believe that music can bring people together and heal them, and I have single-mindedly pursued my youthful determination, doing as much as I could with the means that were available to me. I am convinced that music—because it keeps us in contact with the world, because it helps us see ourselves as part of the vibrant cosmos—shapes the conscious and the unconscious in us, and creates a harmony within each of us and with each other.

¹ From his book *The Violin*, published by Flammarion, 1996

The work I do in my Foundation²—the various projects that have been set up over the years—and in my schools proceeds from this unshakable faith in the salutary power for humanity of singing, dancing and art. This work may eventually culminate, I pray, in a European Parliament of Cultures, to become a counterweight to the Parliament of States. Perhaps one day the artist that slumbers in every one of us will find a response to political parties. Perhaps one day the human instinct of domination will find other channels of expression—not in fighting and aggression, but in music, sculpture, theatre, sport, adventure, and the pursuit of knowledge and discovery. Perhaps one day, under the beneficent influence of artistic activity, the hypocrisy and schizophrenia which give us such easy alibis for not seeing the misery around us, for not taking action in Sarajevo and elsewhere, will become a thing of the past, in the same way as human science has succeeded in eradicating certain illnesses.

On India and Indian Music

Against this contemporary cacophony it was an enlightening experience to find myself with my wife Diana in India for the first time in 1951, immersed in a civilisation which has retained close links with its historical origin. Indian music and Indian arts are still regarded as religious offerings, and when we visited in the 1950s the performers were only just beginning to come to terms with the fixed time slots demanded by the broadcasting studios. Indian music deals with the infinite, knowing neither beginning nor end. It emerges imperceptibly from the tuning of the instrument which lays the ground for the particular raga or scale to be used. It is part and parcel of a given time of day, mood, or event, weather, harvest, wedding, death, victory or defeat. Indian music belongs to the people who have always played on instruments, which in the early days were simplified forms of the wondrously fashioned instruments of the classical tradition. Folk music is improvised and not read—there is thus always an element of creating, of responding to the needs of the moment and of the player. In the great players this produces an intellectual command and an emotional abandon which is beyond belief. It is as if an intense spiritual upheaval joined forces with the infinite calculating capacity of a computer to express a deep emotion which is universal and true.

On Ravi Shankar

Ravi Shankar revealed to me a new dimension in music. It was thanks to him that I came to understand the religious quality of this art, and the devotion and inspiration which it demanded. In India music is seen as an offering. But it is also the product of

² The International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation sponsors the yearly Menuhin Festival, an international academy of music, the Parliament of Cultures, some schools for talented children and the MUS-E-project (Music, source of equilibrium and tolerance) with the support of the European Community Commission and UNESCO which has established schools for children with learning difficulties in many European countries introducing song and dance into the curricula of 'difficult' primary schools in a very beneficial way.

hard work and particularly intense experience, because Indian music demands a mastery and a level of imagination almost unknown to us in the West. Since the written score does not exist as intermediary, the Indian musician must be at once both performer and composer. Thus, before he can begin playing, he has to learn and assimilate a far stricter discipline than that of our classical tradition: he has to know hundreds of scales, with their infinite variations, and has to master the inexhaustible wealth of highly complex rhythmic combinations. The first time I heard Ravi Shankar play this music, which has neither beginning nor end, but which is fluid and moves like a river, I was astonished. I encountered Ravi Shankar on our first visit to Delhi in 1952—I was gripped by his playing and found it to have an expressive range fully as large as our own, imbued by that fervent religious dedication which was not so much a religion as a sense of belonging to dimensions and mysteries beyond our comprehension. It was an extraordinary demonstration of the unity of exuberance, pleasure, abandon, within a form and discipline of the utmost rigour and complexity which in no way inhibited either the sense of reflection or abandon. It was a new breath of life in my own world of music. For me he is one of the world's greatest musicians.

The sessions with Ravi Shankar, a wonderful teacher, were unforgettable and incredibly stimulating. We have made several records and a fine video of our joint performance at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations in New York.

In November 1995 Ravi Shankar and I hosted a concert which illustrated in music, dance and song the history of an epic trek—that of the Gypsies, all the way from Rajasthan to Andalusia. We were able to bring together Indian musicians and dancers, in the sparkling colours of their festive costumes, illustrating various points in their stages north and south of the Mediterranean, until we found the synthesis of Gypsy, Arab, Jew and African in the great flamenco dancer Blanca del Rey, accompanied by the guitarist Manolo San Lúcar. All the artists joined in the finale that was led by Ravi Shankar and Blanca del Rey, for they all understood the great nomadic tradition, the tragic and heart-rending experience of people persecuted along their way, even until today.

This concert was an unforgettable illustration of the eternal interchange between cultures and civilisations, a cross-fertilisation of which music is perhaps the greatest example.

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Any other words than these, his own, are superfluous. It is evident that with Yehudi Menuhin leaving the scene, the world has lost a powerful manifestation of a force of the good, the true and the beautiful.

May we remember him with love and gratitude when listening to the many recordings which save his performances for us and for later generations.

WILHELMINA VAN VLIET

SRI RAMAKRISHNA DAS

‘TAPOBHUMI’—the land of austerity—is the epithet ascribed to India which has been hallowed by the severe austerities practised by the saints and the sages born in it through the ages. Conspicuous in this holy land is the region called Utkala (*i e.*, Orissa) whose heart bears Nilachala, the seat of Lord Jagannath. An Oriya poet has aptly sung:

*Bharata sarase Utkala kamala
Ta madhye keshara tuhi Nilachala.*

Which rendered into English reads:

In the pond of India
Shines the lotus of Utkala,
Thou art its stamen,
O Nilachala

In this holy land whenever there is the decline of righteousness and the prevalence of wickedness, God sends his Vibhūtis, or the saints, or incarnates himself to restore righteousness to its right position by destroying the wicked.

In the early part of the twentieth century in Utkala, when it was under the sway of wicked forces and its people had lost their virtue, followed evil ways and forgot their own religious duties, there was born a divine child by the name of Krishnachandra Routray on the 14 August 1909. His father was Markandeya Routray and his mother Jhumki Devi. The name of the village where the child was born is Routpur. It is under the Balikuda Police Station in the Jagatsinghpur Sub-division of the Cuttack District. That child is now called Sri Ramakrishna Das, who till his death in 1998 resided in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In Orissa he is popularly known as Babaji Maharaj.

While he was yet a child of five or six years he often used to fall asleep in the arms of his mother. He would then come out of his body and rise up into the sky and, a short while after, get into the body again. While he re-entered the body he gave out a cry of fear. He narrated the experience to his mother and wanted to know the cause. But his mother was quite ignorant of these things and she only told him that they were caused by witches.

Young Ramakrishna's education started in a village school called Chatashali at the age of five. At school he was marked as a good student. In addition to the text-books he devoted himself to the study of the *Bhagavata* and the eighteen Puranas which resulted in his inclination towards a spiritual life. One of his favourite books was the *Dardhyatabhakti*. This work in Oriya contains the lives of a number of saints. One day he came across the biography of the saint Raghu Behera in it. He was then only eight. The saint's life influenced him very much. The story describes how the Lord granted a vision of Himself to Raghu Behera. He was so inspired by it that he made up his mind

at that very moment to renounce the world and take to the life of a sannyasin. But this decision took material shape later. He carried on his studies till the age of eleven. At the age of nine or ten he was initiated by his family preceptor with the sacred word 'Ramakrishna'. He was accustomed to the repetition of that Mantra from then.

After the completion of his studies Ramakrishna served as a teacher for a few months in a primary school near his village. His elder brother Sri Baidyanath Routray was then serving as a Gumasta (agent) in the court of Alupada. From him he learnt the art of petition-writing. He then moved to Cuttack and worked there as a Moharrir (petition-writer). Not many months had passed before he was promoted to the post of a Munsarir (secretary). Later he left Cuttack for Ranchi and served there also as a Munsarir. This was the last government service in his life.

Ramakrishna's spiritual life began at Ranchi. He resigned his government service and went straight to Ayodhya. Arriving there he heard of the greatness of Sri Mouni Baba from a priest and immediately proceeded to see him at his Ashram. He approached the Baba with joined palms and prayed to him to accept him as his disciple. The Baba granted his prayer and gave him the divine name 'Rama' as his Mantra. Ramakrishna formerly used to repeat the name 'Ramakrishna'. He now repeated only 'Rama'.

His family name was Krishnachandra. When he was admitted into the order of Sannyasins, his preceptor gave him the new name Ramakrishna by which he was since then known.

Ramakrishna left his bed early every morning and went to the river Sarayu to perform his ablutions. He had his bath twice daily—in the morning and in the afternoon. One afternoon while he was bathing in the river, he saw Lord Sri Ramachandra in the form of a small child floating on its waters.

The master of Ramakrishna had a number of disciples. Ramakrishna was one of the few who were engaged in his personal service. He belonged to the closest circle of the master, a sannyasin of the Vaishnava sect.

Ramakrishna had the vision of Lord Sri Rama thrice in three different forms at Ayodhya.

The various sects of Hinduism such as Vaishnava, Ganapatya, Shaiva, Shakta, etc., are often at odds with one another. But in the life of Ramakrishna we see a harmonious blending of all of them. While repeating the joint name 'Ramakrishna', he offered his devotion to Shiva too.

The boy Ramakrishna had some white marks like leucoderma on his leg. The part of the skin which carried those marks became insensitive. His brother advised him to take medicine after consulting a doctor. His father being a religious person advised him to worship Lord Shiva. On his father's advice Ramakrishna went to a temple about five miles from his village to worship the Lord. He remained at the temple as long as twenty-one days praying for his recovery, determined not to budge from the place until his prayer was granted. As a result of this he was completely cured of his disease.

While at Ayodhya Ramakrishna came across an article on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo published in the Hindi monthly *Kalyan*. This prompted him to get further information regarding the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their ideal, and he penned a letter to an inmate of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to that effect. The inmate posted him some Hindi translations of the works of Sri Aurobindo. He was filled with delight as he went through these books. The ideal of Sri Aurobindo appealed to him so much that he dropped his idea of leaving for the Himalayas.

In the wake of reading the writings of Sri Aurobindo came also a dilemma in his mind. He had been initiated into the Vaishnava cult and was a votary of Sri Rama. To abandon one faith for another would be a sin, he thought. He then remained silent for a time. Now a couplet of Tulsidas flashed into his mind. The couplet said, "However dear a person may be, if he stands in the way of God-realisation he should be avoided like an enemy. As Prahlad had forsaken his father, Vibhishana left his brother, the Gopis of Vrindavan deserted their husbands for the sake of the Lord. Yet these persons are worshipped in the world as noble souls."

Therefore he thought that the world is ever changing. God, too, takes different incarnations in different ages. Then why should it be a sin to change one's faith? Following this trend of thought he wrote to the secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram giving vent to his feeling. The secretary handed over the letter to the Mother. The Mother told the secretary to send him her blessings. Accordingly he sent a blessings-packet containing rose-petals in an envelope. After opening the envelope, as soon as he touched the blessing-packet he was immersed in a divine bliss. He remained in this condition of bliss for a number of days and, at the same time, carried on his work in the Ashram as usual. During this time he was not aware of hunger or thirst. He thought if the simple touch of the rose-petals could give him such extraordinary delight, what a delight it would be to see the Mother in person!

In those days it was a rule to obtain prior permission of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in order to see them or to stay in their Ashram. Accordingly he sent a telegram to the secretary of the Ashram, asking permission to join the Ashram. "Come." was the reply he received from the secretary by telegram. Immediately he sat down to meditate and tried to repeat the word 'Ram', but instead of 'Ram', 'Sri Aurobindo' came spontaneously to his lips. He now found himself at the threshold of a golden opportunity. He prepared for his journey to Pondicherry, his next abode.

Men generally hanker after name and fame. But one who kicks them aside is pursued by them like one's shadow. The life of Ramakrishna is a proof of this. Had he remained in Ayodhya, he would have been the Mahanta (head) of the Ashram in which he was living. But giving up his prospects he came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the year 1945 and settled there for ever.

With the Mother's permission he took up work in the common dining-hall of the Ashram in the washing section. There he worked for over forty years till the end of his life.

Praise and honour, to which he was indifferent, now poured in torrents at his feet.

But he was loving and kind to all. Thanks to his tireless efforts the message of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo—the creation of the supramental race—has reached every corner of Orissa

GUNANANDA DAS

(Translated by Gourmohan Mohanta from the original Oriya)

REMEMBERING GOPAL DASS GUPTA (1912-1998)

DESPITE being the only surviving child of my father, Gopal Dass-ji, it was my misfortune that I spent very little time of my life with him. My mother, a tender-hearted village girl, was very fond of children, but five of her offspring died in their infancy. In 1946, her health broken, Mother died—I was then a year and half old. Thereafter my childhood was spent in the lap of my father's mother. I cannot recall a single occasion when father had taken me onto his lap, fondled me or even looked at me fully with tenderness. Perhaps because those days, fondling one's offspring or speaking to one's wife in front of elders was "just not done." Among the few early memories of him, the one that comes readily to mind is of his calm, serene countenance. And I can still hear in my mind the *khat-khat* sound of his *khadanv*, wooden sandals.

Grandma used to go for her bath to the Ganges at 4 a.m. Her darling that I was, as soon as I opened my eyes and found myself alone I would start crying. Equally early, my father too would go there for his bath after which he practised yogasanas and meditation. One morning, not seeing Grandma, I began crying and continued non-stop. Father, who was within earshot, must have tolerated my wailing for quite some time before coming and giving me a real scolding, the first in my life and the last from him. The result was instantaneous silence—my very breath was stifled. This incident created such a fear that the moment I heard the *khat-khat* of his approaching *khadanv*, I would hide myself. Years elapsed before this fear left me.

I might have been six or seven when my father's brother (next to him in age) took me with him to Bombay. During vacations, either we went to Kanpur or father came to Bombay; those were the only occasions for us to be together. I would post him two or three letters a year, mostly to inform him about my progress in studies in which he took great interest, it was also one of the main topics of our conversations. His economy of words on the one hand and my own hesitant nature on the other had erected something of a psychological wall between us. Even so, the experience of a mutual inner closeness of our hearts used to quite often come to me in whiffs as if through some unknown peephole in that barrier! In time, this wall crumbled on its own and, even when physically far, I began to feel his presence near me. I wonder how on many occasions he would sense my inner state; thus he became my greatest support in life.

Uncle, like the rest of the family, was conservative and therefore was not in favour of my continuing studies beyond the Intermediate. The evening before the results of my examinations were to be declared, I was alone on the terrace in a rather pensive mood. Suddenly father came up from behind and asked, "Ranno, why are you so sad? Are you scared of the examination result? You had prepared for the exams as best you could. You have done your duty. Why then worry about the outcome? Leave it in the hands of God." This was his first instruction to me of the Gita's principle of Karmayoga. When I mentioned my doubts about being allowed to continue studies he said, "Who says that you will not be allowed? If you really want to, who can prevent you?"

Thereafter began a long series of correspondence that created an indissoluble bond

of friendship between us I would open out my mind and heart to him in my letters and he solved all my problems and worries with infinite understanding, patience and love. One of father's special qualities was his ability to understand and deal with youngsters and elders at their respective levels. This was the reason why every member of the family, young or old, felt himself to be close to him.

My marriage took place in February 1963. In days when there was no question of obtaining the girl's consent to any marriage proposal, father asked my opinion before the betrothal. Despite honouring and living within social traditions, he readily accepted the good things of the modern era. Among his treasured gifts to me on the occasion of my marriage were a copy each of Ramcharitmanas and Tilak's *Gita Rahasya*.

That year, on 27 June, he gave up his home. Evidently he had postponed fulfilling this long-standing wish until my marriage took place. The day before he left, he led me to his room and handed me a photograph of my mother. "Now you keep this." It was the first time I was seeing my mother's face. In all those nineteen years, I had never dared ask him anything about her; neither had he ever breathed a word about his life's mate. That day he delved deeply into his past giving me an emotional account of his life with my mother. I heard it all in numbed silence; later, when alone, I wept my heart out—how many bygone struggles and storms lay behind that calm, serene and imperturbable exterior!

For father, renouncing home was a mere formality,—even in the midst of the family, he had led the life of a sannyasi. In fact, right from the time I gained some understanding of the happenings around me, I saw him immersed in one activity or another related to his sadhana. Finally, the Divine Mother called her own 'Gopal' (that was how his physical mother called him, I discovered from his diary entries) to Pondicherry and he duly delivered himself at Her Feet on 12 September 1969.

His presence in the Ashram provided me with the good fortune of visiting Pondicherry. But every time I went, he would say, "To come here from such a distance must be rather tedious and expensive. I am all right here, you need not take the trouble of coming." He never wanted anybody to take any trouble on his account while it was his inborn nature to take care of everybody around, young and old. So in spite of his advanced age, he looked after our comforts here to an extent that was often embarrassing.

In 1990, he put a stop to his correspondence with his relatives, permitting us, however, to keep him informed about important events in our lives. Naturally I became distraught until, fortunately, the sudden vacuum in communication was mitigated by the Mother's Grace, when Sunjoy accepted our request to act as the link. Thus we remained in touch with father. But for this arrangement, I wonder if it would have been possible for me to be near him at the hour of his departure from this world.

On 18 July 1998 we came to know through Sunjoy's e-mail of father's admission to the Nursing Home. My husband and I arrived on the 24th and went directly to the Nursing Home. The moment he saw me, he cried out "Ranno!" and wept. It was the first time I saw him in such an emotionally charged mood. But the next instant he

gathered himself and became his usual self. He worried that there was no stool nearby for me to sit on but did not say a word about his own pain and suffering. He enquired after every member of his entire family and his friends of earlier times—as if the major events of his life had been crossing his mind like images in a film. He was full of praise for Dilipda (Dr. Saheb), the staff and arrangement at the Nursing Home. He repeatedly expressed his gratitude to Sunjoy and Ganapati-bhai and spoke of his close friend Pandey-ji (Shri B. D. Pandey). In those last days I spent with him I saw him greet all who visited him with great love and enthusiasm.

After 30 July, he never opened his eyes—perhaps he was concentrating on his ultimate goal of union with the Supreme Brahman and destroying his bonds with this illusory world, *samsara*. Finally 3 August turned out to be the day of his liberation when his soul merged with the Transcendent Divine Flame of the Lord; the Divine Mother had lovingly taken Her child into the folds of Her dress. All through the night I gazed on that serene immobile face resting in eternal sleep and my heart echoed with the receding *khat-khat* of his beloved *khadanv*. But has he really abandoned me? No, he is still around me, close to me, within me...

On the evening of 2 August he gave me the guideline for the rest of my life: “All of you must live in love and harmony.”

USHA R GUPTA

(To be continued)

SADHANA—THE WAY TO FULFILMENT

THE word *sadhana* is Sanskrit and it could be translated as ‘the way to fulfilment’ In India this is the usual word that should, according to the country’s concepts, be used for our path on earth to inner development As Sri Aurobindo put it, ‘All Life is Yoga’; and Yoga is essentially *sadhana*, the path to fulfilment

Visitors and guests from the West have often asked ‘What is your daily life like now? When are the meditations in the Ashram? Is there a timetable with a fixed period for study in the community?’ They are always astonished to learn that none of these things, which are normal in Ashrams, exist here

A German friend of mine who has been coming to Pondicherry regularly for a long time once asked the Mother a particular question Her stay here was over and now she reluctantly had to think about her return, when she would have to live without the support of the Ashram atmosphere So she asked.

‘Is it necessary to live in the Ashram in order to progress on the path to fulfilment?’ The Mother gestured expansively and answered with a smile ‘The whole world is our Ashram!’

Here I would like to present a shortened version of a talk given by Mrs Jo Gebser, Berne, Switzerland She was a professional psychologist, but not a dogmatic one Her words can clarify many questions, as far as what she wants to convey can be expressed in words Here some terms from physics are helpful, where they refer to vibrations, or frequencies of a subtle kind. This level goes far beyond standard psychology, which was why Jo Gebser had, as she told me, ‘set it aside’.

YOU SEEK BECAUSE YOU HAVE FOUND: PATHS TO SELF-DISCOVERY

We live in a world that has lost its way Perhaps this sad condition is the best one in which to find ourselves? But what do these words ‘self’ and ‘find’ mean? This self is referred—as everything is today—to ourselves, the same applies to the finding. For who finds anything, if we do not find ourselves? The process thoughtlessly expressed by the word ‘self-discovery’ is therefore normally the very necessary discovery of ‘myself’, expressed in the term ‘I myself’ But that is not what I wish to speak of The self that is referred to, for example in the word ‘self-recognition’, is, from the psychological point of view, one’s own psychological constitution, ‘self-knowledge’ is the awareness of the psychological movements taking place in us. The self that we want to discover is obviously always connected with the psyche. So along with the question ‘What is the self, really?’ another question is implied. ‘What is the psyche, really?’

When I put this question directly to anyone, no matter what his or her profession or his or her faith, whether a man or a woman, I received answers that were sometimes very beautiful, but which never really clarified the question of the meaning of the

psyche, or of its relation to the self we are seeking, because he or she either restricted himself or herself to the body-soul region, or to the illusions of truths gathered from religions, philosophies, poems or science. .

I received the most enlightening answer to my question about the soul from a child, who said: "The soul is what lets joy through" And I remembered a passage in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where he describes the absolute silence in whose core is joy, the *ananda* of Buddhism, the light in which God dwells. The decisive words in the child's answer however were "lets through". The child suddenly pointed to an hourglass that it always liked to play with, and said, pointing to the narrow waist: "Look, that is the soul, and here down below that is you, and all the angels and stars are flowing into you. And when you turn the hourglass . ." then after a very long, very thoughtful pause, "well, then you and the angels and stars are all one" And he ran laughing away.

Here the word of St. Matthew was fulfilled: "If your eye is pure, then your whole being will be full of light."

It seems to me that our whole dilemma comes from the fact that we have not yet recognised just this area that the child calls "soul", which has also very rightly been labelled "vehicle", the effective part that connects us with the spiritual plane. To put this differently: we still cling to *re-ligio*, that can only live facing backwards to its so-called sources, instead of opening ourselves up to *prae-ligio*—the connection with the transparent, manifesting, original present, that alone makes it possible to perceive and represent the whole. *Religio*, like Mother Church, only connects with natural sources. It turns through worship and ritual to the spiritual plane, but this means to the nature-symbolic powers within the believer. For this reason it cannot concern itself with the true spiritual plane, which is also the future one, because even a projection of the father or the father-world that is presented as the spiritual world is nothing more than a connection to natural phenomena, in this case those belonging not to earthly but to cosmic Nature. Unless we manage in some sense to go beyond Heaven, that means break through to the Principle that is above all heavens, we can neither grasp the Spiritual nor be able to reach it. And that means that humanity and the world are in danger of disintegration, for lack of participation with the Spiritual.

So to our work with human beings we would need to add something that leads beyond methods and systems, something that could perhaps best be called spiritual practice.

How strongly today, through an emergence of the integral consciousness, knowledge about ourselves, a belief in our own higher nature, and in the possibility of liberating it are already alive in us, is shown amongst other things by the number of yoga and meditation schools with which we are being flooded. And these are increasing at an almost uncanny rate. For us however this fact should be a challenge and not an occasion for negative criticism, for it is no matter of chance that Asia is transmitting to us its spiritual heritage just at this moment when it itself is taking a leap into the structures of the rational mind, which the West is just beginning to try to go beyond. All

that is flowing to us now of the wisdom, truths and practices of the East must be received and above all adapted by us, in order to make it applicable to the whole of humanity. We have to see this development in a very wide perspective. And we should not allow ourselves to be disturbed by the sometimes troublesome and often very amusing swindles that many of the so-called oriental "masters" give rise to in the Western world. These are side-effects, that are even very necessary, because they bring a breath of life into the fixities of our rational schemes of thought. We have to take account of new circumstances. This requires us to go beyond established, inherited and tried views, and is connected with the anxiety and sense of compulsion that grows out of the impotence of our understanding, because we are still too closely bound within the old structures of consciousness . . .

Meditation is a sensitising process for becoming aware of higher and higher frequencies. It gives bodily control, and calms the grosser frequencies of Matter on which our life depends. To translate this into an image: this would imply for example that if I want to listen to a programme being transmitted on the ultrashort waves, I should not switch to the longwave channel.

So let us find a quiet corner, sit down, or lie or kneel, it doesn't matter to start with, and just observe our body. This should be done in a detached way, as we might observe turmoil on the ground from a small aeroplane. For there is really a turmoil—all the tension and vibration in the cells, all the knights' moves of the thoughts, a pain here, some tension there, a dreadful confusion. To bring in some order, people usually try to impose a strict control. They force the body into a particular posture, they force the breathing into a particular rhythm by counting the breaths, they concentrate on particular objects, or on mantras or tones, in order to achieve mental silence or a sense of emptiness. But because these exercises belong to a different structure of consciousness, they have lost their relevance for us today and become pure body-training. And then, in our egoistic ambition or an excess of ecstatic emotion we hope to reach high spiritual realisations, especially when the exercises are also connected with magical rituals. In the course of the exercises the body itself gives indications of the requirements that a new inner poise makes of it. Through a completely detached observation one soon notices from which region this confusion originates. I would like to label this, as a whole, our personality—our vitality, our life-force, that has made itself independent, "abandoned by all good spirits," and that turns around and around in an endless tangle like a gramophone needle stuck in one groove. pleasure and pain, good and evil, truth and falsehood, sentimentality and sensitivity are here inextricably interwoven. And this is the province that we have been trying for centuries to find our way out of—through philosophy, theology, or medicine. Today we are experiencing the sad outcome: psychosomatic illnesses, self-centredness, social disintegration, aggression, disorder, murder—extending to the uppermost levels of government. This region could be characterised as "the corporeal"—and then we would be on the track of the devil of whom Jesus says: "The devil is your father and you want only to act according to your father's will, why then do you not understand my words?"

But it is also this life-force that today is putting a strong pressure on our too-rational thinking, that wants to break down the walls that we have built for ourselves, because it can no longer bear the stress of a life that has become meaningless, work that has become meaningless, leisure that has become meaningless. It is the force that today is appealing for ‘life-qualities’, and that expresses itself, for example, in men wearing their hair longer, the expression of a wish for inner strength that was missing. And everywhere we hear a single cry, ‘For God’s sake, leave me in peace!’ And this ‘For God’s sake’ is not said entirely unconsciously.

For in fact we have in us a form or a possibility of consciousness that is total peace. A consciousness that is at peace with itself, that needs nothing, that is dependent on nothing, that is sufficient unto itself. In one form of worship this consciousness is symbolised by Shiva, sitting in profound meditation on the snow-peaks of the Himalayas. But this is not a dead peace, not Nirvana or the Void or Nothingness. For into this peace comes a movement that is full of life. Tantric Buddhism calls this movement Shakti, divine force, in Jewish thought this is the Shekina, the presence of God, radiance breaking through a cloud. In the Gospel of St Thomas, Jesus speaks of this form of consciousness to his disciples. ‘When they ask you what is the sign of your Father who is in you, tell them, ‘There is a stillness and a movement.’’

This is the consciousness we have to find in ourselves. The next phase of the exercise is silence, absolute silence, listening within, having patience, being able to wait, not reacting to anything that happens. This discipline seems almost impossible for us to achieve today. For once we have taken the firm decision to practise, that is to open ourselves to the spiritual, to transform ourselves, our superficial ego is no longer in charge—our ‘Self’ has taken over. This change of government naturally often involves merciless battles. Everything we were so sure of, our virtues, our ‘goodwill’, our moral and ethical values, the certainties of our life come—at the very least—into question. And no outer aid—no teacher, no Himalayan peak, no cloister, no desert island, no community, no group, no Ashram—will allow us to transfer our final responsibility for our own change onto a leader or a group. We have to manage this entirely on our own. The only thing that can help is our trust, the faint voice of ‘conscience’, the certainty that leads us, which is our inner knowledge of our mission and task here on earth, and the iron will for transformation, to conquer the resistance in ourselves.

If we can continue in the practice of silence, of stillness, and above all allow ourselves time, which means becoming free of time, the increasing inner silence will also become apparent outside. Our first small step forward will be that the stillness does not leave us even when we come into contact with the formerly so painful turbulence of daily life. ‘One feels the inner being as one’s own true Self, while the outer one is something superficial, the Self acts through the inner being upon life,’ says Sri Aurobindo.

The next step in our practice is concentration of our gathered consciousness on the area above the head, and we combine this with a call, with a prayer for stillness and

peace, for light and power, or for joy and presence. This intense concentration requires a strong effort of will, for the body—or Matter—tires quickly. So at first this should be done for only a short time, until the body has got used to the demands being made on it for a greater awareness, and becomes transformed and “full of light”.

This call, this plea, are no longer prayer in the old sense. It has nothing to do with wishes and fulfilment. Although still connected with words, it is rather a vibration at a higher frequency. Jean Gebser refers to this vibration in his *Wintergedicht*

“..Wisdom grows brighter not in the dark realm of the word, but in the area around it; in the flicker that flies as an aura around each word becomes perceptible what this overseeing knowledge knows .

This perception, this knowing, this inner certainty is not communicable, but can be experienced, a blue-gold stream constantly flowing through us. It is being at rest in oneself, the mirror-image of the purely personal being in oneself, it is the finding of oneself, coming to a halt within oneself, the higher self, the condition of wholeness, the Self ”

Jean Gebser has formulated in twelve points how this perception expresses itself in the visible world:

- In place of hectic movement, stillness and the ability to remain silent;
- In place of thinking exclusively in terms of aims and goals, disinterestedness;
- In place of power-seeking, surrender and the capacity for true love;
- In place of the quantity-oriented rat-race, quality-oriented spiritual action;
- In place of manipulation, patient submission to the leading of the force;
- In place of the mechanical order of organisation, being in order;
- In place of prejudice, a refusal to make value-judgements, so in place of quick temper an unsentimental tolerance;
- In place of dualistic objects, transparency;
- In place of dealing, poise;
- In place of *homo faber, homo integer*;
- In place of divided human beings, the whole of humanity;
- In place of the emptiness of the limited world, open wideness to the open world.

Today our task is to fulfil these requirements. It does not matter how long this takes. The important thing is for us to begin, here and now, so that one day again some Pilate can say: “Behold—a true man ”

A SUDDEN INTUITION... A SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITION!

Just a few days before the Golden Jubilee Special of *Mother India* made its grand appearance on the Mother's 121st Birth-anniversary Day, 21.2.99, a sadhika, associated with *Mother India* for a long time, was seized with a sudden intuitive idea of arranging an Exhibition on *Mother India* with archival materials. There was hardly any time to arrange such an Exhibition. But, undaunted, she went on aggressively ahead with her idea, took necessary help from all possible sources, and even issued invitation letters signed by Amal Kiran requesting us to make it convenient to attend a meditation at 4.30 p.m. on 21.2.99 at COUNOUMA'S Office (where the Exhibition was arranged). When I wanted to bring to her notice the difficulty which many might feel, because it was Darshan day and they would be busy preparing for the March Past in the Playground at 6.30 p.m. she discarded it forthwith saying "I am also going to attend the March Past, so?"

On the Darshan day she reminded me, saying: "You must come for the meditation by 4.30." I felt, I must be there anyhow by 4.30 p.m. After all it is a loving demand and the letter of request comes from Amal Kiran.

As I approached COUNOUMA'S Office from the Balcony Road on foot (because the roads around the Ashram were blocked to facilitate the visit to the Mother's Room) I saw a small group waiting outside COUNOUMA'S Office. As I drew near, I was extremely delighted to see Amal Kiran in his wheel-chair ready to be taken in by his attendants. I shook hands with him, warmly thankful for his letter. There was a small notice requesting people to keep their chappals outside. I did the same and waited for the surprise that was inside!...

Within a few minutes we were ushered in, and we were before two living pictures of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on an altar beautifully decorated with flowers. An atmosphere charged with the Presence of the Two who are One. And the walls all around were covered with fascinating exhibits!

Here again that very sadhika made a stormy appearance and commanded the attendants of Amal Kiran to bring his chair near the altar, ran inside an adjacent chamber to bring a copy of *Mother India* Golden Jubilee Special and handed it over to Amal Kiran, saying "Place it before Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This is your offering to them on the occasion of this Golden Jubilee of *Mother India*." Prompt came Amal Kiran's sweet reply: "Of course!" and he obeyed her. By this time it was about 4.25 p.m. She then commanded the attendants to take Amal Kiran around, herself accompanying him. I wondered when the Meditation would come about! Because the letter of request signed by Amal Kiran read thus:

MOTHER INDIA GOLDEN JUBILEE MEDITATION
(21 February 1999 at 4.30 p.m. COUNOUMA'S House)

Mother India is completing the Golden Jubilee year this February, the

periodical which Sri Aurobindo called “My Paper” As a mark of our sincere gratitude to him and to the Mother, we propose to have a brief meditation in the *Mother India* Office (Counouma’s House) on 21 February 1999 at 4 30 p.m.

We request you to kindly make it convenient to be present for the same

Here the Meditation at 4 30 p m is given the prime importance. But there was hardly any time left! In the meantime the sadhika showed Amal Kiran a couple of exhibits, stopped his chair at that spot and made it face the photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on the altar, and ran into the adjacent chamber As I looked back to see what was happening, I saw Nirodbaran taking his seat beside Amal Kiran. Already the Mother’s music for the Meditation had started and it was exactly 4 30 p m ! The humming place suddenly froze into a deep silence and again the Presence of the Lord and the Mother was overwhelming.. and needless to say the exhibition was a grand success, appreciated by one and all.

SATADAL

MOTHER INDIA GOLDEN JUBILEE SPECIAL—SOME COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS

- 1 Page 90 of the Golden Jubilee Special of *Mother India* (February-March 1999) reproduces a facsimile of the frontpage of *Mother India*’s first issue But regretfully this frontpage was dated February 19, 1948 The remaining 11 pages of the paper were dated correctly February 19, 1949
- 2 The error about the year of publication on the frontpage seems to have caused some confusion at a number of places It should be taken as February 1949 and not February 1948 It should also be noted that *Mother India* started as a fortnightly and not a weekly
- 3 In this regard attention of the readers is drawn to the Introduction to *India and the World Scene* by K D Sethna (Amal Kiran) published in 1997 It also furnishes some details as to how the name “Mother India” was chosen
- 4 On page 376, line 12, please read “Conscious Force” and not “Conscious non-Force”

Editor

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of April 1999)

SINCE the life of the *Arya* synchronised with the course of the First World War and the months of peace-making by the League of Nations, it was inevitable that Sri Aurobindo occasionally should make that ghastly global tragedy the subject of formal discussion in his journal. Some of these articles appeared as a book in 1920. And it has since been printed more than once. Whether a war is going on or not, thinking men cannot help probing the causes of war, and speculating about the possibility of the permanent outlawry of war. In the foreword to the first published edition of *War and Self-Determination*, Sri Aurobindo underlined the idea behind the discussions. He wrote

“The four essays* published in this volume were not written at one time or conceived with any intentional connection between them in idea or purpose. The first was written in the early months of the war, two others when it was closing, the last recently during the formation and first operations of that remarkably ill-jointed, stumbling and hesitating machine, the League of Nations. But still they happen to be bound together by a common idea or at least look at four related subjects from a single general standpoint,—the obvious but practically quite forgotten truth that the destiny of the race in this age of crisis and revolution will depend much more on the spirit which we are than on the machinery we shall use. A few words on the present bearing of this truth by way of foreword may not be out of place.

“The whole difficulty of the present situation turns upon the peculiar and critical character of the age in which we are living. It is a period of immense and rapid changes so swift that few of us who live among them can hope to seize their whole burden or their inmost meaning or to form any safe estimate of their probable outcome. Great hopes are abroad, high and large ideals fill the view, enormous forces are in the field. It is one of those vast critical moments in the life of the race when all is pressing towards change and reconstitution. The ideals of the future, especially the ideals of freedom, equality, commonalty, unity, are demanding to be brought out from their limited field in the spiritual life or the idealism of the few and to be given some beginning of a true soul of action and bodily shape in the life of the race. But banded against any such fulfilment there are powerful obstacles, and the greatest of them come not from outside but from within. For they are the old continued impulsions and obstinate recalcitrance of mankind’s past nature, the almost total subjection of its normal mind to egoistic, vital and material interests and ambitions which make not for union but for strife and discord, the plausibilities of the practical reason which looks at the possibilities of the day and the morrow and shuts its eyes to the consequences of the day after, the habits of pretence and fiction which impel men and nations to pursue and forward their own interest under the camouflage of a specious idealism, a habit made up only partly of the

* A fifth one, “After the War”, has been added in this edition

diplomatic hypocrisy of politicians, but much more of a general half-voluntary self-deception, and, finally, the inrush of blinder unsatisfied forces and crude imperfect idealisms—of such is the creed of Bolshevism—to take advantage of the unrest and dissatisfaction prevalent in such times and lay hold for a while on the life of mankind. It is these things which we see dominant around us and not in the least degree any effort to be of the right spirit and evolve from it the right method. The one way out harped on by the modern mind which has been as much blinded as enlightened by the victories of physical science, is the approved western device of salvation by machinery, get the right kind of machine to work and everything can be done, this seems to be the modern creed. But the destinies of mankind cannot be turned out to order in an American factory. It is a subtler thing than that which is now putting its momentous problem before us, and if the spirit of the things we profess is absent or falsified, no method or machinery can turn them out for us or deliver the promised goods. That is the one truth which the scientific and industrialised modern mind forgets always, because it looks at process and commodity and production and ignores the spirit in man and the deeper inner law of his being.

“War and violent revolutions can be eliminated, if we will, though not without immense difficulty, but on the condition that we get rid of the inner causes of war and the constantly accumulating Karma of successful injustice of which violent revolutions are the natural reactions. Otherwise, there can be only at best a fallacious period of artificial peace. What was in the past will be sown still in the present and continue to return on us in the future.”¹

In *The Passing of War* (written in the early months of the war), Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the egoistic craving for power and domination, the scramble of competitive commercialism for markets and the periodic unloosing of war form a fatally logical sequence, and only a spiritual solution can prove to be an effective and a lasting one. He explained

“The progress of humanity proceeds by a series of imaginations which the Will in the race turns into accomplished facts and a train of illusions which contain each of them an inevitable truth. The truth is there in the secret Will and Knowledge that are conducting our affairs for us and it reflects itself in the soul of mankind, the illusion is in the shape we give to that reflection, the veil of arbitrary fixations of time, place and circumstance which that deceptive organ of knowledge, the human intellect, weaves over the face of the Truth. Human imaginations are often fulfilled to the letter; our illusions on the contrary find the truth behind them realised most unexpectedly, at a time, in ways, under circumstances far other than those we had fixed for them.

“Man’s illusions are of all sorts and kinds, some of them petty though not unimportant,—for nothing in the world is unimportant,—others vast and grandiose. The greatest of them all are those which cluster round the hope of a perfected society, a perfected race, a terrestrial millennium. Each new idea, religious or social, which takes

possession of the epoch and seizes on large masses of men, is in turn to be the instrument of these high realisations; each in turn betrays the hope which gave it its force to conquer. And the reason is plain enough to whosoever chooses to see; it is that no change of ideas or of the intellectual outlook upon life, no belief in God or Avatar or Prophet, no victorious science or liberating philosophy, no social scheme or system, no sort of machinery internal or external can really bring about the great desire implanted in the race, true though that desire is in itself and the index of the goal to which we are being led. Because man is himself not a machine nor a device, but a being and a most complex one at that, therefore he cannot be saved by machinery, only by an entire change which shall affect all the members of his being, can he be liberated from his discords and imperfections.”²

“... So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical facts of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness, human nature recuperates itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace, may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end; the organisation will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity, what is within us, must manifest itself outside.

“Meanwhile it is well that every false hope and confident prediction should be answered as soon as may well be by the irony of the gods; for only so can we be driven to the perception of the real remedy. Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men, but a dominant sense of unity and commonalty, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers,—that is a fragile bond,—but as parts of himself, only when he has learned to live, not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a large universal consciousness, can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapons, pass out of his life without the possibility of return. Meanwhile that he should struggle even by illusions towards that end, is an excellent sign, for it shows that the truth behind the illusion is pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.”³

The Unseen Power was written when the war had ended, phantasmagoria of the world crisis. When Sri Aurobindo sees the terrible havoc and ruin and suffering caused by the war, he is reminded of Arjuna’s words in the Gita which provoke Krishna’s power. “I am the Time-Spirit, destroyer of the world, arisen huge-statured for the destruction of the nations,” and Sri Aurobindo concludes that it is not human reason or

human science but a greater spirit, the *Sutradhara* that is behind the blood scenes. Sri Aurobindo interprets.

“Great has been the havoc and ruin, immense the suffering, thick the blood-red cloud of darkness enveloping the world, heavy the toil of life, bottomless the expenditure of treasure and human resources, and all has not yet been worked out, the whole price has not yet been paid, for the after-effects of the war are likely to be much greater than its present effects, and much that by an effort of concentration has resisted the full shock of the earthquake, will fall in the after-tremblings. Well might the mind of a man during the calamity, aware of the Power that stood over the world wrapped in this tempest, repeat the words of Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra,—

*dr̥ṣtvādbhutam rūpam ugram tavedam
lokatrayam pravyathitam mahātman
dr̥ṣtvā hi tvām pravyathitāntarātmā
dhṛtum na vindāmi śamam ca viṣno.
yathā nadīnām bahavo'mbuvegāh
samudramevābhimukhā dravanti,
tathā tavāmī nara-loka-vīrāḥ
viśanti vaktrānyabhivijvalanti,
yathā pradīptam jvalanam pataṅgāh
viśanti nāśāya samrddhavegāh
tathaiva nāśāya viśanti lokās
tavāpi vaktrāni samrddhavegāh
lelihyase grasamānaḥ samantāt
lokān samagrān vadanairjvaladbhiḥ
tejobhur āpūrya jagat samagram
bhāsastavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣno
ākhyāhi me ko bhavānugrarūpo
namo'stu te devavara prasāda
vijñātumicchāmi bhavantamādyam
na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttim.*

When is seen this Thy fierce and astounding form, the three worlds are all in pain and suffer, O Thou mighty Spirit. .. Troubled and in anguish is the soul within me as I look upon Thee and I find no peace or gladness. As is the speed of many rushing waters racing towards the ocean, so all these heroes of the world of men are entering into Thy many mouths of flame As a swarm of moths with ever-increasing speed fall to their destruction into a fire that someone has kindled, so now the nations with ever-increasing speed are entering into Thy jaws of doom Thou lickest the regions all around with Thy tongues and Thou art swallowing up all the nations in Thy mouths of burning, all the world is filled with the blaze of

Thy energies, fierce and terrible are Thy lustres and they burn us, O Vishnu
 Declare to me who art Thou that comest to us in this form of fierceness, salutation
 to Thee, O Thou great Godhead, turn Thy heart to grace. I would know who art
 Thou who wast from the beginning, for I know not the will of Thy workings

‘If the first answer might seem to come in the same words that answered the
 appeal of Arjuna, ‘I am the Time-Spirit, destroyer of the world, arisen huge-statured for
 the destruction of the nations’,

kālo'smī loka-ksaya-krt pravṛddhah
lokām samāhartum iha pravṛttah,

and the voice the same to those who would shrink back hesitating from participation in the devastating struggle and massacre, ‘Even without thee all these shall cease to be who stand in the opposing hosts, for already have I slain them in my foreseeing will, know thyself to be an instrument only of an end predestined’,—still in the end it is the Friend of man, the Charioteer of his battle and his journey who appears in the place of the form of destruction and the outcome of all the ruin is the *dharmarājya*, the kingdom of the Dharma To humanity as to the warrior of Kurukshetra the concluding message has been uttered, ‘Therefore arise, destroy the foe, enjoy a rich and happy kingdom’ But the kingdom of what Dharma? It is doubtful enough whether as the nations were blind to the nature of the destruction that was coming, they may not be at least purblind to the nature of the construction that is to be created. An increase of mechanical freedom to be lavished or doled out according to the needs, interests, hesitations of the old-world forces that still remain erect, a union effected by a patchwork of the remnants of the past and the unshaped materials of the future, a credit and debit account with fate writing off so much of the evil and error of the past as can no longer be kept and writing up as good capital,—with some diminutions by way of acquitment of conscience, part payment of overdue debts,—all that has not been hopelessly destroyed, an acceptance of the change already effected by the tempest or made immediately inevitable and a new system of embankments to prevent the further encroachments of the flood, is not likely to put a successful term to the cataclysm Even if a short-sighted sagacity could bring this about for a time by a combined effort of successful and organised egoisms making terms with the powerful Idea-forces that are abroad as the messengers of the Time-Spirit, still it would be only an artificial check leading to a new upheaval in the not distant future A liquidation of the old bankrupt materialistic economism which will enable it to set up business again under a new name with a reserve capital and a clean ledger, will be a futile attempt to cheat destiny. Commercialism has no doubt its own Dharma, its ideal of utilitarian justice and law and adjustment, its civilisation presided over by the sign of the Balance, and its old measures being now annulled, it is eager enough to start afresh with a new system of calculated values But a *dharmarājya* of the

half-penitent Vaishya is not to be the final consummation of a time like ours pregnant with new revelations of thought and spirit and new creations in life, nor is a golden or rather a copper-gilt age of the sign of the Balance to be the glorious reward of this anguish and travail of humanity. It is surely the kingdom of another and higher Dharma that is in preparation''⁴

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *SABCL*, Vol 15 pp 575-77
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- 3 *Ibid* , pp 586-87
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BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi, by *Pratibha Ray*. Translated from Oriya by Pradip Bhattacharya. (Rupa & Co., 15, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta - 700 073. 402 pages Rs 145)

RECREATING the legends of the *Mahabharata* has been a favourite pastime with Indian authors ever since Kalidasa chose the story of Sakuntala for dramatisation two thousand years ago. Some of our finest Sanskrit writers have made use of the *Mahabharata* cycle: *Kiratarjuniya*, *Venisamhara*, *Urubhanga* . the list is long.

This century saw the rise of the novel and the writers went to the *Mahabharata* for thematic inspirations In recent times the traumatic anguish suffered by Karna and Draupadi has given us two masterly narratives: *Mrityunjaya* by Shiwaji Sawant in Marathi, *Yajnaseni* by Pratibha Ray in Oriya. Pradip Bhattacharya's translation shows that Pratibha's original Oriya must have strong and suggestive whorls of significance. Here is no doubt a welcome addition to the growing shelf of Indian literature in translation

Pratibha Ray is a tireless storyteller She has studied the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa well as also the Oriya version of the epic by Sarala Dasa. This may not have been easy, if she read them to *understand* the lives of the epic characters. For, the epic is full of bafflements. The major bafflement is to get into the process of an utterly human story while remaining hopelessly entangled in supra-normal conditions.

I have often wondered whether Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's attempt to clear Krishna's story of the supra-normal encrustations wasn't wise. We are human, and when we read classics, we are in search of remedies for these human problems. Paranormal matter can hopelessly confuse our sense of categories.

It is, however, not necessary to brush aside all that is paranormal in our epic tellings. Bankim Chandra himself did not do so. He was not averse to the presence of the spiritual. For instance, he did not deny the Avatarhood of Sri Krishna. Nor the so-called supernatural phenomena.

I am aware that there are many such natural laws of which we are ignorant. Just as a tribal may consider a clock or messages sent over the electric wires supernatural phenomena, so we too consider many incidents in the same fashion Admitting our ignorance on such counts, however, without special proof we cannot believe in any supernatural incident, because it is not one's duty to accept beyond the ken of one's knowledge any divine law without proof.

The phenomenon of Grace is present all the time around us, inexplicable in its workings For the rest, Bankim Chandra wanted us to avoid cluttering the countries of our mind with such phenomena when there was actually no need to do so. There were perfectly alternative tellings

The problem confronts us in a sharper manner for Pratibha Ray confesses writing *Yajnaseni* as a result of what happened to a young girl she knew. Named Krishnaa, the girl had had to obtain a divorce from her husband who was a debauchee and a drunkard. Friends and relations were full of sympathy for the girl. But their tune changed when she remarried:

Well, when her very name is Krishnaa, she could be happy only after taking a second husband. Arre! The Krishnaa of Mahabharat took five husbands, and still not being satisfied, was attracted to Karna and Krishna.

Pratibha was deeply pained as it brought to her mind the calumny Draupadi had endured though herself blameless. Pratibha adds further sentimental dimensions by making Draupadi fall in love with Krishna himself first, and resolves the problem in a rather simplistic way—if Krishna is the immanent universal, he is in the five Pandavas as well!

This is Pratibha's weakness. Instead of putting a rein on the paranormal happenings in the original text, she blithely adds more complications that take away the tragic aura that surrounds Draupadi in the noble accents of Vyasa. In *Yajnaseni* there is further distancing of the epic heroine from a suffering woman of contemporary times.

Yajnaseni. The title is a magnificent one. She is the one born in a sacrificial fire (because Drupada's wife refuses to accept the *havis* and thus denies Draupadi a normal entry into the world), the daughter of Yajnasena Drupada. Pratibha underlines the idea that Draupadi was born in the fire, a young woman of surpassing beauty which was often described by Panchala's court poets. However, she does not tarry to analyse the 'lost childhood' of Draupadi and its possible effect on her later anxieties, but proceeds to retell the *Mahabharata* story line as one long flashback, as Yajnaseni lay dying, abandoned by the five Pandavas on their onward march towards the beyond.

Reading *Yajnaseni* one almost feels that this is a document of Draupadi's defence and that she definitely deserves the title *sati*, a virtuous, chaste wife. Unfortunately, *sati* is the most misunderstood term in India's social history. To associate the term only with a lady who has one husband at a time is to woefully limit its connotation. The term has to be understood properly if we wish to avoid Roop Kunwar tragedies and the other obscurantisms of our times.

Sati comes from *sat* which has various meanings including noble, existence, worthy and steady. The feminine *sati* also means 'a female ascetic' and Goddess Durga is known as Sati the Existent. *Sat* is the base for the blossoming of Consciousness which leads us to Bliss. Thus Panchali is not to be seen merely as a good wife (it is irrelevant whether she had one or five husbands, these traditions belong to social mores of particular climes and ages) but as the Eternal Feminine. One must remember the strong words she uses in the Udyoga Parva (Canto Eighty-One) to Krishna and the dramatic manner in which she holds up her dark tresses to him to recollect the implacable vow she had undertaken in the Kuru Court.

It is this Draupadi, the image of Durga as Sati, we invoke in the Vedas for overcoming undesirable happenings (*anishtaparihaaraartham*)

*Taam agnivaranaam tapasaajvalanteem vairochaneem karmaphaleshu jushtaam
durgaam devam saranamaham prapadye sutarasi tarase namah*

Fire-sheened, She burns up evil by her flames, this consort of Vairochana (Shiva), who is worshipped by devotees for gaining results of works I surrender to Durga Devi who helps me cross (this life) easily.

The image of Draupadi has to be related to this Vedic origin as also the fact that the Devi is described as born in the *chit-agni*. Though this *chit-agni* is referred to as the fire created by the gods out of their own limbs to gain an incarnation for overcoming Bhandasura, it is actually *jnana-agni*, the Fire of Knowledge which flares up when ego is used as *ahuti* to put an end to all karmas, the *jnana-agni* spoken of by Krishna. If we take for granted the extraordinary circumstances of Draupadi's birth, then we have to see her as an extraordinary woman who faces the trials with a superhuman endurance. Only this image of Draupadi can be of contemporary relevance and render help to the educated Indian woman who loses her self-confidence too easily and seeks self-destruction when caught in a crisis.

There is no need to justify Draupadi's chastity as a wife of five husbands which in effect *Yajnaseni* tries to do in many chapters. For instance, Karna does enough damage in the Kuru Court when he joins the Kauravas in humiliating Draupadi. There really is no need for the rather involved addition now of his rejecting food cooked by Draupadi as his high idealism would not permit eating food prepared by 'a public woman'.

Such sentimental story-telling is as damaging to the 'role model' as the incident in Kamyak forest (Krishna "writing a letter and keeping it in a golden lotus plucked from Kubera's lake" and that style of imagination) in making epic characters relevant to our times. It must be remembered that using *authentic* material to draw new lessons is an admirable task but never an easy one. Yet, it is a task worthy of attempt, as Sri Aurobindo says in the play (left unfinished), *The Maid in the Mill*:

He's creator
Who greatly handles great material,
Calls order out of the abundant deep,
Not who invents sweet shadows out of air

The task involves careful sifting and well-planned elaboration. The aim is to *cleanse* the material but one must needs approach the task with humility.

Sri Aurobindo was writing exactly one hundred years ago. He found the epic characters to be "ideal presentments of character-types" and Draupadi (or Karna or Kunti) comes to us as one who is the very ideal of Durga-like power. This has to be

remembered so that the woman facing an unjust calumny or the woman who is struggling in a crisis does not give in to sentimental sighs of self-pity.

Pratibha Ray's novel does contain a mesmerising picture of Draupadi who is 'burdened with the sorrow and struggle in Time', the image of woman in all her yesterdays. How right Pratibha is in portraying Draupadi's anguish after she is drenched in Duhshasana's blood! She hits at the quintessence of womanhood when Draupadi smells Abhimanyu's blood in this gory circumstance. She further reveals the spirit of Mother India when Draupadi asks Krishna not to allow the land to be split up anymore. *Yajnaseni* thus concludes with a benediction and a prayer:

Therefore I request that because of race, religion, language and colour let no country split into parts like Hastina and Indraprastha. Inequality is the variety of Your creation. Let not the integrity, unity and purity of any country be destroyed because of this. I have suffered the consequences of the great war. Both the victor and the vanquished lose their friends and relations. Civilization, culture, wealth, life—all vanish.

Such was also the seminal message of Sri Aurobindo to the nation on 15 August 1947. Half a century later, there is need for proclaiming this message of integrality in a louder voice. *Yajnaseni* does that, concluding with Pratibha's earnest wish: 'That in the soul of this world, sorely beset by war, that final prayer of Yajnaseni should reverberate: *Om shantih! shantih! shantih!*'

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Rajat's Inheritance and Other Short Stories, by *Chunulal Chowdhury* Published by Vijay Poddar from 206, South Ex Plaza, 389 Masjid Moth, South Extn -2, New Delhi-110049. Price Rs 25

It is a collection of short stories and anecdotes which appeared in *Mother India* over a period of time, commencing from 1961, along with the author's other writings.

The stories will capture the imagination and touch the heart of both the young and the old. Chunulal Chowdhury writes candidly in crisp and clear language and he has the true ability to draw the attention of his readers. His settings and characters are Indian. His stories have an element of suspense and twist and they often convey an elevating message, as in *Rajat's Inheritance* and *On the Sea-Shore*. His anecdotes often touch the heart of the reader, as in *The Story Behind Tears* and *Nishikanta as I Knew Him*. He has a commendable skill for subtle endings as in *The Great Discovery*, *Aseem's Letter*, etc. Of the anecdotes, *The Teacher Who Never Smiled* is a masterpiece. The readers who knew Kishor Gandhi are bound to be moved.

Out of the nine stories, *Rajat's Inheritance*, *On the Sea-Shore* and *The Teacher*

Who Never Smiled are especially good stories. Though critics may not agree to count *The Story Behind Tears* as a short story, it is a nice piece about the famous Bengali novelist, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay

The experiences of his life as an Ashramite here since 1953 are the raw material for the writer's anecdotes. They are intimate to us and hence become more enjoyable.

Chunilal Chowdhury's small book of 56 pages will gladden many hearts. Many will find immense interest in it

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

The Century of Life by Sri Aurobindo (An English translation of Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka*) Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry. Rs. 50

The Century of Life is Sri Aurobindo's English rendering of Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka* in Sanskrit. The translation was done some time around 1900 and it was first published in 1923. But the present publication (February 1998) of the book brought out by the Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry is unique in that it gives the original Sanskrit text along with the English rendering. This not only enables the knowers of both the languages to make a comparative study, but even those who are not well versed in Sanskrit can enjoy the English rendering and yet not miss what its Sanskrit counterpart has to provide.

Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka* is a typical example of classical epigrammatic poetry in vogue during Bhartrihari's time. This type of poetry is called *Subhashita* in Sanskrit. A *Subhashita* may be defined as 'a thing well said and therefore memorable'. As a successful *Subhashita* throws an arc-light on a passing object, its style has the 'instantaneous concentration of vision' and 'a crowded lucidity of separate detail in the clear-cut unity of the picture'. In this attempt of writing epigrammatic poetry, the 'power of compression' which Sanskrit possesses has given Bhartrihari an added help. The 'harmonic variations of four-lined stanza' of classical prosody provides a handy instrument to the poet to express some vivid and beautiful picture of the various aspects of life and conduct. The style of Bhartrihari is a conscious blend of richness with concentrated force and directness of expression and the vividness and the lucidity in thought and matter.

Such a style is typical of and true to the personality of Bhartrihari. His is a personality with "the true heroic turn of mind and turn of speech, he breathes a large and puissant atmosphere. High-spirited, high-minded, high of temper. admiring courage, firmness and daring aspiration above all things. dowered with a trenchant power of scorn and sombre irony, and occasionally of stern invective.."¹

What a true picture of the personality of the creator of the *Nitishataka*! Any number of verses may be quoted from sections 'Fools and Folly', 'The Wicked', 'Fate', even from 'Miscellaneous Verses' to show the truth of what Sri Aurobindo writes

above about Bhartrihari's personality. Such a personality is genuinely well fitted for the purpose of writing epigrammatic poetry. Nowhere it is more true of the dictum 'The Style is the man himself' than in the case of Bhartrihari's *Nitushataka*.

As the title signifies, *Nitushataka* is commonly expected to have as its theme a hundred morals of life. Bhartrihari has, perhaps, taken the meaning of the Sanskrit word *niti* in a vaster and more complex sense. *Nitushataka* is not merely a century of morals. It includes also "policy and worldly wisdom, the rule of successful as well as the law of ideal conduct" and makes observations of all "the turns and forces determining the movement of human character and action,"² comments Sri Aurobindo. Bhartrihari's *Nitushataka* is, in fact, "a series of poetical epigrams" upon human life and conduct. It is in this sense that the book may be regarded as a 'criticism of life'.

Nitushataka contains and expresses, as Sri Aurobindo writes, "high ethical thought or worldly wisdom or brief criticisms of aspects of life."³ This work is particularly significant as it reveals one of "the three leading motives of the mind of the age, its reflective interest in life and turn for high and strong and minute thinking." *Nitushataka* is divided into ten sections called *paddhatis*. Each *paddhati* deals with an aspect of life in general. Here the poet uses many possible variations of the four-lined stanza, giving him ample scope and opportunity to compress in one small stanza enough material. The Sanskrit text appended along with the English rendering will help readers assess for themselves what has been said about Bhartrihari's poetry.

Coming now to the English rendering of *Nitushataka*, Sri Aurobindo has followed the Sanskrit text edited by Telang in the Bombay Sanskrit series. In the translation no attempt has been made at close verbal rendering, for 'it would be disastrous' in a translation from a different family of languages as from Sanskrit into English. Therefore, "the principle of translation followed," in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "has been to preserve faithfully the thought, spirit and images of the original, but otherwise to take the full licence of a poetical rendering."³ The distinctive features of Bhartrihari's style could not be rendered in the English language. The "severity and compact massiveness of Sanskrit diction," not possible in English, have been substituted by "the greater richness and colour preferred by the English tongue." The translation is aesthetically more colourful than the severe massiveness of the original Sanskrit work. Let the original Sanskrit and the translation of Verse 12 of *The Century of Life* be compared. This would establish what has been said above.

साहित्यसङ्गीतकलाविहीनः साक्षात् पशुः पुच्छविषाणहीनः ।
तृणं न खादन्नपि जीवमानस्तद् भागधेयं परमं पशूनाम् ॥

Some minds there are to Art and Beauty dead,
Music and poetry on whose dull ear
Fall barren. Horns grace not their brutish head,
Tails too they lack, yet is their beasthood clear
That Heaven ordained not grass upon their feasts,
Good fortune is this for the other beasts

A second distinction between the original and the translation needs to be mentioned here. The epigrammatic style of Bhartrihari's verses and their peculiar qualities could only be rendered into English in an unpedantic and free style. Any attempt to preserve the qualities of the *Subhashitas* in the translation would have blurred "the finer associations and suggestions of the original". Justifying this principle of translation Sri Aurobindo writes, "I hold it more pardonable in poetical translation to unstring the language than to dwarf the spirit and mutilate the thought. For in poetry it is not the verbal substance that we seek from the report or rendering of the foreign masterpieces, we desire rather the spiritual substance, the soul of the poet and the soul of his poetry."⁶ It is of course true that the sounds and the rhythms of the original language, which the poet's countrymen and contemporaries loved and admired get lost in the translation, yet what "that ancient music set vibrating in the heavens of thought" may find its echo in a good translation as in *The Century of Life*. A very apt summing up has been done by Vijay in the Preface to the book. He writes: "It is an elevating and enriching experience to read a great work, as well known as *Nitishataka*, in the original Sanskrit with its typical epigrammatic style and to see the form it takes when expressed in the English language in the masterly hands of Sri Aurobindo. This poetical translation will also help those not familiar with Sanskrit to enter into the spirit of one of its great masterpieces."

With a "wonderful command of the Sanskrit and English languages and their prosody", Sri Aurobindo "had at his disposal all the necessary requisites needed for rendering Bhartrihari into English". Indeed this translation has admirably caught and expressed the Indian mind and spirit in the English language.

The present edition, two-in-one, will not only help break cultural barriers between the East and the West, but for the students of literature it has opened a vast and unexplored area in the field of comparative literary study. The attempt of the publisher to highlight Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius as a translator is very much appreciated.

ASHOK K GANGULY

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Students' Section

THE HIDDEN CHAMBER OF THE VEDIC TRUTH

(Continued from the issue of May 1999)

Interpretation

THE Veda has mainly two different interpretations—esoteric and exoteric (i.e. internal and external)

From the exoteric point of view the Veda is a book describing the lifestyle of ancient inhabitants of India known to be the Aryans. These people had good brick-built houses. They formed clans and lived in villages and towns. The society was divided into the Chaturvarna or the Four Castes that we are familiar with, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. I won't elaborate further on this subject but I'd like to tell you that, as it is presented to us today, it is a distortion of an originally noble and logical concept based on a spiritual ideal. In the Vedic times a man belonged to a particular caste not by birth but by his temperament. The perversions we see today are the results of human rigidities.

The Aryans had developed several sciences such as metallurgy, astronomy, astrology, etc. Because in the texts there is a frequent mention of crossing of waters, they are believed to be a seafaring people. They were also master chariot-builders, so much so that in one verse poetry is compared to chariot-building.

Politically, the king was at the head of the state. We also notice that neighbouring kings frequently had conflicts with each other. But in spite of political divisions and feuds the Aryans had a common culture, they all offered sacrifices to common gods such as Agni, Indra, Varuna. In return they asked for cows and horses, sons and wealth.

Europeans

The European Indologists like Roth and Max Muller seized the external aspect of the Veda and with their supposedly superior intellectuality classified the works as childish prattlings of barbarians. About the European point of view however, Sri Aurobindo says:

The advent and the labours of European scholarship have rescued these divine hymns from a long secrecy and neglect, but have thrown no trustworthy illumination on their secret. Rather, if the Indians hardly understand the Vedas at all, the Europeans have systematised a radical misunderstanding of them.

The Europeans as well as many Indians accept the Upanishads as the highest spiritual authority in India. But the Vedantic Rishis themselves often turned to the

Vedas for enlightenment; in fact large parts of the Upanishads are texts directly taken from the Rig-Veda. If the Vedas seemed incomprehensible and uncohesive, the Upanishads were a wee bit easier for the European rationalists to grasp,—because the spiritual experiences mentioned there are more elaborately explained for the intellect to assimilate. Yet, objectively viewed, great portions of the Upanishads are as obscure as the Vedas themselves. Sri Aurobindo beautifully describes the baffling impact of the Vedantic works on a seeker:

Often we feel ourselves in a mighty tropical jungle of strange intellectual flora and fauna, a jungle through which there is no road or bypass, in which indeed there are fortunate clearings and brilliant and familiar stars shine down upon us, but everywhere else only a luxuriant wilderness of foliage, deep scented, unknown flowers, strangely-brilliant fruits and labyrinths of festooned roots and interlacing branches in which we are caught or over which we stumble.

Traditional Indians

While the Europeans, incapable of sympathizing with the ancient Indian psychology, refused to accept the greatness of the Vedas, we Indians were also responsible for their neglect. Yaska and Sayana are two of the most famous interpreters of the Vedas. Sayana made the colossal mistake of projecting the sacred texts as merely ritualistic in nature. Although he never openly denied the possibility of spiritual significance of the texts, he emphasized more their ritualistic aspect. But, carefully studied, Sayana's interpretation proves to be very inconsistent. For example, the word *ritam* is one of the key words of the Vedas. Sayana gives about twenty-four different meanings to the word, sometimes even forcing a certain meaning to it to suit his convenience. Thus *ritam* in his texts sometimes means 'water' or 'sacrifice', 'truth' or even the phrase 'one has gone'. Similarly *dhi* is interpreted variously as 'thought', 'prayer', 'action', 'food', etc. The possibility of giving several meanings to one word is characteristically native to the Sanskrit language itself. Sayana may be technically right but, as Sri Aurobindo tells us, it is only by giving one consistent meaning with varying shades of intensity to a particular word that the true message of the Veda is revealed to us.

The Mantra

The inconsistency of Sayana is the natural consequence of his limited and materialistic approach to the Vedas; but then, as Sri Aurobindo says in the opening statement of his book *The Secret of the Vedas*, the question arises: "Is there at all or is there still a secret of the Veda?" Or are we merely forcing upon those ancient scriptures some profounder significance that is not latent in it.

To find the answers to these questions one needs to go to the very root of the words, and see if, given a different connotation, they can reveal worlds of inner

knowledge to us To understand this it is imperative to know the origin of the Vedic mantras

The Veda is also known as *shruti*, literally meaning *hearing*. As recorded, the Vedic utterance came as a revelation to the Rishi who was known as *kavi* or *drashta*, meaning *the direct seer of the truth*

The language of the Veda is not an intellectual composition but, as Sri Aurobindo says, it is "a rhythm heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge by years of rigorous self-study." In another place he poetically describes the mantra as "a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm—chhanda" This implies that the Rishis didn't select words to describe their spiritual experiences, but that the words were revealed through the experiences themselves.

I know that these notions are difficult for the modern mind to grasp; but as one starts leading a spiritual life sincerely, one becomes more receptive to occult worlds such as the worlds of sounds and ideas These revelations that seem miraculous to us were common to the Rishis of yore

It is because of the mantric value of the words that the ancients insisted on the absolute accuracy of the texts, the accuracy of every syllable, of every accent while performing the Vedic rituals They believed that the effectuality of the sacrifice depended entirely on these supremely important factors In the Brahmanas there is the story of Twashtri who, performing a sacrifice to get a son, an avenger of his son slain by Indra, got instead, owing to an error in accentuation, a son who was in turn slain by Indra

It is due to this need for supreme accuracy that the Veda has survived without suffering any major deformations this vast span of time, particularly when printing machines were not available

Spirituality In The World

Traditionally the Veda has been considered as the book describing the soul's journey for the discovery of the absolute truth. But then one wonders why it has been guarded with such fierce secrecy? Before answering this question, I would like to trace the development of spirituality in the world

Man in his earliest days must have necessarily worshipped the powers of Nature such as the Sun, the Moon, the Heavens and the Earth, the Wind, the Rain, the Storm, the Rivers, etc These he saw as more powerful entities than himself and so he offered sacrifices to them, hoping to appease them and win their favour This is one line of thinking

Then as man gradually became more mentalised and grew out of his gross physical lifestyle, he needed to attribute finer and subtler psychological characteristics to his gods Apollo the Greek Sungod, for example, became the god of poetry and prophecy Similarly Saraswati, a river goddess, became the goddess of wisdom and learning and

the arts and crafts. As man became more civilized he sought for something spiritual and celestial in his religion, he invoked gods to support him in his endeavour. The mystics, who had great influence during the early civilizations, were largely responsible for determining and deepening this inward turn of man. In every early civilization there has been the age of Mysteries when men, in search of deeper self-knowledge, established their practices of rites and secret lore on the framework of existing religions or philosophies. In Greece there were the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries, in Egypt and Chaldea the priests and their occult lore and magic, in Persia the Magi and in India the Rishis. The preoccupation of these men was with self-knowledge. Their motto was ‘‘Know Thyself’’. They saw that there was a deeper and inner being behind the surface of the physical man, the Indians called it the Atman. Discovering this truth became the sole aim in life.

Moreover, these mystics also found that there is a hidden Truth, a Reality that operates behind the surface universe. Their great aspiration was to realize that truth. In addition to these discoveries they also found that there exist secret powers in Nature which influence the physical world and that, knowing these, one could control happenings on the physical plane. A mastery of that occult knowledge was another of their preoccupations.

But the mystics believed it imperative to undergo a rigorous training of self-purification before handling these occult forces, because without that one could misuse those powers and bring grave dangers upon oneself or upon others. To save these occult truths from abuse by the undeserving, the Rishis in India couched their sacred knowledge in coded symbols, as in the Vedas. An ordinary man who looked at these symbols literally accepted the external meaning as the sole content of the text. It was only the initiate who was given the key to this secret knowledge. In India the passing of this knowledge from a realized soul to his most deserving disciple is the basis of the Teacher-Disciple Tradition, *Guru Shishya Parampara*. It is greatly due to this tradition that the Vedas have retained a lot of their purity.

(To be continued)

ANURADHA CHOWDRY

ORIGIN AND FATE OF THE UNIVERSE

(Continued from the issue of May 1999)

THE discovery that the universe is expanding is, in the intellectual world, perhaps the greatest revolution of this century. But sadly very few people are even aware of this epochal phenomenon. Now 70 years later with hindsight it is easy to wonder why no one had thought about it earlier. Newton and others should have realised that a static universe would soon start to contract under the influence of universal gravity. That all matter in the universe would coalesce into a single chunk of matter should be obvious at the very outset and Newton himself was aware of this problem. But if we consider an expanding universe this dilemma could be avoided. There are two scenarios leading to different consequences. In the case of the universe expanding rather slowly, the force of gravity would eventually stop the expansion and cause it to re-collapse. But if we suppose that the universe is expanding at more than a critical velocity, then gravity would never be strong enough to stop the expansion and it would expand forever.

This behaviour of the universe could have been predicted from Newton's theory of gravity at any time in the 19th, 18th or even the 17th century. But everyone believed so strongly in a static universe that this misconception persisted into the early 20th century. Einstein formulated his general theory of relativity in 1915, however he too first proposed a static universe and introduced a fortuitous force of repulsion. This theory changed radically the very concept of gravitational force. In the general theory we speak of the gravitational force not in terms of a physical quantity but in terms of geometry, the curvature of space-time. A massive body will curve space-time around it and any object that passes through that curved region will have its trajectory changed. In the Newtonian sense the curvature appears to behave like force.

An analogy of this situation can be drawn with that of a bed-sheet held tightly at four corners. The bed-sheet corresponds to our space and in the absence of a mass it is flat. But the moment a mass is placed on the sheet it gets curved. Now, this curvature corresponds to Einsteinian gravity. For example, if a small ball is rolled on the bed-sheet, its trajectory is going to be altered the moment it will pass through that curved region. If the ball has sufficient velocity then it will emerge from the curved region with only its trajectory transformed; however, if the ball should lack sufficient velocity then it will rotate around the bigger mass and eventually come to rest. This is exactly what we perceive as gravitational force.

In 1917 while solving the field equations based on his general theory of relativity Einstein was surprised to find that the universe should be expanding. This was twelve years before Hubble actually observed the universe to be expanding. Yet so strong was Einstein's belief in a static universe that he modified his theory to accommodate the belief. He introduced the notorious lambda-term, or the cosmological constant as it is better known, in his equation. This cosmological constant was an 'anti-gravity' force; in other words, the nature of this force was repulsive. As such a force was never

observed Einstein said that it did not originate from any particular source but was in-built in the very fabric of space-time. He claimed that space-time had an inherent tendency to expand and this could balance the attraction of all the matter in the universe and explain why the universe is static. Such a force has never been observed and in 1933 Einstein withdrew his claim; later he called the introduction of the cosmological constant "the greatest blunder" of his life. This incident just goes to show that even the greatest scientists are not free from prejudice and are not always capable of keeping an open mind. But then we should also admit that he was true to his professional intuition.

In this milieu there was only one person who was ready to accept the full consequences of the general theory of relativity. While Einstein and others were looking for a way to avoid the prediction of a non-static universe, it was the Russian mathematician Alexander Friedmann who set about explaining it.

Friedmann made two very simple assumptions about the universe. The first assumption was that the universe is homogeneous, which means that it looks the same in every direction around us. Now on a local scale this assumption might not be true, but if we look at the universe on a large scale we indeed find that Friedmann's assumption is true. Friedmann's second assumption was that the universe is isotropic. This means that the universe looks the same not only in every direction around us but also the same around any other point in space. Scientists have no scientific evidence for or against this assumption and so they accept it on grounds of modesty. It would be most remarkable if the universe looked the same in every direction around us but not around any other point in space! This would make man's position in the universe special; but there is no reason for us to suppose that our position is indeed special. Now, from these two assumptions alone, Friedmann managed to simplify Einstein's field equations and show that we should not expect the universe to be static. In 1922, seven years before Hubble's discovery, Friedmann predicted exactly what Hubble observed afterwards.

In Friedmann's models all the galaxies are moving directly away from each other. An analogy of this situation can be drawn with that of an expanding balloon. Let us suppose a balloon with a number of spots painted on it being blown up. As the balloon expands the distances between the spots increase; but at no point of the expansion can we say that any spot is at the centre of the expansion. Also, the farther the spots are, the faster we shall see them moving away. Similarly in Friedmann's models the speed at which any two galaxies are moving apart is proportional to the distance between them. So we see Friedmann's models predicted exactly what Hubble later discovered.

It must be remembered however that Friedmann's universe corresponds to the rubber-membrane of the balloon and not to the space inside. Just like the balloon which is finite but has no boundary, so is Friedmann's universe finite but without any boundary. The membrane of the balloon represents two-dimensional space closing upon itself, analogously Friedmann's universe corresponds to a three-dimensional space that closes upon itself. A three-dimensional closed space is beyond the human capacity to imagine and so I shall not elaborate about it further. The only thing that I

shall add about this closed space is that it is somewhat like the surface of the earth. If we start from any point and follow a straight path, that is a geodesic, we shall return to the point from where we started.

Although Friedmann found only one, there are in fact three different kinds of models that obey his two fundamental assumptions.

In the first kind, the one Friedmann found, the universe is expanding sufficiently slowly so that the gravitational attraction between the different galaxies causes the expansion to slow down and eventually stop. The universe reaches a maximum size and then the galaxies start to move towards each other and the universe begins to contract. The universe begins with zero separation of the galaxies and ends with zero separation.

In the second kind of model, the universe is expanding so rapidly that gravity is not strong enough to halt it, though it does slow it down a bit. The universe expands forever.

Finally in the third kind of model, the universe is expanding just fast enough to avoid collapse. However, the speed at which the galaxies are moving apart gets smaller and smaller but it never quite reaches zero.

We must now stop and ask which of Friedmann's three models really describes our universe. Will the universe expand forever or will it begin to contract sometime in the future? To answer the question we need to know the present rate of expansion of the universe and its average density. If the density is less than a certain critical value, which is estimated at present to be about 3 hydrogen atoms per cubic metre of space, the gravitational force will be too weak to halt the expansion. On the other hand if the density is greater than the critical value then sometime in the future the universe will begin to collapse.

The present rate of expansion of the universe can be determined very accurately by using the red shift phenomenon. There is however a doubt whether the red shift of the incoming light is due to recession of the galaxies or is due to the gravitational field. We are also not confident about the distances because they have been measured using indirect methods such as apparent luminosity. At the present we can only assert that the universe is expanding by 5 to 10% every billion years. There is also an uncertainty about the total mass of the universe and therefore about its average density. If the masses of all the stars in our galaxies and all the stars in all the other galaxies are added up, the total is less than one-hundredth the amount required to halt the expansion.

But the idea that the universe might re-collapse has to be seen in the context of the unobserved mass in the universe. It is believed that the universe might contain a large amount of 'dark matter' which, if taken into account, will raise the mass of the universe sufficiently high to halt the expansion. But before this 'dark matter' can be included into calculations, we must find out what it is and if it really exists.

Let us divert a little at this point and try to understand this 'dark matter'

(To be continued)