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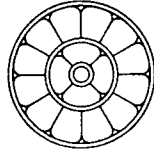
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

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. LIII

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## A SUMMONS FROM THE BEING'S SUMMIT

AS IN the vigilance of the sleepless night  
Through the slow heavy-footed silent hours,  
Repressing in her bosom its load of grief,  
She sat staring at the dumb tread of Time  
And the approach of ever-nearing Fate.  
A summons from her being's summit came,  
A sound, a call that broke the seals of Night  
Above her brows where will and knowledge meet  
A mighty Voice invaded mortal space  
It seemed to come from inaccessible heights  
And yet was intimate with all the world  
And knew the meaning of the steps of Time  
And saw eternal destiny's changeless scene  
Filling the far prospect of the cosmic gaze  
As the Voice touched, her body became a stark  
And rigid golden statue of motionless trance,  
A stone of God lit by an amethyst soul  
Around her body's stillness all grew still  
Her heart listened to its slow measured beats,  
Her mind renouncing thought heard and was mute  
"Why camest thou to this dumb deathbound earth,  
This ignorant life beneath indifferent skies  
Tied like a sacrifice on the altar of Time,  
O spirit, O immortal energy,  
If 'twas to nurse grief in a helpless heart  
Or with hard tearless eyes await thy doom?  
Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death"  
But Savitri's heart replied in the dim night  
"My strength is taken from me and given to Death,  
Why should I lift my hands to the shut heavens  
Or struggle with mute inevitable Fate  
Or hope in vain to uplift an ignorant race  
Who hug their lot and mock the saviour Light  
And see in Mind Wisdom's sole tabernacle,  
In its harsh peak and its inconscient base  
A rock of safety and an anchor of sleep?  
Is there a God whom any cry can move?  
He sits in peace and leaves the mortal's strength  
Impotent against his calm omnipotent Law  
And Inconscience and the almighty hands of Death

What need have I, what need has Satyavan  
 To avoid the black meshed net, the dismal door,  
 Or call a mightier Light into life's closed room,  
 A greater Law into man's little world?  
 Why should I strive with earth's unyielding laws  
 Or stave off death's inevitable hour?  
 This surely is best to pactise with my fate  
 And follow close behind my lover's steps  
 And pass through night from twilight to the sun  
 Across the tenebrous river that divides  
 The adjoining parishes of earth and heaven  
 Then could we lie inarmed breast upon breast,  
 Untroubled by thought, untroubled by our hearts,  
 Forgetting man and life and time and its hours,  
 Forgetting eternity's call, forgetting God''  
 The Voice replied ''Is this enough, O spirit?  
 And what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows  
 The work was left undone for which it came?  
 Or is this all for thy being born on earth  
 Charged with a mandate from eternity,  
 A listener to the voices of the years,  
 A follower of the footprints of the gods,  
 To pass and leave unchanged the old dusty laws?  
 Shall there be no new tables, no new Word,  
 No greater light come down upon the earth  
 Delivering her from her unconsciousness,  
 Man's spirit from unalterable fate?  
 Cam'st thou not down to open the doors of Fate,  
 The iron doors that seemed for ever closed,  
 And lead man to Truth's wide and golden road  
 That runs through finite things to eternity?  
 Is this then the report that I must make,  
 My head bowed with shame before the Eternal's seat,—  
 His power he kindled in thy body has failed,  
 His labourer returns, her task undone?''

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 474-76)

## THE HOUR OF GOD

THERE are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being, there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny, the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty.

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force or misuse the moment, for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction.

In the Hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear, for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God, but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand, even though he falls, he shall rise again, even though he seems to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Hour of God, SABCL, Vol 17, p 1)*

# A FEW ESSAYS ON THE GITA IN BENGALI

*(Continued from the issue of December 1999)*

## THE POLITICAL RESULTS OF SRI KRISHNA'S WORK

UNDER the first impulse of pity, Arjuna had laid most emphasis on the ruin of clans, for on looking at that huge massing of troops thoughts of the clans and peoples automatically came to mind. We have said that concern about the good of the clan was natural to the Indian of that age, even as for the modern race of men thoughts about the good of the nation come naturally. But was it a baseless fear to suppose that the foundations of the nation would be destroyed on the ruin of the clans? There are many who say that what Arjuna had feared actually came to pass, that the Kurukshetra war was the root cause of the downfall of India and her long period of subjection, that great harm has been done to India by the disappearance of the powerful race of Kshatriyas and the weakening of the war-like spirit. A well-known lady of foreign extraction at whose sacred feet many Hindus are at the moment bowing their heads as disciples,<sup>1</sup> has not hesitated to say that to make the path easy for the British to found their empire was the real object of God Himself incarnating on earth. We feel that those who speak in such irrelevant terms are finding fault with Sri Krishna's policy without going deep into the matter and under the influence of wholly inconsequent political theories. These political theories are the contributions of foreigners and are the results of an un-Aryan way of thinking. The un-Aryan owes his strength to a titanic power, he knows of that power as the only foundation of freedom and national greatness.

National greatness cannot be founded solely on the strength of the Kshatriya, all the fourfold power of the four orders of society is the basis of that greatness. The sattwic power of the Brahmin keeps alive the rajasic Kshatriya power with the sweet elixir of knowledge, humility and thought for the good of others, the Kshatriya power gives protection to the power of the Brahmin. Brahmin power bereft of the strength of the Kshatriya is affected by tamasic attitudes and gives umbrage to the ignoble qualities of the Shudra, hence it is forbidden for a Brahmin to live in a country where there is no Kshatriya. If the race of Kshatriyas comes to an end, to create the Kshatriya anew is the first duty of the Brahmin. Kshatriya power bereft of the Brahmin's strength turns into a violent uncontrollable titanism turns at first to the destruction of others' good, finally destroys itself. The Roman poet was right when he said that the titans fall from the excess of their own strength and are utterly destroyed. Sattwa should create Rajas, Rajas should protect Sattwa, should engage itself in sattwic works, that makes possible the good of the individual and the nation. If Sattwa engulfs Rajas or if Rajas engulfs Sattwa, the quality thus victorious is itself

<sup>1</sup> Translator's Note: The reference here is probably to the late Mrs. Annie Besant and her Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras.



vanquished by the emergence of Tamas, there is a reign of the Tamasic mode. The Brahmin can never be king, if the Kshatriya is destroyed, the Shudra becomes king, the Brahmin becoming tamasic will distort knowledge out of greed for money and take to the service of the Shudra, spirituality will encourage inaction, will itself fade away and be the occasion for a fall from the right law. The subjection of a nation without Kshatriyas and run by the Shudra is inevitable. This is what has come to pass in India. While on the other hand it is possible that there is an influx of power and greatness from a temporary excitement under the influence of titanic power, yet the country soon begins to languish from weakness, inertia and the draining of strength, from rajasic indulgence, pride and the increase of selfishness the nation becomes unfit and cannot keep up its greatness, or else as a result of civil strife, immorality and tyranny the country breaks to pieces and becomes an easy prey to the enemy. The history of India and of Europe affords ample illustration of all these eventual results.

In the age of the Mahabharata the earth was groaning under the load of titanic power. Neither before nor after was there in India such an outbreak of strong and powerful and violent Kshatriya power, but there was little chance of that terrible power being turned to good purpose. Those who were the vehicles of this power were all of them of an asuric nature, vanity and pride, selfishness and self-will were in their very bones. If Sri Krishna had not established the rule of law by destroying this power, then one or another of the three types of results described above would certainly have happened. India would have fallen prematurely into the hands of the barbarian. It should be remembered that the Kurukshetra war took place five thousand years ago,<sup>1</sup> it was after two thousand five hundred years had elapsed that the first successful invasion of barbarians could reach up to the other side of the Indus. The rule of law founded by Arjuna was therefore able to protect the country under the influence of a Kshatriya power inspired by that of the Brahmin. Even at that time there was in the country such an accumulation of Kshatriya power that a fraction of itself has kept the country alive for two thousand years. On the strength of that Kshatriya power great men like Chandragupta, Pushyamitra, Samudragupta, Vikrama, Sangramasingha, Pratap, Rajasingha, Pratapaditya and Shivaji fought against the country's misfortunes. Only the other day in the battle of Gujarat and on the funeral pyre of Lakshmi Bai was the last spark of that power extinguished, with that ended the good fruit and the virtue of Sri Krishna's political work, there came the necessity of another full Incarnation for the saving of India and the world. That Incarnation has rekindled the vanished power of the Brahmin, that power will create the Kshatriya power. Sri Krishna did not extinguish the Kshatriya power of India in the blood-bath of Kurukshetra, on the contrary by destroying the titanic power he saved the power of both the Brahmin and the Kshatriya. It is true that by the slaughter of Kshatriya families drunk with the strength of the titan, he reduced to tatters the violence of rajasic strength. Such mighty revolutions, putting this kind of check on internecine

1. Translator's Note. This was the view traditionally held in India before it was disputed by recent scholarship.

strife by effacing it through acute suffering, the slaughter of violent Kshatriya clans, are not always harmful. Civil strife saved the Roman aristocracy from the clutches of destruction, as the establishment of monarchy saved the huge empire of Rome from the clutches of premature death. In England, through the ruin of the aristocratic families in the Wars of the Roses, Edward IV, Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth were able to lay the foundations of modern England, so well defended and powerful conqueror of the world. India too was saved in that manner by the war of Kurukshetra.

That India has undergone a downfall in the Kali age no one can deny. But God never descended on earth to bring about a downfall. The Incarnation is for saving the Law, the world and men. Particularly in the Kali age does God incarnate Himself in full. The reason is that in Kali there is the greatest danger of man's downfall, there is a natural increase of unrighteousness. Therefore, in order to save mankind, destroy unrighteousness and establish the Right by barring the way of Kali, there are incarnations again and again in this age. When Sri Krishna incarnated, it was already time for the beginning of Kali's reign. It was through fear of His advent that Kali could not set his feet on his own kingdom. It was through His grace that Parikshit could hold up the exercise of Kali's sovereignty in his own age, by granting him five villages. From the beginning to the end of this Kali age, a fierce battle has been raging and will continue to rage between man and Kali. As helpers or leaders in that battle, the emanations and incarnations of God come down frequently during this period. God took on a human form at the opening of Kali in order to maintain the power of the Brahmin, the knowledge, devotion and desireless works, and teach these things that they might be of use in that battle. On the safety of India rest the hope and foundation of man's well-being. God saved India in Kurukshetra. In that ocean of blood, the Great Being in the form of Time the Destroyer began to take his delight in the sporting of a new world.

*(To be continued)*

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translated by Sanat K. Banerji)

## FIRST GLIMPSE

SPLENDOUR in the penury of night,  
All this everlastingness of light,  
A dole of leaven hid within the meal,  
The vivid disarray that woodlands feel  
As trim dead Winter steals away  
On the first warm springful day  
All outward heaviness of Death  
Made nought by one sweet cowslip's breath,—  
Though love be the glint of a cowslip-flame  
That on the heels of winter came,  
No time can from these ears drive out  
Its golden-clamoured fairy shout,  
No swathing custom reave these eyes  
Of that sun-miracled surprise  
When on an elfin ridge of earth  
They saw Love's fire-bloom spring to birth

May 24, 1935

ARJAVA

### Questions by Arjava and Sri Aurobindo's Answers:

ARJAVA I am afraid this is lacking in unity—not only in the non-uniformity of metre And the rhythm does not seem to be handled very well,—e g “Made nought by one sweet cowslip's breath” I feel as if the theme had been imperfectly mastered and there is some uncertainty in the handling

SRI AUROBINDO I don't find any lack of unity or uncertainty in handling Perhaps what you mean is that there is not the clear building or structure of thought which there had been latterly in your poems, but there is another kind of development more subtle if less explicit and in its kind, which is a very beautiful one—a series of suggestive images culminating in one which is chosen to develop the theme—it seems to me a great success There is a great beauty in the poem throughout

ARJAVA In the last line but one is it not a mistake to have “sun-lit” after “sun-miracled” of the line before?

SRI AUROBINDO Yes, that I think might be altered It is a little difficult, for one cannot touch the “sun-miracled surprise”, while “sunlit” is obviously the right epithet for the “ridge”, but perhaps something as good can be found for the “sun-lit ridge”.

The rhythm does not seem to me to be at fault—the line you speak of is a little slow and perhaps at one place difficult in its stepping, but it is too good in its language and feeling to change

## SRI AUROBINDO'S RENDERINGS OF SOME OF THE VEDIC RIKS

(Continued from the issue of December 1999)

आपो य व प्रथम देवयन्त इन्द्रपानमूर्मिमकृण्वतेळ ।  
त वो वय शुचिमरिप्रमद्य घृतपुष मधुमन्त वनेम ॥

(Rig Veda, 7 47 1)

O Waters, that supreme wave of yours, the drink of Indra, which the seekers of the Godhead have made for themselves, that pure, inviolate, clarity-streaming, most honeyed (*ghrtapiusam madhumantam*) wave of you may we today enjoy (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 107)

O ye Waters of being, that supreme flood of yours. a flood of revealed knowledge, which the seekers of godhead made as a drink for Indra, may we enjoy today pure and free from all rejection and raining the mind's brightness and full of the sweetness (*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1983, p 112)

तमूर्मिमापो मधुमत्तम वोऽपा नपादवत्वाशुहेमा ।  
यस्मिन्नन्द्रो वसुभिर्मादयाते तमश्याम देवयान्तो वो अद्य ॥

(Rig Veda, 7 47 2)

O Waters, may the son of the waters (Agni), he of the swift rushings, foster that most honeyed wave of you, that wave of yours in which Indra with the Vasus is intoxicated with ecstasy, may we who seek the Godhead taste today (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 107)

That flowing abundance of yours, utter sweet, O ye Waters, may he of the swift-movement keep in manifestation who is the child of the waters, and that in which Indra with the Masters of substance groweth drunk with rapture, may we taste in you today growing to the godhead (*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1983, p 112)

शतपवित्रा स्वधया मदन्तीर्देवीर्देवानामपि यन्ति पाथ ।  
ता इन्द्रस्य न मिनन्ति व्रतानि सिन्धुभ्यो हव्य घृतवज्जुहोत ॥

(Rig Veda, 7 47 3)

Strained through the hundred purifiers, ecstatic by their self-nature, they are divine and move to the goal of the movement of the Gods (the supreme ocean), they limit not the workings of Indra. offer to the rivers a food of oblation full of the clarity (*ghrtavat*) (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 107)

Full of a hundredfold purification, rejoicing in the self-state of the nature the divine waters move to the ranging-field of the gods and they measure not nor limit the activities of Indra Do ye to the Rivers offering—an offering full of the mind's richness (*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1983, p 113)

या सूर्यो रश्मिभिराततान याभ्य इन्द्रो अरदद् गातुमूर्मिम् ।  
ते सिन्धवो वरिवो धातना नो यूय पात स्वस्तिभि सदा न ॥

(Rig Veda, 7 47 4)

May the rivers which the sun has formed by his rays, from whom Indra clove out a moving wave, establish for us the supreme good And do ye, O Gods, protect us ever by states of felicity (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 107)

They whom the Lord of Illumination by his rays extended and for whom Indra clove out their abundant movement,—may those Rivers establish for us that which has the supreme good And do ye protect us always with states of happy being (*Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1983, p 113)

(*To be continued*)

(Compiled by Sampadananda Mishra)

## ALIPORE BOMB CASE TRIAL

### C. R. DAS DEFENDS SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of December 1999)

THERE are some articles of the *Bande Mataram* of that period Counsel then read the article of the 17th September headed ‘‘The secret of prudence and moderation’’ The article also deals with passive resistance ‘‘Every country fought its battle of freedom in its own peculiar way We can use our passive resistance in such a way, etc’’ (Reads) I need not trouble your Honour with other articles because the idea is the same They are articles on the Congress, *Swaraj* and so forth

It is a curious feature that the whole evidence against Arabinda is doubtful When your Honour finds, so far as Arabinda’s case is concerned, that there is something unusual, something difficult to understand, I submit that your Honour may come to the conclusion that there is something behind the series of difficulties When your Honour finds that some act is repeated a number of times your Honour may draw that inference (Reads) I suggested to him why he did not put any mark He says he put some mark in blue pencil which was obliterated (Reads)

I submit there is nothing in it which goes against Arabinda

The next period I take up now is from September 1907 to December 1907 Your Honour will find that from the middle of October 1907 to about the end of December 1907, Arabinda was ill and he was at Deoghur I ask your Honour’s attention to the letters and other evidence on this point because this matter is of some importance in connection not only with this topic but also with different topics

Counsel next read a letter from Mr Palka which related the entire activities of Arabinda with regard to the Congress The writer invited a number of extremist delegates Arabinda wanted to put the Congress on a representative basis He said that what is alleged to be a national gathering must be national in the true sense of the word

Judge —The Congress has ceased?

According to the Extremists the Congress has ceased to be But according to the moderates it is still going on It is like ‘‘The Duma is dead Long live the Duma.’’

Counsel next referred to the slip which was sent to the *Bande Mataram* for discussion

Your Honour will find, continued Counsel, from the evidence of Mr K. B. Dutt that Mr Surendranath Banerjee did not like the idea of giving up boycott at the Conference A few days after they issued a circular that *Swadeshi* covered everything The extremists say that it was merely a trick to mislead the people to feel very thoroughly on the question of boycott

Mr Das referred to a letter from Mr Tilak to Arabinda Ghose It asked Arabinda Ghose to invite a large number of extremist-delegates to the Congress Mr Tilak

wanted to have a separate Conference for the nationalists. His idea was to have a separate Conference as soon as the deliberations of the Congress were over. Their attitude was not to break up the Congress. They wanted to have the question of electing Dr Rash Behari Ghosh decided by voting. The extremists wanted to have a separate sort of party organisation for them. In England the parties have their own organisations, the Liberals, the Conservatives, down to the Socialists. They did not want to force their views. They wanted to see that the views of the delegates were represented by the Congress. I submit the Nationalist Conference was held and passed resolutions. These resolutions were published in newspapers. They assembled not to break up the Congress. They did not say, "if you don't accept our views, we shall break your head." They had no bombs in their contemplation. I do not say as my friend suggested that they had bombs in their contemplation.

Judge —It is rather forcing their views on the Congress.

Mr Norton —Surely.

Mr Das.—The position of affairs was this. The nationalist delegates did not want Dr Rash Bihari Ghose as the President. They wanted Lala Lajpat Rai. If he declined, then they would have Mr. Surendranath Banerjee.

Mr Das —There is no difference between extremists and moderates. The moderates have the ideal of "swaraj" on the colonial lines while the extremists have the ideal of "swaraj" in the independent form.

Mr Norton —The moderates have the ideal of Government as obtained in the colonies.

Mr Das —What is the difference? Where is the control of England over the colonies?

Judge —It is a matter of policy.

Mr Das —It is not a question of ideals. The Parliament cannot force its views. The extremists liked to put their ideals in a more logical form. The "Bande Mataram" made this point clear. The moderates and extremists mean the same thing but the moderates have not the courage to say as the extremists.

The same letter contained a phrase which was printed as "Government Expression," saying that if Dr Ghose was rejected, there would be "Government Expression."

Judge —It is probably repression.

Mr Das next made reference to a letter, from Mr Tilak to Babu Moti Lal Ghose asking him not to accept Dr Ghose as the leader. Counsel referred to the manifesto issued by Arabinda Ghose inviting extremist delegates to the Nationalist Conference here.

Your Honour heard the discussion about the scheme for the constitution of the Congress. That was another point on which there was a good deal of dispute between the extremists and the moderates. Mr Norton suggested that he got it at Surat, nobody would dispute that. To my mind it was a scheme for the purpose of drawing up a constitution for the Congress. The subjects mentioned were National Fund, Arbitra-

tion Court, Primary Education, Swaraj and Boycott Either they were to be discussed in the Congress or a scheme is to be proposed before the country for the Congress The worst point in that is the establishment of an Arbitration system, of course from our point of view There is nothing sinister, nothing suggestive of bombs, conspiracy or anything of the kind (Reads)

Then some other letters appear during that period I will not read them They prove Arabinda's connection with the "Bande Mataram" It is admitted That is the letter which I have referred to in connection with Arabinda's residing at Deoghur In this letter the writer made suggestions for the improvement of the "Bande Mataram" It was from a man of Bombay He thought that Arabinda had some influence over the "Bande Mataram", that is why he wrote it to him It is clear that Arabinda had some sort of control and I have all along admitted that both here and elsewhere in connection with the other case

Arabinda's work was a work of love for the "Bande Mataram" He would not be put to such a position as to be responsible for anything appearing in the "Bande Mataram" He had not the time nor would his health allow him to look after or supervise the paper That is why he refused to be the editor He was not the editor at any time It is the case with English newspapers that the reporters send their reports and they are printed and the editor is responsible for what appears He associates himself with the views but he does not hold himself responsible for anything that appears in the editorial columns I can't ask Your Honour to read the whole but there was nothing to show that he was responsible

Continuing, Counsel said—I have got a few articles of the "Bande Mataram" placed before Your Honour I placed articles published in December 1906 I have got 3 or 4 articles representative of different views of the different parties Arabinda was arrested on the 2nd May, 1908 I have taken up all the articles from December 1906 to April 1908 They conclusively support the contention that I have made from beginning to end

Mr Das then dealt with several articles from the paper during this period and assailed the argument of Mr Norton about the alleged connection between the Nationalist papers

He continued—I have dealt with the evidence with regard to the so-called conspiracy and I now desire to draw Your Honour's attention to certain points in common among the moderate papers, the "Bengalee" and the "Indu Prokash" for instance and the Anglo-Indian papers like the "Statesman", the "Indian Daily News", the "Pioneer" and the "Englishman" Still these papers have their peculiarities I cannot forget the fact that there must necessarily be a great deal in common between them It is, by no means, a violent assumption to say that But in spite of the points in common, each paper must stand on its own legs Your Honour will find certain peculiarities in each paper Your Honour knows the "Bengalee" and the "Indu Prokash" of Bombay are perfectly moderate papers I do not know why my friend will extend his triangle so far



So far as the "Bande Mataram" and the "Jugantar" are concerned, I shall show by reference to one article that according to the "Bande Mataram" the ideal of freedom must be attained by passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, courts of arbitration etc To quote from the famous speech of Gladstone, "You must educate yourself for self-government. You must take up as much work of Government as you can do" National education, Swadeshi, all these are methods laid down by the "Bande Mataram" The paper says that it is only by pursuing these methods that you can attain self-government Make yourself fit for self-government This is the doctrine of political philosophers in Europe upon which the view is based This view has again been analysed by the "Bande Mataram" and adapted to Vedantism pure and simple Every philosopher in England deals with the growth of democracy. From the time of Hobbs down to the time of Spencer,—passing from the period of English history known as the period of French illumination, it has been held that the Government can only exist with the tacit consent on the part of the people. In point of time, if the character of the Government be most despotic that you can imagine or representative, the mere fact that the Government does exist shows conclusively that the people has given consent to it There was a time, according to Hobbs, when the people and the King used to meet together. They met why? To determine the consent of the people.

Locke borrowed his views from Rousseau on this point Spencer's "Man vs State" embodies this view As a matter of fact, the relation between the Government and the governed is based upon actual contract It may not be so historically speaking but it must be true logically speaking. You cannot govern people against their wishes. At every point of time that the Government exists, it shows that it exists because the people lend their support

Continuing Counsel said Arabinda also exposes the same theory. He gives a new expression and makes it a new point of his philosophy. This doctrine of the tacit consent of the people and another doctrine which is misapplied, namely "vox populi vox dei", are applicable in this connection Arabinda holds the same principles with regard whether to the nation or to the individual He sees in the development of the society or the individual, the manifestation of God He takes the same principle of development according to the law of Nature or law of God, in the light of Vedantism. "Vox populi vox dei", *i.e.*, the voice of the people is the voice of God, because the people are the manifestation of God. No man can attain salvation except by severe self-restraint Unless he restrains himself, he has no hope of salvation If you apply this doctrine, as Arabinda Ghose has applied it, to the situation of this country, what is the result? The result is that the people want "Swaraj" or self-government I do not desire to repeat my argument here. Arabinda has taken care never to define the form of "Swaraj" Arabinda has advocated National Education, Swadeshi, Boycott and Court of Arbitration whereas the "Jugantar" in its article headed the "Suchona" holds that no progress of the country is possible without independence. Talk of Swadeshi, the "Jugantar" laughs at it Talk of National Education, Arbitration Court,

the ‘‘Jugantar’’ says all that is a pastime No progress of the country can ever take place unless you have absolute independence This is the essential difference between the principles of the *Bande Mataram* and the *Jugantar*.

Mr Das here read articles from the *Sandhya*, *Navasakti* and other papers to show the difference in the tone of their writings

(To be continued)

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## I HAVE SEEN

LIFE IS NOW a suspense of calm certitude,  
 I wait for the voice, the unmistakable command in my heart;  
 Withdrawn, I watch from behind the drama unfold,  
 Events falling into place with artless exactitude.  
 Timed to the rhythms of an orchestral music old

Audience to the grim business of gyre and fancy,  
 A trade of limb and life in the histrionic mart,  
 Death, a black habit, a chant of necromancy  
 Smear'd on his lips now parted to eat the end of man  
 Is himself watched by the sun with golden eyes divine  
 Piercing the crust of the earth, her nebulous core is illumined

I who was lodged in death have seen the splendour of my soul,  
 Flame of a deathless fire increasing in the cavern  
 Emerge, and annex to godhood body, life and mind

AKASH DESHPANDE

## A PRAYER

**January 1, 1914**

To THEE, supreme Dispenser of all boons, to Thee who givest life its justification, by making it pure, beautiful and good, to Thee, Master of our destinies and goal of all our aspirations, was consecrated the first minute of this new year.

May it be completely glorified by this consecration; may those who hope for Thee, seek Thee in the right path; may those who seek Thee find Thee, and those who suffer, not knowing where the remedy lies, feel Thy life gradually piercing the hard crust of their obscure consciousness

I bow down in deep devotion and in boundless gratitude before Thy beneficent splendour, in the name of the earth I give Thee thanks for manifesting Thyself; in its name I implore Thee to manifest Thyself ever more fully, in an uninterrupted growth of Light and Love.

Be the sovereign Master of our thoughts, our feelings, our actions  
Thou art our reality, the only Reality  
Without Thee all is falsehood and illusion, all is dismal obscurity  
In Thee are life and light and joy.  
In Thee is supreme Peace.

THE MOTHER

(CWM, Vol 1, p 43)

## THE ASCENT TOWARDS GOD

To judge the events of history, a certain distance is needed; similarly, if one knows how to rise high enough above material contingencies, one can see the terrestrial life as a whole. From that moment, it is easy to realise that all the efforts of mankind converge towards the same goal.

It is true that collectively or individually men follow very different paths to reach it, some of these paths twist and turn so much that they seem at first sight to move away from the goal rather than to lead towards it, but all are going there, consciously or unconsciously, swiftly or slowly.

What then is the goal?

It is one with the purpose of man's life and his mission in the universe.

The goal "Call him what you will, for to the wise, he is the Possessor of all names."

The Tao of the Chinese—The Brahman of the Hindus—The Law of the Buddhists—The Good of Hermes—That which cannot be named, according to the ancient Jewish tradition—The God of the Christians—The Allah of the Muslims—The Justice, the Truth of the materialists

The purpose of man's life is to become conscious of That.

His mission is to manifest It.

All religions, all the teachings of all the sages are nothing other than methods to reach this goal.

They can be classified into three principal categories.

First method—intellectual. The love of Truth, the search for the Absolute.

By discernment, study, reflection, analysis, control and concentration of the thought, one dispels the illusion of personality, a whirl of atoms in a single substance which is itself nothing but an appearance—a condensation of the ether.

When we say "myself" what do we speak of? The body? The sensations? The feelings? The thoughts? All this has no stability. The appearance of continuity comes from a rigorous determinism obtaining in each of these realms of the being, and into this determinism there enter as many external as internal agents. Where then is the self, that is to say, something permanent, constant, ever the same? In order to find it, to find this absolute, we must proceed from depth to depth, from relativity to relativity—for all that is in form is relative—until we reach That which is Unthinkable to our reason, Unutterable to our language, but Knowable by identification—for we carry That in ourselves, it is the very centre and life of our being.

Second method—the love of God. It is the method of those who have a developed religious sense.

Aspiration towards the Divine Essence of all things that we have perceived in a moment of integral illumination.

Then self-consecration to this Divine Essence, to this Eternal Law, integral self-giving, at every moment, in all one's actions. Complete surrender—one is now only a

docile instrument, a faithful servant before the Supreme Master The Love is so complete that it causes a detachment from all that is not the Divine Absolute and perfect concentration on Him

“Besides, it is not impossible to rise higher than that, for love itself is a veil between the lover and the Beloved.” Identification

Third method—the love of humanity

As a consequence of a clear vision, an intense perception of the immense suffering of humanity, there arises the resolution to consecrate oneself entirely to making this suffering cease

Self-oblivion in the giving of all one’s thoughts, all one’s energies, all one’s activities to succour others, in however small a degree

“With your hearts overflowing with compassion, go forth into this world torn by pain, be instructors, and wherever the darkness of ignorance rules, there light a torch ”

This consecration to humanity manifests in four domains One can give to others in four ways:

Material gifts Intellectual gifts. knowledge. Spiritual gifts harmony, beauty, rhythm The integral gift, which can be made only by those who have followed the three paths, who have synthesised within themselves all the methods of development, of becoming conscious of That which is Eternal the gift of example The example which is not self-conscious and which one gives because one is, because one lives in the Eternal Divine Consciousness

THE MOTHER

## SRI AUROBINDO, THE FIRST SUPERMAN

A colonist from immortality.  
A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,  
His birth held up a symbol and a sign  
He bore the stamp of mighty memories  
And shed their grandiose ray on human life  
His days were a long growth to the Supreme

(*Savitri*, p 22)

It was the German philosopher Nietzsche who first gave the concept of the Superman and it has since captured the imagination of mankind. Even the prefix Super has become very popular, anything higher than the ordinary is called super. Great men of the past, Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, and moderns like Stalin, Mussolini or Gandhi are being called supermen. But that only shows that men have not yet any clear idea of what a superman really is. For the first three, no doubt among the greatest of men, were known to Nietzsche and he did not recognise them as supermen. Here are his own prophetic words.

“Ye have made your way from the worm to man, and much within you are still worm. Once were ye apes, and even yet man is more of an ape than any of the apes.

“Even the wisest among you is only a disharmony and hybrid of plant and phantom. But do I bid you become phantoms and plants?”

“Lo, I teach you the Superman.

“The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say. The Superman shall be the meaning of the earth. Upward goes our way from species to super-species.

“I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man? All beings have created something beyond themselves, and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man?”

In all this Nietzsche “spoke out the Word as he had heard it, the Truth as he had seen it, bare, luminous, impersonal, and therefore flawless and imperishable.” But Nietzsche “was an apostle who never entirely understood his own message.” He could not always rise above his personal temperament and individual mind, his European inheritance and environment, his revolt against the Christ-idea, his war against current moral values. He conceived the superman to be the embodiment of power, and regarded the *will to power* as the means of its realisation. Starting from this conception he made a new valuation of moral ideas and said, “Good is all that enhances the feeling of power, the will to power and power itself. Evil is all that proceeds from weakness.” He regarded pity, compassion, fellow-feeling as weakness to be discarded relentlessly. Hitler literally followed this ideal and the world has seen how instead of being a superman, which he claimed himself to be, he actually became

a type of *asura* Nietzsche himself suspected this, “Ye would call my Superman a devil?” Sri Aurobindo has corrected this fundamental and fatal error, his superman is no Titan or asura, but a human Godhead, and in his own personality he created its first type on the earth. Certainly power is a divine attribute and as such will be found in the superman in the highest degree. But so also is compassion. “There is a divine compassion which descends to us from on high and for the man whose nature does not possess it, is not cast in its mould, to pretend to be the supreme man, the master man or the superman is a folly and an insolence, for he alone is the superman who manifests the highest nature of the Godhead in humanity” (Sri Aurobindo’s *Essays on the Gita*)

Nietzsche gives the clue that the Superman will be a new species higher than man, as man is a species higher than the ape; but he did not analyse exactly what constituted the difference between the ape species and the human species, nor what would be the crucial difference between man and superman. A man does not differ very much from an ape in his body, the crucial difference is in the mind, the human mind being something radically different from the animal mind. Man is called a rational animal, man has a mind with self-consciousness and reasoning power which animals lack. In the same manner the superman will have a level of consciousness higher than the human mind, to this higher level of consciousness Sri Aurobindo has given the name, Supermind. “The Supermind,” says Sri Aurobindo, “is a truth and its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable.” From his direct spiritual experience, he asserts that the Supermind is a Truth, he has seen it, experienced it, embodies it in himself—so for him there is no place for any doubt. But to convince others he has given reasons to show how in the very nature of things its advent is inevitable. That constitutes his philosophy which he has lucidly propounded in *The Life Divine* and other writings. In terms of modern thought we can give here the gist of his argument. Man with his beautiful and highly efficient body and his qualities of head and heart is the supreme creation of Nature, through millions and millions of years with the labour of an infallible force, she has at last evolved man out of the atomic dust—but still man with all his achievements is imperfect. His mind is a very imperfect instrument of knowledge and his senses of knowledge and of action are full of defects and errors. Man has noble and beautiful dreams but cannot achieve their fulfilment. At the present moment humanity seems to prepare to commit suicide with the help of the wonderful scientific knowledge it has gathered. If this be the final result, then all this aeonic labour of Nature seems to have been a colossal waste, and this universe seems to make no sense. It would be intelligible only if man be only a transitory stage and his mind a preparation for a higher consciousness which would be free from all its defects. “Its highest knowledge,” says Sri Aurobindo, “is often abstract, lacking in a concrete grasp, it has to use expedients and unsure means of arrival to rely upon reasoning, argumentation and debate, inference, divinations, set methods of inductive and deductive logic, succeeding only if it is given correct or complete data and even then liable to reach on the same data different results and

varying consequences; it has to use means and accept results of a method which is hazardous even when making a claim to certitude and of which there would be no need if it had a direct or a supra-intellectual knowledge. It is not necessary to push the description further, all this is the very nature of our terrestrial ignorance and its shadow hangs on even to the thought and vision of the sage and the seer and can be escaped only if the principle of a truth-conscious supramental knowledge descends and takes up the government of the earth-nature ”

*(To be continued)*

ANILBARAN ROY

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## THOUGHTS

### I

MERE crotons  
do not a garden make  
Nor grass blades a grove  
Smiling buds and  
laughing flowers,  
buzzing bees and  
swift footed squirrels  
should join hands  
to give the garden its due

Child  
is proof  
of the flowering garden

### II

You hold the queen-moon  
In captivity,  
O Pond!  
Yet croaking frogs  
Create ripples in you

P RAJA



## A LETTER

I THINK your puzzlement over Harin's lines—

A diamond lamp with a ruby flame  
Burns at the deep heart-centre—

arises because you forget that the psychic has two colours and not one, as is clear from Sri Aurobindo's line

The white and rose of the heart is dead,

and this double colouring is but natural since the psychic is not a power of purity alone, it is also a power of devotion and love. The colour of devotion and love is rose with all its shades. One of the shades is ruby—and Harin very appropriately takes it here: the epithet "deep" is in perfect consonance with it, as again shown by Sri Aurobindo calling the Rose of God "ruby depth of all being." Besides, when the gem-term "diamond" is used, "ruby" most naturally follows to complete the two-fold psychic picture.

I am no authority on the colours of the various planes, but it seems to me that black and grey are the Subconscient, brown the material, red and purple and green the vital, yellow the mental, blue the overhead static spiritual consciousness in general, gold the supramental in particular and in different intensities the dynamic consciousness of the diverse overhead planes. Silver is, I believe, *Ananda*, the Soma-colour, but it has other meanings too; as distinguished from the golden Ishwara the Shakti is silver. There are no clear-cut lines, however, and all colours play on all planes and have their living significances: the earth-plane is not only brown but holds the entire range of the rainbow. Each plane has all the others involved in it: the typical predominant hue is what the occult sight disengages as representing the basic consciousness on which a plane is built. This predominant occult hue is what helps one to decide the plane on which one's dreams or visions occur: another clue is the level in front of one, the psychic vision occurring opposite the heart, the vital opposite the navel and the genitals, the mental opposite the brain.

What you say about beauty and truth and goodness with regard to Art is admirably acute as far as it goes. The artist is concerned only with the revelation of things in a form of beauty: he must not be taken to task if the things he chooses to reveal in a vivid pattern are not "good" or "edifying", practically demonstrable or philosophically believed in by him. The sole test of his being a small or great artist is whether his "things" are trivial or weighty, whether they float on the surface or touch depths. There are various depths and there are various moods touching them. In one mood life may seem drab and flat and purposeless: if the artist catches that mood beautifully with a depth of feeling and vision, an intensity of revealing consciousness,

he creates great art, no matter how out of tune that mood may be with his general disposition and belief. Art is primarily psychological in its matter, an expression of moods either fugitive or long-lasting, taking a private and personal or a dramatic shape. To bring in truth as the criterion is to give top-place to a philosophical or religious or scientific criticism, just as dragging in goodness is to yield to an ethical tyranny. Contents of consciousness, ranges of vision, gamuts of emotion—these are the substance of art which it has to catch in a form of beauty and which it has to reveal as beauty, however ugly, dark and horrible, however fantastic, deceptive and untrue they may seem from certain standpoints. Of course we must properly understand what beauty is—otherwise we see the formula “Art for Art’s sake” in a very superficial light—as a justification of empty glitter, decadent decorativeness. It is perhaps in a reaction against the superficiality into which this formula fell in the late eighteen-nineties that people like AE insist on beauty being not enough. What they really mean is that art must have depth, intensity, sincerity. Yes, art must have these things—but that only means that there must be Inspiration, the outflow from within through the heart and the imaginative faculty. Inspiration and nothing else must take form—for Inspiration alone creates beauty. The artist must not capriciously and cleverly make up things—there must be a genuine and serious turning towards inspiration so that his work may have a godlike stamp. It is an inaccurate narrowing down of the godlike in art to fasten on it the ordinary connotations of truth and goodness, just as it is a superficialising of it to deem art a mere beautifying method applied from without.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K D SETHNA)

# BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

## AS GIVEN BY THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

—MAN'S aim is to move towards an integral perfection. Life is the field of action given to us for developing that integral perfection. And the path is the total surrender of our life and action.

—SRI Aurobindo's sadhana does not exclude the world. It is the integral transformation of the world by bringing down from the heights the Divine Consciousness.

—This is not possible solely by human endeavour. The human aspiration from below and the response from above, it is only in the union of these two that this work can be done.

—Man with his mind can determine his conduct in the practical, material life but then the very imperfection of man's earthly life can completely unsettle everything. No political ideology, no religious discipline, no philosophical system, no intellectual understanding, no ethical solution or scientific discovery can bring about that perfection until man transforms his own nature. And once man's nature is transformed then every activity can be utilised for the work of integral perfection.

But then the question arises: Should man just twiddle his thumbs until the transformation of his nature takes place? Not at all. He has first to be convinced of this truth in his mind and life. And then keeping this truth in full view he should develop himself in all the parts of his being, keep the flame of aspiration constantly burning within him and rely entirely on the Divine Grace.

Man should determine his work according to his nature, capacity and inclination since it is work that helps us in manifesting our inner truth outside. Then it is important to try and turn oneself through one's work and one's work through oneself into something as beautiful as possible.

There is no high and low in work. It is not work that makes man great or small. It is man who makes his work great or small. One can advance towards perfection through any work as long as that work is done with inner sincerity.

At the very outset there is not much that needs to be changed in life from the outside. First one has to change one's attitude in life and then that takes care of the rest.

One has to discover one's inner Truth and then allow it as fully as possible to direct one's whole life.

It is not an easy path. At every step there is risk and danger. At every step one's inner sincerity is put to the test. But there is no other way.

## THE MOTHER'S MISSION

THE MOTHER first came to India in 1914 and has practically been in India since then. It is with her co-operation that Sri Aurobindo started the *Arya* and gave expression to his vision of the future and the ideal of human understanding and unity.

The Mother became the executrix of Sri Aurobindo's vision and shared the full responsibilities of this great endeavour for over fifty years. In her view of things, the ideal of human understanding has to have its foundation in a deeper knowledge of human consciousness and a faith in the emergence of its divine possibilities.

Towards this task she gave a body of knowledge, a discipline for its realisation and its manifestation in life, and also set up an institution, a community sharing the ideals and living together to give form to the varied creative activities of life.

She brought up a band of young men, strong and erect, fired with high idealism and discipline. She raised the status of women by teaching them to throw away the yoke of subjugating nature and degrading traditions by realising their soul-status.

We, the people of India, owe it to truth and posterity that we do not fail to recognise her great and long work, her guidance in difficult times, her constant protection and her encouragement to find the best in us and live up to it—to justify India's mission.

She, on her part, would not have allowed any public recognition of her work because she did not live like an individual. Her life and spirit had merged with the All and her works were dictated by the One in All.

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

(This undated note was found in the late author's unpublished papers —Editor)

## FOR MARY HELEN

### Poems in Haiku Style

1. SUDDEN and harsh  
The uncaring rain  
Shattered the peony blooms.
- 2 Morning rose  
Silver and blue  
Matching the columbine
- 3 When I failed  
To see His Light  
He filled my life with flowers.
4. Open and proud  
The perfumed rose  
Laughs in the arms of the wind
- 5 A flower blooms  
I speak its name  
Known from an ancient past.
6. By my door  
Finches fly  
Golden by a golden sky
- 7 Poised above me  
A Being of Light  
Blesses the earth eternal
- 8 Gold and green  
Two wondrous eyes  
Peer from a pile of white fur.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

Here is  
Savitri

COMPILED FROM THE WRITINGS OF SRI AUROBINDO  
AND THE MOTHER AND OTHER SOURCES

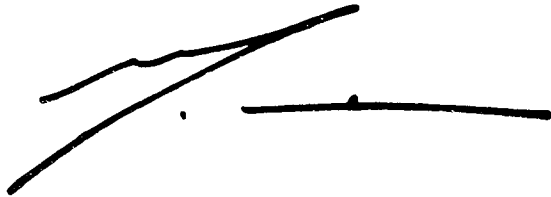
The importance of  
Savitri is immense

Its subject is universal  
Its revelation is prophetic

The time spent in its  
atmosphere is not wasted.

It will be a happy compensation  
for the feverish haste men  
put now in all they do.

10-2-67.



WHENEVER anything from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has struck me as illuminating and revealing and as corresponding in its own way to the verses of *Savitri*—Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic—I have tried to put together the relevant passages to the best of my ability

The Mother herself used to refer me many a time to her own works as well as to Sri Aurobindo's, in order to drive home certain points of her talks with me. She also quoted in writing to me numerous sayings of great men from all ages.

Included here are her talks and letters to me on *Savitri*, along with her account of her own experiences and visions, and accompanied by sketches done by her. Also given are quotations from numerous books which accord with the theme.

I hope this will prove helpful to all readers who look to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for guidance.

We begin with Book Two *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*.

✽

### THE WORLD-STAIR

There walled apart by its own innerness  
 In a mystical barrage of dynamic light  
 He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile  
 Erect like a mountain chariot of the Gods  
 Motionless under an inscrutable sky<sup>1</sup>

The Mother and I started this Book—*Book Two—The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds* in July 1963. While explaining to me this painting the Mother said:

You know how Tamil priests carry their gods in a big chariot with many levels or gradations. So, you must paint accordingly.

And she laughed softly.

The heavenly worlds are above the body. What the parts of the body correspond to are planes—subtle physical, higher, middle and lower vital, mental. Each plane is in communication with various worlds that belong to it.<sup>2</sup>

*The Tupal Worlds.*

The other worlds are tupal worlds, each fixed in its own kind and type and law. Evolution takes place on the earth and therefore the earth is the proper field for progression. The beings of the other worlds do not progress from one world to another. They remain fixed to their own type.<sup>3</sup>

*World-pile*

Compared with the chariot It is like a mountain here A mountain is motionless while a chariot can be moved But both of them take the soul to its topmost height

*World-pile*

Towers up and disappears into high unknown—just as a temple tower built by aspiring soul or mass, which climbs up towards sky

*Temple-tower*

It touches the highest point of creation

*World-pile*

Calls out the conscious spirit, which is nursed in Matter's house from our dense mortality

Once in the vigil of a deathless gaze  
 These grades had marked her giant downward plunge,  
 The wide and prone leap of a godhead's fall  
 Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme  
 The great World-Mother by her sacrifice  
 Has made her soul the body of our state <sup>4</sup>

Our own view has been that the cosmos is a self-graded evolution out of the super-conscious Sachchidananda <sup>5</sup>

The divine intention suddenly shall be seen,  
 The end vindicate intuition's sure technique <sup>6</sup>

This faint and fluid sketch of soul called man  
 Shall stand out on the background of long Time  
 A glowing epitome of eternity,  
 A little point reveal the infinitudes <sup>7</sup>

For man, the head of terrestrial Nature, the sole earthly frame in which her full evolution is possible, is a triple birth He has been given a living frame in which the body is the vessel and life the dynamic means of a divine manifestation His activity is centred in a progressive mind which aims at perfecting itself as well as the house in which it dwells and the means of life that it uses, and is capable of awaking by a



progressive self-realisation to its own true nature as a form of the Spirit. He culminates in what he always really was, the illumined and beatific spirit which is intended at last to irradiate life and mind with its now concealed splendours.

Since this is the plan of the Divine Energy in humanity, the whole method and aim of our existence must work by the interaction of these three elements in the being. As a result of their separate formulation in Nature, man has open to him a choice between three kinds of life, the ordinary material existence, a life of mental activity and progress and the unchanging spiritual beatitude. But he can, as he progresses, combine these three forms, resolve their discords into a harmonious rhythm and so create in himself the whole godhead, the perfect Man.<sup>8</sup>

Man is God hiding himself from Nature so that he may possess her by struggle, insistence, violence and surprise. God is universal and transcendent. Man hiding himself from his own individuality in the human being.

For what do we mean by Man? An uncreated and indestructible soul that has housed itself in a mind and body made of its own elements.<sup>9</sup>

A slow reversal's movement then took place.  
A gas belched out from some invisible Fire,  
Of its dense rings were formed these million stars,  
Upon earth's new-born soil God's tread was heard.<sup>10</sup>

Involution of a superconscious Spirit in inconscient Matter is the secret of this visible and apparent world and the evolution of this Superconscious out of inconscient Nature is the keyword of the earth's riddle. Earth-life is the self-chosen habitation of a great Divinity and his aeonic will is to change it from a blind prison into his splendid mansion and high heaven-reaching temple.

The nature of the Divinity in the world is the immutable stability of an eternal existence that puts on superficial mutable forms, the indivisible light of an infinite consciousness that breaks out into multiform detail and groping of knowledge, the illimitable movement of an omnipotent force that works out its marvels in self-imposed limits, the calm and ecstasy of an immeasurable Delight that creates waves and rhythms of the outward-going and inward-drawing intensities of its own all-possessing and self-possessing bliss. This will be the nature of our own fourfold experience when it will work in us in its unveiled nature, and if that manifestation had been from the beginning there would have been no problem of terrestrial existence.

But this Godhead here, whether within us or outside us in things and forces and creatures, started from an involution in inconscient Nature and began by the manifestation of its apparent opposites. In Non-existence, discontinuity and void, the appear-

ance of a blind incontinent Force, in the creations of that Force a principle of difficult labour and suffering and pain: out of these opposites the Spirit in Matter has chosen to evolve its might and light and infinity and beauty.<sup>11</sup>

Only by electric hordes your world is run?  
 But they are motes and spark-whirls of a Light,  
 A Fire of which your nebula and your sun  
 Are glints and flame-drops scattered eremite

Veiled by the unseen Light act other Powers,  
 An Air of endless movement unbegun  
 Expanding and contracting in Time-hours,  
 And the intangible ether of the One.<sup>12</sup>

A miracle of the Absolute was born.  
 Infinity put on a finite soul,  
 All ocean lived within a wandering drop,  
 A time-made body housed the Illimitable.  
 To live this Mystery out our souls came here.<sup>13</sup>

You think then that in me (I don't bring in the Mother) there was never any doubt or despair, no attacks of that kind I have borne every attack which human beings have borne, otherwise I would be unable to assure anybody "This too can be conquered". At least I would have no right to say so. Your psychology is terribly rigid I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence even if greater in degree, that there is behind others—and it is to awaken that that he is there.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way—men need not be extraordinary beings to follow it. That is the mistake you are making—to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual<sup>14</sup>

He is, we cannot say; for Nothing too  
 Is His conception of Himself unguessed.  
 He dawns upon us and we would pursue,  
 But who has found Him or what arms possessed?

He is not anything, yet all is He;  
 He is not all but far exceeds that scope  
 Both Time and Timelessness sink in that sea:  
 Time is a wave and Space a wandering drop <sup>15</sup>

\*

A figure sole on Nature's giant stair,  
 He mounted towards an indiscernible end  
 On the bare summit of created things.<sup>16</sup>

*(To be continued)*

HUTA

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## NAGIN-BHAI TELLS ME

*(Continued from the issue of December 1999)*

### **05:12:1994**

Day before yesterday the Mother told me that she was descending in me. I went within and opened out myself Nothing happened. Yesterday the same

I did not know what the matter was Then Sri Aurobindo told me that she has already done the work and gone back. "A new consciousness has descended in you," he said

### **06:12:1994**

Yesterday evening, after the meditation, I was going to the Samadhi Sri Aurobindo said "Power " I aspired for Power and opened out myself.

The Power was coming down continuously It was coming down like that for a long time All the while I kept myself open to it.

I saw that it was coming from the Mother. Through my spirit it went directly to my subconscious The spirit was receiving it, carrying it; it was the channel

I saw her being of Power standing separate, apart I saw both of them, the full Mother and her being of Power

Long back she had told me that she was descending in Sri Aurobindo's consciousness in me I saw from her Power coming into me. The Mother was standing on top and she had told me that it was not she herself who was descending, but it was the being of Power And she showed me the being of Power.

This was in the evening of 5th December

### **07:12:1994**

There was a column connecting me with the Overmind. After meditation in the evening I went to the Samadhi I was standing there for almost half an hour.

The time for general meditation around the Samadhi was approaching and I could not go to the Samadhi for doing Pranam

But Sri Aurobindo told me that I need not do it

He himself moved towards me where I was standing He blessed me

This column was coming from top down almost to my knees It was a solid column, very concrete But no indication about what it was there for, no indication of any sort available.

I did not see the column descending and I do not know if it happened very quickly It was there standing, solid and erect

Later on I felt it was Consciousness, not impersonal but personal

### **08:12:1994**

In the evening after my meditation I was going to the Samadhi I was told that

the column from the Overmind to the knees down below is passive.

I was also told that it is for me to make it dynamic. They have done their work and now whatever is to be done should be done by me, I have to do it now.

The work seems to have been done at the vital-physical centre. So the sadhana has come back to the same point, again to the same position.

I have to make the column dynamic.

### 10:12:1994

Yesterday I went to Sri Aurobindo's Room. Nothing happened there, really. But during my morning meditation, at 10 o'clock, there was a great experience.

When I had gone to Sri Aurobindo's Room on an earlier occasion, he had told me "This is your psychic being." He had repeated it three times, three or four times, from the time I entered the Room till I came out. This time nothing had happened in the Room. I also did not stay there for too long, as we had to come out and go for the general meditation of the 9th morning.

During meditation he had put me floating in the Cosmic Consciousness. I was floating in it for a long time, for a long time, in the Cosmic Consciousness.

In the evening as there was no general meditation, I could sit in the Ashram and meditate as long as I liked.

During this meditation my lower parts started opening one after another. This process went on for a long time, yes, for a long time. It was very wonderful, marvellous indeed.

But from the place where normally I sit I could not even go to the Samadhi. The whole place was filled up with environmental consciousness. It was very difficult to stir and move out from there.

The column which was there until then is not there now. It is not there now. Even the resistance in the lower vital-physical is also not there.

Interesting things are happening, very interesting.

*(To be continued)*

R Y DESHPANDE

## COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of December 1999)

### The 1936-37 Version

TOWARDS the end of 1936, Sri Aurobindo began sending passages from *Savitri* to Amal Kiran. Two lines he had quoted earlier had whetted Amal's appetite for more. In 1933, the young poet-disciple's pleas for a glimpse of the poem had stimulated Sri Aurobindo's work on it, but failed to elicit quotations. Sri Aurobindo had only written

Anyhow in the effort to quote I have succeeded in putting the first few hundred lines into something like a final form—which is a surprising progress and very gratifying to me even if it brings no immediate satisfaction to you.

Early in October 1936, Amal sent this reminder

I wonder if you realise how passionately I long to be in contact with the visions and vibrations that are the stuff of your highest poetry. Of course, anything you have written will be most welcome, but to get quotations from "Savitri", if not all of it, is the top of my aspiration.

Sri Aurobindo replied with characteristic humour:

Well, I tried to do it—but the condition of timelessness = not enough time to do anything in which I am and have been for a long time, made it impossible. My box is full of things that ought to be done and are not done and, the box being insufficient, they are trailing all over the table and everywhere else.

Finally, on 25 October 1936, Sri Aurobindo sent the first sixteen lines of the opening, as it then stood, to his eager disciple. Amal responded with elation:

The beauty of what you have sent may move one to utterance but the wideness takes one's breath away. I read the lines over and over again. I am somewhat stunned by the magnitude and memorableness of this day.

Sri Aurobindo continued to send the poem to Amal in daily instalments. On the 3rd of November, he came to a long description of the heroine, including the lines

As in a mystic and dynamic dance  
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies,

Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault,  
 Moves in some prophet cavern of the Gods,  
 A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
 Inhabited with rich creative beats  
 A body like a parable of dawn  
 That seemed a niche for veiled divinity  
 Or golden temple door to things beyond

Amal was ecstatic:

I am seized, lifted, hurled, broken to smithereens of rapture! Your passage is the greatest thing in poetry I have ever read. What a flight!—nobody can describe so marvellously our Mother Isn't Savitri she and she only?

Sri Aurobindo answered simply:

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

The correspondence continued in this way for almost a month without a break. After an interruption, it was resumed from 5 to 20 January 1937. In all, over a thousand lines were sent. Amal typed them out and Sri Aurobindo touched them up, replying also to specific questions about words and lines or general questions of technique and inspiration. The incomplete version so produced represents roughly the mid-point in the evolution of *Savitri*. It has been published in *Mother India* (November 1982 to February 1983) under the title "The Opening Sections of the 1936-37 Version of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*".

The word "section" has a precise significance at this stage. It must be understood in order to know what Sri Aurobindo means when he refers to the first four sections in letters of 1936-38. He explained at the outset (26.10.1936):

This First Book is divided into sections and the larger sections into subsections. The first section is "The last Dawn", i.e., the dawn of the day of Satyavan's death, (but it must be remembered that everything is symbolic or significant in the poem, so this dawn also,) the next is "The Issue", both of these are short. Then comes a huge section of the Yoga of the Lord of the Horse (Aswapati, father of Savitri) relating how came about the birth of Savitri and its significance, finally the birth and childhood of Savitri.

The numbers and titles of the sections were written in the left margin rather than as headings. Later, when "cantos" replaced "sections" as the units into which books were divided, "The last Dawn" would become "The Symbol Dawn". "The Issue" would remain as the next title; Sri Aurobindo explained on 31.10.1936 that it meant

the issue between Savitri and Fate or rather between the incarnate Light, the Sun Goddess, and Death the Creator and Devourer of this world with his Law of darkness, limitation, ignorance

Sri Aurobindo modified the plan of the first book somewhat when he reached the first instalment of the *Yoga of the Lord of the Horse*. He had written earlier of a single “huge section” with subsections; he now described it as “a number of sections making the greater part of the first book”. The first section in this series (the third section of the first book) corresponded to the present Book One, Cantos Three to Five. It was initially given the title “Ascent to Godhead—Unveiling” and later re-named “The Yoga of the King”. After this there was

a long passage describing Aswapati’s progress through the subtle physical, vital and mental worlds towards the Overmind

At first this fourth section had no title, but soon Sri Aurobindo was referring to it as the “Ascent through the Worlds”. The remaining sections in the *Yoga of the Lord of the Horse* would have been those leading up to and describing the vision of the Divine Mother, the subject of the present Book Three. According to the plan stated at the outset, the Book of Birth would have concluded with a section or sections describing the birth and childhood of Savitri. But the version Sri Aurobindo had started sending to Amal was never completed. In any case, another major change in the scheme of the poem had become necessary. On 5 January 1937, Sri Aurobindo wrote

I have been once more overwhelmed with correspondence, no time for poetry—so the Mind Worlds are still in a crude embryonic form and the Psychic World not yet begun. But the whole thing has been lengthening out so much that I expect I shall have to rearrange the earlier part of *Savitri*, turning the Book of Birth into a Book of Beginnings and lumping together in the second a Book of Birth and Quest.

This brought the structure of the growing epic one step closer to its final form. With this rearrangement, it had nine books. “The Book of Beginnings” has remained as the title of Book One of the final poem. In 1937, however, it corresponded to the present Part One, including what are now Books Two and Three, so that the Book of Birth and Quest, now Book Four, was the second book.

On 20 January 1937, Sri Aurobindo wrote that he had reached “the end of the Life-Worlds”. He announced, to Amal’s dismay, that there was now a “big gap” that would take time to fill.

Until I have got Mind into order and realised or rather embodied the Psychic, no farther instalments possible



So the sending of passages was discontinued, though there were further exchanges regarding what had already been sent. Around the end of March, Amal asked optimistically “May I dare to hope that tomorrow you really will send me an instalment of ‘Savitri?’” He received the answer. “Physically, mentally, psychologically and temporally impossible.”

By the next year, however, Sri Aurobindo could report substantial progress:

I have done an enormous amount of work with *Savitri*. The third section has been recast—not rewritten—so as to give it a more consistent epic swing and amplitude and elevation of level. The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation.

But later in 1938, before his accident in November interrupted work on *Savitri* altogether for two or three years, Sri Aurobindo described the state of the poem as follows:

I have not been able to make any headway with *Savitri*—owing to lack of time and also to an appalled perception of the disgraceful imperfection of all the sections after the first two. But I have tackled them again as I think I wrote to you and have pulled up the third section to a higher consistency of level; the “Worlds” have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!

*(To be continued)*

RICHARD HARTZ

## NISHTHA\*

“Miss Wilson, Mother has asked me to escort you home every evening after the meditation,” said I, as she was going back from meditation

A sharp turn of the sharp oval face and a pair of grey-blue eyes shone on me with agreeable surprise. An explanation was evidently needed and I hastened to furnish it “You lost your way yesterday and asked me to show you your house These streets look so hopelessly alike and most of the houses are painted in the same grey colour Every new-comer at first feels lost That’s why Mother has told me to escort you home every evening.” A broad radiant smile lit up her features and we moved along

One afternoon, as I was pacing up and down a terrace in the Ashram compound, supervising my work, my attention was attracted by a young Tamil girl running through the front street. And lo! at a corner of the same street stood Miss Wilson evidently feasting her eyes on the grace and beauty she discerned in the lithe figure of the flying girl. She gazed and gazed till the girl went out of sight. There was an expression of wondering admiration in her eyes

“You refer everything to the Mother?”, she enquired of me one evening as we were about to part “Yes, madam,” I replied. “The Mother attends to almost every detail of our life and work, and it is by this constant inner and outer reference that we can be sure that we are obeying Her Will, serving the Divine with a disinterested sincerity and not following the impulsions of our egoistic desires ”

There was a sudden pause, a silence in which she seemed to descend to her depths to contemplate the contours of a consecrated life

“I had been a devoted admirer and follower of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda before I was attracted towards Sri Aurobindo,” she confided to me one day with a lively gleam in her eyes “My conversion was rather romantic. You must have heard of Dhangopal Mukherjee? Well, one day I attended with my father a lecture delivered by him on some spiritual subject. After the lecture was over I threaded my way through the crowd and, approaching him, asked with an ill-suppressed tremor in my voice. “Sir, do you know Sri Aurobindo?” Dhangopal Mukherjee eyed me with fatherly tenderness and replied: “No, Miss Wilson, I don’t know Sri Aurobindo personally; I know him only through my brother who was one of his associates during his political life in Bengal. But I can tell you that he is the greatest living philosopher in India today.” And with a voice the ring of which I shall never forget, he added: “I

\* Miss Margaret Wilson, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson of First World War fame She came to India for practising Yoga in 1938 and stayed in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry till her death in February 1944 She was given the name “Nishtha”

The article has been written from memory The writer, therefore, does not vouch for the authenticity of the words used in the dialogues but only for their gist and substance What is aimed at is not so much a rigidly faithful reproduction of the incidents and expressions as a true and living representation of the nature and character of the departed lady Demands of literary composition have been met by the introduction of a proper setting here or a revealing colour there as was deemed indispensable for the object in view (Author’s note)

bless you, Miss Wilson, your heart's desire will be fulfilled."

"I was overwhelmed Sri Aurobindo, 'the greatest living philosopher', my 'heart's desire will be fulfilled'

"My heart beat loud and fast within my breast. My soul fluttered with an unguessed felicity.

"I read then Romain Rolland's book in which he has described Sri Aurobindo as the 'last of the Rishis, holding in his unrelaxed grip the creative bow of the future'. My decision was made My soul pointed straight towards the golden Orient.

"I looked for some books written by Sri Aurobindo Most of the biggest libraries and booksellers disappointed me They had many books by other Indian writers, but none by Sri Aurobindo And yet he was 'the greatest living philosopher in India today'

"At last I secured a copy of the *Essays on the Gita.*"

"You have read that book?" I interposed with an almost impatient curiosity.

"Oh, it is my Bible The whole book is an inspired gospel I have read it over and over again Yes, as I was telling you, having acquainted myself with what I could procure of Sri Aurobindo's teachings in America, I ordered a few books from Calcutta I devoured them with growing avidity. As my study progressed, my future seemed to loom larger before me and clearer than ever. Something within me seemed to respond with unwonted delight and fervour to Sri Aurobindo's message of the life Divine, something seemed to be new born. My soul was aflame

"I wrote to Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry A reply came, an encouraging reply with blessings I wrote again, disburdening myself like a child and he began to guide me

"Years rolled on till India called me Or was it the call of my destiny or of my Guru, or of God? Of all in One And I sailed In Bombay I put up at the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission The head of that institution, a very kindly personality, said to me referring to Sri Aurobindo, 'You are going to a great Yogi.' And so here am I in your midst How lovely this place is! How..."

She gave a sudden start. I wondered. There were some dogs barking in the street.

"The noise gets on my nerves I can't bear it In America I used to live as often and as long as I could in our country house, reading and meditating."

Another evening after meditation during our twilight saunter towards her house, she said: "Look here, Rishabhchand, Sri Aurobindo has christened me 'Nishtha' Do you know what the word means? Here is his own definition" And she produced it. It ran as follows "The name means one-pointed, fixed and steady concentration, devotion and faith in the single aim—the Divine and the Divine Realisation."

She was all joy She was all "Nishtha"

"You know, Rishabhchand, my soul is athirst for the highest spiritual realisation; I mean the realisation of what the Master calls the integral Divine or Purushottama And this crowning realisation I want here in this life, in the full waking consciousness Isn't this our aim in sadhana? Nothing short of it can satisfy my soul.

It is the magnetism of this glorious unimaginable realisation that has attracted me to the Master's Yoga. To be in full possession of the supreme divine consciousness not only in static silence but even while acting, thinking, feeling, speaking, in all states of the being and under all circumstances and everywhere, to be moved only by the divine Will and be an effective channel of His supreme force, to be still as He is still and yet eternally active as He is ecstatically active, to be One and yet contain and comprehend the many within oneself, to be infinite and eternal and immortal "

Her voice shook with emotion, her eyes flashed and a gentle glow of fervour suffused her clear-cut intellectual physiognomy Her whole being had caught fire

"Sri Aurobindo is one with the Purushottama I believe it The Mother is the Divine Mother incarnate How fortunate I am to have been allowed to sit at their feet and do the sadhana!"

And so, indeed, she lived and did her sadhana

The tropical climate, however, conspired with her weak nerves and some collateral causes to undermine her health. Her vitality began to wane But her humour shone brighter, her smile became sweeter, her intellectual perceptions grew keener and her aspiration for the Divine flamed intenser as infirmity invaded her physical frame She had, indeed, an abundant sense of humour Was it American, or her own or an inheritance from her illustrious father? Once or twice, I remember, she had referred to President Woodrow Wilson's keen sense of humour Those who came in close contact with her must have felt how subtle and refined was her humour, how softly scintillating and fragrant with the dew of her soul's unstinted sympathies

To cite an instance, once she asked me "Rishabhchand, will you please tell me what are the different Purushas the Master speaks of in his books—the universal Purusha, the Purusha in the silence of the inner heart, the vital Purusha, the physical Purusha? They appear to me to be like the feet of the centipede, the more you try to count them, the more you are baffled by their advancing number "

Once when she was rather seriously ill, I went one Sunday afternoon to wind the clock in her house It was a house to which she had moved for some time from her permanent residence She was lying bedridden. I took my seat by her bed and enquired about her health I did most of the talking as she was too weak to speak much, but she managed to mutter a sentence, a short sentence that came in jerks as if wrenched out of the python coils of her physical suffering, but a pulsing tissue of her soul's fire-flakes, a sentence of poignant beauty and sublimity which might well be at once the envy and despair of many a spiritual seeker

She muttered: "I could go to some health resort for a change of air and better medical aid, but if I had died outside, my soul would have been lost, here my soul is safe in the hands of the Mother."

I sat speechless with admiring amazement Was it not for the sake of this soul that she had come all the way from America? And yet she was no ascetic practising neglect of the body

It was a hot summer afternoon one Sunday We were discussing Sri Aurobindo's

philosophy in her bedroom. She seemed to be in better health and eager to thrash out some important questions.

“I can’t say,” she began, “that I have glimpsed the Purusha, the silent, immobile self within me, but during meditation I do enter into a silence and stillness which gives a sense of release, a foretaste of freedom from the feverish rush and rattle of life. Don’t you think it is an authentic movement of progress?”

“Undoubtedly,” I replied. “All you have to do is to try to live more and more in that silence and stillness till the Purusha, the eternal immaculate self of your being, stands self-revealed.”

This was the central truth of her spiritual experiences. Ever since her arrival at Pondicherry she had been steadily progressing in the realisation of this inner silence and preparing for the eventual self-revelation of the Purusha, the immortal luminous reality inhabiting the mortal tenement of man. But a high-strung nervous system enfeebled by physical ailments proved her undoing. Even the slightest noise would shake her whole system. Her intellect was keen and alert and strove to dominate and quiet the untoward reactions of her nerves, but her vitality, by means of which alone the intellect could hope to succeed, failed her. And so there was a tussle in the system—a frequent swaying and heaving and tossing that well-nigh shattered her health. Her clear-seeing mind and heart hungered for the honey-feel of the infinite embrace, but her jaded and distraught nerves shattered and almost broke her body by their revengeful racking reactions.

“India of the glorious past is not dead,” she said one day, slowly warming up as she descanted. “The soul within her is yet a living brazier, only her outer limbs have aged and withered, the channels of her self-expression have dried up. When the Master brings down the healing and immortalising waters of the Supermind, these limbs will all become young and vigorous again and India will once more be great and mighty, greater and mightier, indeed, than she has ever been before. I have no doubt about it. Spirituality is the very life-breath of this indestructible people.” Her words rang metallic in the somnolent hush of the hall where we were sitting.

“How nice you have made my vase-stand, by waxing it! But it’s a pity it won’t remain so for long. The water dripping from the flowers will stain it. But what can I do? Darling Mother gives me so many flowers every day. I sort and arrange them in different vases. That flower you see over there in the left-hand vase—its significance is Grace. How soft and lovely is the white. In the evening it will turn pink, it will change into Love the Victor. How I love these flowers!”

*(To be continued)*

## SALUTATIONS TO CENTURIES!

*Salut!* O Century of Light. Where or when in the eternal field was sown the seed which germinated and bloomed into an Avatar!

O Blessed 19th Century! The aspiration and yearning since millions of years of humanity, of animals, plants and inanimate objects, and “the unspoken desire of earth” epicentred in a small embryo which took birth in that century and blossomed into a magnificent pink lotus—Avatar, penetrating the thick veil of darkness of matter and men with its “blazing lamp of knowledge” and emanating an aura of the beauty of the future!

*Salut!* O Century of Love. Where or when in the timeless and infinite space was fixed the hour and venue of the meeting of two souls

Without him, I exist not,  
without me, he is unmanifest

O Blessed 20th Century! The yearning of humanity since its first appearance on earth—shackled to its desires, its violence and rages, its preoccupation with little nothings! To sever that bondage and long for a perfect life on earth! Culminating in the meeting of the Avatar and Aditi! In that *muhurta*, in that auspicious moment a new hope was born—a luminous golden path revealed and the goal fixed “to change the earthly life to life Divine” With Their Love and Grace They guided humanity towards the great future that is awaiting at the doorstep—to Superhumanity

*Salut!* O Century of Ananda. The first rays of the morning sun of 1st January 2000 will touch the shores of Katchal, belonging to the Nicobar group of islands. Thousands of people will gather there to savour the first rays of the new millennium—a touch of curiosity, joy and excitement mingling together

Will that be all to welcome the new millennium?

Will not the millions of human beings scattered all over the world pledge for a perfect earthly condition? Will they not sing in harmony a song for peaceful, harmonious life, free from war and massacre, free from destructive weapons, experiments and barbaric acts? Will not the bugle blow to welcome the supreme manhood? Let the blazing light of knowledge of the 19th century light the path, let the love and grace of the 20th century guide humanity on the luminous path, let it culminate in the supreme goal of Ananda in the 21st century—the new millennium!

The sun of 1st January 2000 will rise, as it did for millions of years. It has no need to count the years or millenniums—for, truly, it is eternal. Human passions, emotions, confusions or calculations do not affect it. It is impassive. Unmoved—a perfect Yogi. A red sun will rise over Katchal on 1st January 2000, it will speed over the Bay of Bengal, in its endless journey it will touch the shores of Pondicherry. The hymn *Om Savitur* will greet it. A narrow beam will kiss the beautifully decorated Samadhi. The ray will quiver and, for the first time since its eternal journey, a shiver

intense, strong, and powerful will race up to the sun Golden-transformed all will turn into the Supramental Sun!

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

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### NAKED OF ALL

A MILLION diamonds on the breathing sea  
Dancing in ecstasy in the morning light!  
Did Thou, O Sun-god, pour them down for me  
To save my day from the shadows of the night?

Upon velvet moving with the ocean's surge  
On quivering silver chains Thy jewels shine  
With thrilling lure and heart-compelling urge  
Naked of all, collect them—and be mine

White plumage of heaven's birds, spread over the sky  
Shall veil you with transparent shimmering haze  
While you gather my present under my single eye  
Which ever protects you with a loving gaze.

Yes, I come, and flinging my garments away  
I trust myself to Thy ocean's brilliant sway.

RUTH

## SAVITRI—THE NEW EPIC

THE epic as a form of poetical expression has been continually changing with regard to its subject matter and, obviously, technique and style. The primary epic of ancient time was intended by the bard to be recited and had a strong objective story element belonging to the 'Heroic Age'. Such an epic narrated the adventure of the protagonist and all the hazards and perils he had to overcome. The story was narrated in a high-flown language and in majestic style. The story element in these epics and the majestic style facilitated recitation from memory. To this category belong the two Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, and the ancient European epics of Homer and Virgil. After that the epic tradition underwent a transition giving way to secondary or literary epics. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* has neither a mythological nor a historical story. This epic has a literal meaning which depicts the fortune of a certain soul after death and an allegorical meaning, the destiny of man and the ideal of perfect justice.

The grandiose epic chant of Milton in *Paradise Lost* expresses in "fit greatness of speech and form the conception of Heaven and Hell and man and the universe which his imagination had built out of his beliefs and reviewed in the vision of his soul"<sup>1</sup> Again in Sri Aurobindo's words ".nowhere has there been a more powerful portraiture of the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain and yet still sustained by the greatness of the divine principle from which it was born."<sup>2</sup> Milton's epic attracts our admiration by greatness of its style. "Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement; seldom has there been an equal sublimity of flight"<sup>3</sup> Yet its substance "has failed to enter victoriously either into the mind or into the heart of the world; . it has not lodged itself deeply in its imagination ."<sup>4</sup> The reason, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not far to seek: "The theology of the Puritan religion was a poor enough aid for so ambitious a purpose: but the Scriptural legend treated was poetically sufficient if only it had received throughout a deeper interpretation. Milton's structures are thought out, they have not been seen, much less been lived."<sup>5</sup> It may also be said that Milton in *Paradise Lost* speaks of "the mystery of the individual will in eternal opposition to the Divine Will." But whatever be the theme of the epic, the significance of an objective story has considerably dwindled compared with that of the primary epic. The epic is moving more and more towards the subjective element. Hence many critics opine that it is not necessary for the epic to be a "historical fact",—only it must have poetic reality. Or, as some others hold, the "epic-purpose" will have to abandon "the necessity of telling a story".

From Milton to Sri Aurobindo, a span of about three centuries, we see that the epic tradition has got totally revolutionised. A total reversal of the epic method has come with Sri Aurobindo. The objective story is on the surface and its significance is minimal and secondary in nature, retaining only the names of the characters and the kinship they bear with each other. The title of Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri: A Legend*



and a Symbol, is significant. The poet has transformed the legend into a symbol and there is not much in it of the objective story. The statement of Sri Aurobindo in this regard would throw light on this: “*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and is often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences.”<sup>6</sup> *Savitri* is “a new poetry with a new law of expression and technique.”<sup>7</sup> And “there must be a new extension of consciousness and aesthesis to appreciate a new kind of mystic poetry. Moreover if it is really new in kind, it may employ a new technique, not perhaps absolutely new, but new in some or many of its elements.”<sup>8</sup>

It is commonly asserted by critics that epic writing solely belongs to primitive ages when “the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity and a genuine epic poetry [is] no longer possible now or in the future.”<sup>9</sup> But the creative spirit always has surprises in store for us. Sri Aurobindo asserts: “The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action.”<sup>10</sup> No more are primitive war and adventure the fit themes for the imagination of the epic poet. “The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.”<sup>11</sup> These words, written during the *Arya* period, form a prophetic utterance wherein Sri Aurobindo anticipates the creation of a new epic of his own in the 20th century. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo “broke into another Space and Time.” Newness of *Savitri* lies primarily in its theme, the theme of the poem is

.. the epic climb  
Of human soul from its flat earthly state  
To the discovery of a greater self  
And the far gleam of an eternal Light<sup>12</sup>

If the theme is really new in kind, obviously the poem may have to employ a new technique too,—and Sri Aurobindo states it so

*Savitri* is the outcome of Sri Aurobindo’s new concept of poetry and what the seer-poet demands of poetry of the future. The poetry of the pre-Aurobindonian era, in spite of some brilliant compositions, had exhausted itself and was inadequate to fulfil what it should have done. Human evolution has reached a level of development dominated by external physical life. The “truer light of God”, as Browning would say, lies hidden in man. The “burning Witness”, our “magic key”, is “concealed in life’s hermetic envelope”, it lies screened by the intellectual layer, the sensory layer, the emotional layer and that of the physical mind. Unless the inner “Inhabitant” comes to the forefront and the divine potentialities of human life are revealed, true progress of man shall remain dwarfed.

*The Future Poetry* is Sri Aurobindo's answer to what the new poetry will be like and what its role should be in the evolutionary progress of man. It would be enough to state here a few salient features of the new poetry as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo: (a) The poetry of the future shall be a supreme light of the spirit, a perfect joy and satisfaction of the subtlety and complexity of a finer psychic experience and a wide strength and amplitude of the life soul; (b) it shall bring to the fore the discovery of the divine reality within the self of man and the large self of the universe, and of man's own divine possibilities, (c) it shall bring "a new and greater self-vision of man and Nature and existence into the idea and the life," (d) the spiritual idea it expresses must be a complete spiritual realisation, affecting the individual intellect, the psychic, the mind and the imagination. Regarding the role and function of this new poetry, Sri Aurobindo puts upon it the greatest responsibility. To him the spiritual realisation which this poetry expresses must have the power to enter into the general sense and feeling of the race and remoulding them, bring about "a spiritual uplifting" of human thought and feeling and sense, revealing "the divine potentialities of human life". Secondly, the new poetry shall be the "Mantra of the Real", so as to transform human nature, show to man his divine potentialities and reveal the creation as the field for a divine manifestation. This is a poetry that delights and transforms. To Sri Aurobindo poetry to be great and to fulfil the task assigned to it requires the following: (a) the enlightening power of the poet's vision of Truth; (b) the moving power of beauty and delight, (c) the sustaining power of the breath of a greater life, (d) the shaping power of the spirit which will restore to the race the sense of the Eternal and the presence of the Divine. Poetry of the future has to pass through the crucible of these tests. Sri Aurobindo's new concept puts on poetry the high responsibility of implanting a new consciousness and thereby helping to establish a superhumanity upon earth,—

And lead man to truth's wide and golden road  
That runs through finite things to eternity<sup>13</sup>

As *The Future Poetry* embodies Sri Aurobindo's new principles of poetic creation, *Savitri* is his greatest poetical legacy and gift to humanity, based on his theory elaborated in *The Future Poetry* and expounded in hundreds of letters on poetry. It is "the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision",<sup>14</sup> as the Mother says. If "*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience", an expression of the "enlightening power of the poet's vision of Truth", why has Sri Aurobindo chosen the epic form?—asked K. D. Sethna. "Philosophical statement lending logical plausibility to facts of the Spirit is necessary in a time like ours when the intellect is acutely in the forefront and Sri Aurobindo has answered the need by writing that expository masterpiece, *The Life Divine*. To create a poetic mould equally massive and multi-form as *The Life Divine* for transmitting the living Reality to the furthest bound of speech—such a task is incumbent on one who stands as a maker of a new spiritual epoch."<sup>15</sup> Such a "massive and multi-form" task requires an equally massive and wide canvas, a canvas as vast as the cosmos and the beyond. To quote a noted

American critic, R. F. Piper: "I venture the judgment that it [*Savitri*] is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void through earth's darkness and struggles to the highest realms of Supramental spiritual existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence and metaphorical brilliance. *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute." Such a poetic objective could not be achieved in a form less vast than the epic.

Another unique feature of *Savitri* and as its corollary the epic's newness becomes evident from the following. Seeking a clarification on a certain metaphysical idea and its technicality, a critic asked Sri Aurobindo "it is that reader [non-mystical] whom you have to satisfy, as it is for the general reader that you are writing and not for yourself alone."<sup>16</sup> Sri Aurobindo's reply to this is very significant. He writes "But if I had to write for the general reader I could not have written *Savitri* at all. It is in fact for myself that I have written it and for those who can lend themselves to the subject-matter, images, technique of mystic poetry."<sup>17</sup> The second part of the reply "for myself that I have written it" is specially significant. As stated by the poet in another letter, "*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience." The epic records the exceptional Yogic experiences of the poet. As the poet ascended to new planes of consciousness, he would compose the poem from that level of inspiration. In fact *Savitri* reflects Sri Aurobindo's Yogic ascension, and such a poem is not static. *Savitri* is a movement on the path of Yoga. Hence there are several versions or recasts of the poem. "The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Moreover, there have been made several successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry."<sup>18</sup> Regarding the earlier versions Sri Aurobindo states "I had no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme."<sup>19</sup> All this very emphatically establishes the thesis that *Savitri* reflects Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga or if we may venture to say so *Savitri* is Sri Aurobindo's spiritual autobiography and there lies its newness as an epic.

ASOKA K GANGULI

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## AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT — XI

### BULA-DA (Charu Chandra Mukherjee) Thunderer with a Song

*On the occasion of his centenary year, beginning on 9.9.99)*

The inside of every cloud  
Is bright and shining;  
I therefore turn my clouds about,  
And always wear them inside out,  
To show the lining

Ellen T Fowler

THERE was a time in the Ashram when everyone knew everyone. There is some truth (not all the truth) in the saying “Small is beautiful.” That was the time when we referred to the Ashram Departments as Khirod-da’s, Mani’s or Udar’s. One such was Bula-da’s. I am glad to note that some still call it Bula-da’s. Surely Bula-da’s is more homely, has more an old-time charm, than “Régie d’Électricité” or “the Plumbers”. Who does not know Bula-da? Most Ashramites would surely do so—anyone who switched on an electric light or used a tap should remember him.

On the 9th of September this year (9 9 99), Bula-da would have been a hundred years old. This is a delayed tribute to a great grand old man whose eyes were ever so crossed, yet the vision straight, the views straighter and the strength of purpose, the unwavering devotion, the straightest and most constant.

Bula-da was born a hundred years ago on the ninth day of the ninth month of the 99th year of the 19th century. This number 9 seems to have dogged his footsteps through much of his life. He first arrived here in the ninth month of 1930. He did go back, but came and settled here in the July of 1934—since then he never went out of Pondicherry, even for a day. In the olden days the Mother distributed soup to sadhaks in numbered cups—his was numbered 9.

Bula-da did not intend to stay in the Ashram. He had ideas about doing some business to earn money for the Mother. He did do some business in jute. But the Mother had other ideas. She gave him the flower “Aspiration in the Physical”, saying this flower would bring him back. And so it happened. Sahana-di, his aunt—well-known in Bengal as the Nightingale of Bengal—was already here. Then others of the family, mother Amiya, aunts Nolina and Aruna and brother Kunal followed. It seems Nolina-di’s husband, Dr Ghosh, sent Bula-da to the Ashram to bring her back to Calcutta. Bula-da came and never went back, nor did Nolina-di. I wouldn’t know what Dr Ghosh did about it.

Bula-da was a big man, with a well built body (must have been very strong in his youth) Biggish cheeks, but slightly hanging. The eyes held a squint and a crease from between the eyebrows ran up the forehead. Not the handsomest person one can come across, not in the least. But he had a charm of his own (specially when he smiled or laughed) that could only be felt by a closer acquaintance. Let us make a closer acquaintance. Bula-da had his education at Shantiniketan, was quite close to Rabindranath Tagore. It seems he sang quite well too—nothing surprising if his aunt Sahana-di was anything to go by.

Bula-da like many of the old sadhaks was uncompromising in quality of work. A straight line was a straight line for him. Any kink or deviation in thought, speech or action had to be immediately straightened out. This was usually done by heat-treatment. All in his Department knew this. Be it a paid worker, sadhak, or even some government official, he had to suffer this very democratic treatment. None could oppose him or challenge him. His sincerity and strength of purpose made him irreplicable. But he was not all fire. He never retained the heat he generated. One moment he may scorch you, and the next, reach out to you all smiles and sympathy.

Bula-da lived (except the first 2-3 years) in the main Ashram Building, in the room next to the stairs near the cashier's office (Mansukh lives there now). It may interest people to know that the original cashier was Satyakarma (Pavan and Varun Reddy's great grandfather). He lived there contentedly all his Ashram life, in one corner of that office, just an area of 20 sq ft or so, curtained off from the rest of the room. A small story—to better know what it takes to be contented. Alexander the Great, conqueror of half the known world, found the world too small. Diogenes, his contemporary and an ascetic philosopher, lived in a bath-tub and found it enough. Alexander once went to visit Diogenes. He stood in front of the tub and asked Diogenes if he needed anything. The old man replied from the tub, "Just get out of the way, let the sun fall on me—nothing more."

Bula-da led an extremely simple life. His room contained practically nothing; the impression one got was emptiness. That's because it held not one bit of anything but the barest necessities—a small table, chair, cot and a kuja of water. Later one almirah was added to keep some things not belonging to him. A ceiling fan came much later (maybe in the 70s), hung there by his staff and his well-wishers. They forced it on him. I wonder if he used it much—if at all. He had for decades a hand-fan made from a section of a palm leaf. Chandubhai has inherited it and uses it even now in his Golconde room, in preference to a table-fan. Incidentally, it may be thought-provoking to note that Golconde has no ceiling fans, nor are any contemplated. It is the Ashram's most "exclusive" guest house, also the oldest and most famous. (Except for Guest House where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother resided in the early days.) Fortunately Golconde is excluded from our usual list of guest houses.

There were many hurricane lanterns in Bula-da's room, well maintained and ready for use. A ladder too was there or close by, also ready for instant use. He needed it very often for electrical repairs. In his younger days (even when not so

young) one might have seen him rushing with the ladder, to restore some light or power. He said, only he knew how to navigate it through a crowd, so it was risky offering to help him. It was best not to ask where, why, or why not. If you cared, just follow him and wait.

Bula-da's unchanging dress was a white dhoti, worn in Bengali working class style (not the Bengali Babu's) and a white half shirt. I don't think anyone has seen him differently dressed. It could be minus the shirt late at night.

Bula-da took his work as his sadhana, his lifetime offering to his Gurus. His devotion to it, through it to his Gurus, knew no bounds of time, weather or mood. He could not tolerate anything, be it a person, an event or a personal feeling, to come between him and its accomplishment. One may think all this to be a bit of an overstatement. Read on, then, draw your own conclusions.

Once the Mother was slightly indisposed. She had to go frequently to the WC. Sometime in the evening Amrita-da (or Pavitra-da?) informed Bula-da about the Mother's condition and added that the flush was stuck and water was constantly gushing out. It had to be repaired. Bula-da was in a fix. At that time of the evening, none could enter Her room, leave alone repairing a flush. Bula-da thought—and acted. The night passed uneventfully. Next morning the flush was repaired and Amrita-da (or Pavitra-da?) informed Bula-da that all went off well the previous night—so he thought. But how did it all go so well the night through? No one probably gave it serious thought. The fact (found out much later) was that while others slept, Bula-da was awake on duty. He had gone up, onto the terrace of the Mother's room. He sat near the overhead tank and kept watching the bathroom window. He closed the control valve on the pipe leading to the WC. When the Mother switched on the light he would open the valve. When the Mother put off the light, he would again close the valve. Thus he passed the night, hand on the valve and eye on the window for the tell-tale light. Who knows, some other Light may have shone on Bula-da, for She surely Knew. The incident may well be a measure of Bula-da's devotion and loving concern for the Mother.

The following episode gives an insight into another aspect of Bula-da. His room's window opens on to the road in front of our Dispensary. I have seen or heard of people calling him, waking him up in the dead of the night for some urgent reason or other. On one such night, one of the Ganguli brothers (Manoranjan Ganguli's son probably Barin) woke up Bula-da. He seemed quite desperate. He requested Bula-da to go and report at once to the Mother about his sister's condition. She was very ill. The others of the family were very anxious and nervous. Bula-da would have been justified had he said, "No, not possible—maybe tomorrow I can do it." For indeed it was not possible for anyone to meet the Mother at that time of the night. But Bula-da could not just turn him away disappointed. He told him, "OK, now don't worry. Go home and sleep well." Bula-da's thoughts ran on wider tracks than the usual—maybe they ran on Faith and Devotion. He went to the Samadhi and actually "reported" the sick girl's condition—to the Samadhi! Thereafter he gave no more

thought to the matter, and resumed his sleep

The next morning one of the Gangulis went up to the Mother to tell Her about their sick sister—and before he could proceed, She said “Oh yes, I know Bula had informed me.”

Then there is this little story of Devendra’s (Electric Workshop) He was fortunate enough to work under Bula-da and so receive the “hot and cold” treatment It has, I believe, had some effect in shaping and tempering him to some extent

The day was Devendra’s birthday There was a call for duty in the Ashram Devendra went and Bula-da acted as his assistant-cum-supervisor Bula-da kept pouring a constant stream of strong advice and comments on the working man Fortunately Devendra knew what was good for him, kept quiet, and absorbed what he could The work over, he left—a bit punch drunk but richer by the experience Later Bula-da came to know that it was Devendra’s birthday Bula-da found him, gave him some sweets, patted him on the back with a big smile and said, “Bhai, tomar jonmodine tomay khatiyē, boke dilam Kichchhu mone korona ” (On your birthday I made you work and scolded you Don’t take it to heart ) Devendra was moved and embarrassed by Bula-da’s gesture—genuine and loving

Devendra was recipient of some more lessons from Bula-da of which two from the early days of his coming to the Ashram may be interesting and enlightening

Sunday is, as we all know, taken for granted, and some even claim as a “right”, a holiday. Well, Devendra too was one who thought so On Sundays he spent morning hours in the Library, reading On one such Sunday, Bula-da had an urgent job for Devendra. He looked for him, naturally could not get him in the usual haunts, which for Bula-da were the 2 or 3 electrical departments, D R or the Ashram When he heard that Devendra was in the Library, he was not very impressed He rather in no uncertain terms impressed on Devendra that on such leave days he had more responsibility to attend to Bula-da told Devendra to sit in his office upto 11 30 a m on Sundays, etc I think Devendra still follows that directive

A more interesting, with more connotations than the above episode, is the following one—again with Devendra as the “hero” under Bula-da’s hammer shaping Devendra was newer He had, he thought, some spare time early in the morning He watched two old sadhaks, namely Khirod-da and Biren-da (both late, one of the Building Service and the latter the Garden Service) sweeping the Ashram courtyard Nowadays there are many such privileged sweepers—with some difference Devendra approached one of them and asked, “Dada, I too want to sweep I am free at this time and can help you ” Biren-da looked up and asked “*Bhai, tumi parbe ki* ” (Bhai, will you be able to do this work ) and continued, “It is a difficult job You see, Nolinibabu walks up and down, from the Meditation Hall to the Samadhi—and how can anyone sweep when he is passing by? You have to wait until he is out of sight and sweep the Meditation Hall side, stop when he comes round the corner, go sweep the Samadhi side, stop before he comes round again and go to the Meditation Hall side can you do it?” Devendra said he could try Then Khirod-da said “All right,

but I have to refer your case to the Mother. You may write down your name, your work and other details and give it to me I will send it Up.” Devendra did so as early as he could. Khirod-da warned him thus: “I am sending this Up through Nolinibabu. I cannot say, nor can I ask Nolinibabu as to when the answer will come. I cannot even remind him, you too should not ask me about it.” Devendra was a bit deflated and mystified, but agreed to abide by these rules. A month passed by—no reply. Another fifteen days went by—same silence. I would sidetrack here with another short story.

Devendra used to go to Bula-da’s room usually at 11.30 a.m. and accompany him to the D.R. Bula-da usually occupied the same place. He took from the counter only what he could eat and always ate all he took with great relish. He cleaned up the plate with a piece of bread saved for the purpose (a habit of many old sadhaks, not much seen nowadays. I too had picked it up from them, but dropped it somewhere on the way). He took the empty dish to the washing place and to the first person he met there, he would remark, “*Ah, ki ranna! Pet bhore kheyechu!*” (Ah, what cuisine! I have eaten my fill!) He really meant it and this was a daily unflinching programme.

Now to continue on the main track. After about one and a half months of imposed silence Devendra as usual went to Bula-da’s room at 11.30 to move on to D.R. No sooner than they came out of the Ashram, Bula-da’s salvo caught Devendra absolutely unawares, pants down. He for a few seconds did not know what hit him or why. He was the only one within range, so he knew he was the intended target. Bula-da opened up with: “What cheek you have. What emboldened you?” Devendra was still wondering, and Bula-da continued: “How could you write to the Mother asking permission to sweep in the Ashram? Nolinida asked me about you. Have you not been given a big responsibility by the Mother? You have to look after water and electricity supplies. So, stick to these—you should have no other considerations.” That settled it—quiet again. Normal conversation resumed—D.R. and eating as if nothing had happened.

I too was within Bula-da’s firing range on an occasion or two. I had by then learned to duck under cover (mentally) and wait it out until the ammo was spent. The storm over, fine weather was sure to follow. Moreover, I had seen people much older and more important than I, cowed to silence by Bula-da’s wrath. So nothing to feel belittled about. Also the cleansing was usually deserved and good—a bit rough though it was.

There was a railing to be erected at the swimming pool. I thought of saving some money—so took some “once-used” GI pipes (a spot of rust here and there). I and some others around thought the pipes would serve the purpose. In came Bula-da. He asked: “What for are the pipes?” I told him, unsuspecting and relaxed—when the blast came: “*Tumi ki pagol? Buddhi, shuddhi nai?*” (Are you mad? Have you lost your sense?) He went on: “Who taught you this false economy? What if the railing breaks, and a child falls, who will be responsible?” I did not offer any explanation. He cooled down as suddenly as he had burst out and said: “Why don’t you take some



new pipes?" So a good job was done—the railing still stands and serves.

Years ago two Government officials came to settle a dispute as to what tariff should be paid by us on power consumption in the Swimming Pool. One was from the Centre, the other from the State, both of high standing. Bula-da was our representative. The higher one, from the Centre, had visited the place the previous day, when only I was present. He, like me, assumed the role of a passive onlooker. Bula-da had only the officer from the State to deal with. The gentleman had hardly set the ball rolling when Bula-da came down heavily on him and pinned him down—not on any technical point but on some common ethical points, that the gentleman had failed to observe. We, the officer from the Centre and I, enjoyed the 20-minute one-sided battle. The “victim” too kept quiet, for he knew Bula-da was right, not just for that occasion, but as far back as he could recollect.

One may be led to think that Bula-da was nothing but a bundle of tinder, ready to catch fire at the least spark. True, to a certain extent—from a certain point of view. But one should also try to find out what sort of fire it was, what the fire burned and why the fire flared up at all. I suppose those singed by him could give better and truer answers. I for one would opine the fire was necessary to burn away some useless *accoutrements* that we let cling to us.

I read somewhere that a measure of a people’s culture is their attitude and feeling towards their children. Bula-da went all soft and weak, overcome, when he saw or talked to any small child. There were three little children on whom he doted like a grandfather—Hema, Prema and Mahi. His three “grandchildren” may have more to tell. He had another very human penchant—Tea. Bula-da, one fine morning, came to Parul’s room. He was passing by and just peeped in. He sat awhile and talked of old times. He then got up to leave. Parul and I pleaded with him to dally a while longer. He said, “No, no, I have to go—another day.” We then suggested: “Bula-da, *ek cup cha kheye jan.*” (Have a cup of tea and go.) A half guilty smile broke across his face and he said, “Achcha—a cup of tea—maybe I can linger a little longer!” He sat down and we sipped a long slow cup of memories.

Bula-da was keenly aware of the difficulties of others too. He did not shut himself up in his “tower” (ivory was out of the question). It was on his insistence that the Matrisharanam was built, for he felt that the visitors must have a place with no charges levied to at least wash off the grime and weariness of their travel. (I leave to each one’s imagination the pleasure felt when one can answer one’s “call of Nature”, that too decently and discreetly. Moreover, what relief to the public.) During meditations he allowed people to occupy his room as sitting place was always scarce on such occasions. He did not even mind people leaving their chappals in his room. It seems he even promoted the cause of our students who wanted to stay back and join the Ashram after their studies. He wished they be given full facilities. Albeit these are small matters, they take birth from deeper feelings—so I mention them.

Bula-da was not only in-charge of “Bula-da’s”. He was, as importantly, one of the three-member “Commando Force” within the Ashram (Dyuman-bhai and Hara-

dhan-da being the other two) Dyuman-bhai and Bula-da had no day or night duties. They were on 24 hours alert. To us now those early days seem like some "Frontier days", with hardly any amenities and back-up systems (fridge, generator, etc.), no regular services, no transport except an old bicycle. A shoestring budget completed the picture.

Bula-da was also a caretaker of the Ashram Main Building. Closing gates, doors, putting off lights, seeing to the orderliness of the Darshan crowds, shifting furniture, cleaning, polishing, fixing of curtains, replacing fused bulbs (sometimes, at odd hours, when no one was available or permitted—the Mother would hold the ladder while he climbed up), and keeping numerous hurricane lanterns filled (kerosene), cleaned and trimmed (in case of power failure) etc., etc., all these and more, came under the purview of Bula-da's duty.

With so much to do he found it impractical to join in any function or programme outside the Ashram or, later, the Playground activities. On one occasion, long ago, Bula-da entertained a wish to go to witness a dance programme in Dilip-da's (Dilip Kumar Roy) house (now the Tresor Nursing Home). He went to ask the Mother who was busy on the Meditation Hall stairs. She told him to wait and went upstairs. He waited and waited—the Mother did not come—the dance was naturally over. (It was like the Vindhya mountains waiting for Agastyamuni's return from the South.) Bula-da took the hint. It was the last time he let such a wish enter him.

But a more exacting and satisfying duty Bula-da, Dyuman-bhai and Chinmayee had, and that was being the Mother's personal "servant" (Another team of equally dedicated "servants" for Sri Aurobindo was Champaklal-ji, Purani-ji, Nirodda, Pujalal-ji, Moolshankar, Lallubhai, etc.) They had to be nimble-minded, nimble-footed and nimble-handed. Their jobs, small or big, were fixed to the minutest detail—as to how, who and when to do it. They took great joy and pride in satisfying their Masters. So the jobs, specially the cleaning and repairing, were to be done without disturbing Them—so quick—get in when They are out, and get out when They come in!

Bula-da, one of our old, old sadhaks, re-lives in us—a century old yet young in our minds and hearts. He was, and is, a path-pointer, one of those who trod the Path before us. For years, when down here, he showed the way—lantern in one hand and ladder in the other.

Bula-da was always optimistic. He was even quite sure he would reach a hundred years. But that was not to be. After a brief illness he left his body on the 28th of April 1986. On this Earth, when the Mother needed him he was always ready, Her willing servitor. If it was an electric or water problem, She depended entirely on Her Bula. His touch would set things right. The Mother once remarked: "Bula, they obey you, they listen to you." One day during the War, when Sri Aurobindo had to have the news of the War, the speaker went dead. (The radio was kept in Pavitra-da's room. A long wire connected the speaker in Sri Aurobindo's room to the radio.) Pavitra-da was not around. Mother summoned Bula-da. He came running and said:

“Mother, I don’t know anything about radio engineering” She said. “Does not matter—go try” He went and, maybe his hand was guided—he touched a wire joint—the speaker came alive! No wonder then, he left us earlier than expected. She must have called him urgently, held the Ladder—maybe some “light connection” problem, if not Up-there, maybe up-to-down-here She may have set him waiting on the Path Beyond, to help us with another “lantern” and another “ladder” without a “last rung” Not to be startled, if perchance a shout is heard—it is but an exhortation to move on

I would end this saga of Bula-da with a final Hurrah!—a saga of devotion and dedication, of sincerity and simplicity, and an undemanding self-giving He was a beautiful person—if we had the eyes to see! His Thunder was his song—had we the ears to hear!

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

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## TRUTH CLIFFS

CONSIDER the sea waves, the undulating  
 Crests and troughs of the long green billows,  
 Or small white flecks on vast monotone  
 Clinging dovetailed, else diverging tangentially!  
 Some reach land’s edge, the large multitude  
 Perish in their journey’s long-drawn middle  
 Losing course on the infinite ocean.

Such are the souls of human beings, joined  
 And separated by gales of nature’s desire  
 Few triumphant reach the truth cliffs  
 The rest sink in bosom of time’s vast ocean  
 To be stirred perhaps at a later moment  
 And truth-amorous resume their surge  
 To the sheer peaks that verge on infinite ocean

HEMANT KAPOOR

## THE ODYSSEY — AN ADAPTATION\*

[A light from above shines on Demodocus]

Sing to me, Muse, of the many-counselled who far through the world's ways  
Wandering, was tossed after Troy he sacked, the divine stronghold,  
Many cities of men he beheld, learned the minds of their dwellers,  
Many the woes in his soul he suffered driven on the waters,  
Fending from fate his life and the homeward course of his comrades.  
Them even so he saved not, for all his desire and his striving;  
Who by their own infatuate madness piteously perished,  
Fools in their hearts! for they slew the herds the deity pastured,  
Helios high-climbing; but he from them reft their return and the daylight  
Sing to us also of these things, goddess daughter of heaven.

Now all the rest who had fled from death and sudden destruction  
Safe dwell at home, from the war escaped and the swallowing ocean  
He alone far was kept from his fatherland, far from his consort,  
Long by the nymph divine, the sea-born goddess Calypso,  
Stayed in her hollow caves, for she yearned to keep him her husband.  
Yet when the year came at last in the rolling gyre of the seasons  
When in the web of their wills the gods spun out his returning  
Homeward to Ithaca,—there too he found not release from his labour,  
In his own land with his loved ones—all the immortals had pity  
Save Poseidon alone, but he with implacable anger  
Moved against godlike Odysseus before his return to his country  
Now was he gone to the land of the Aethiopes, nations far-distant .  
He by the banquet seated rejoiced, but the other immortals  
Sat in the halls of Zeus Olympian, the throng of them gathered,  
First led the word the father divine of men and immortals .<sup>1</sup>

### Scene 1

[Lights come up on gods and goddesses—Zeus, Athena, Hermes and others ]

*Zeus*: How the gods are vainly accused by earth's creatures! They say their miseries are from us. They rather by their own folly and madness cause their woes. We have not willed them

*Athena*. Father of ours, mighty Zeus, son of Cronos, my heart burns for a man who

\* The drama was presented by the students of the Centre of Education in the School Courtyard on 23 June 1999

1 Sri Aurobindo's translation of the beginning of the *Odyssey*, SABCL, Vol 8, p 409

has suffered enough Unhappy Odysseus, prisoner of Calypso, hemmed in on an island far from his Kingdom and his loved ones. Calypso speaks sweetly and with the weaving of her words veils lightly his memories of home, but nothing can cover forever his longing for Ithaca He yearns for his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus He yearns for his kingdom and his place as its king.

*Zeus:* My beautiful daughter, grey-eyed Athena, I know of his sorrow, his love and his fitness as king Wise beyond mortal men he is near to our greatness Yet Poseidon, my brother, has a grudge as deep as his ocean. You know Polyphemus his son, his one-eyed monster whom yet he loves well, was blinded by Odysseus For this the Earthshaker, the king of the ocean, has kept Odysseus wandering. He will not kill him and yet neither will he permit his return If Poseidon were here now we could not even speak of this. His trident would indeed shake the earth, but the tremors would reach up to the heavens But despair not. If we are united in will how can he oppose us? His strength we will not challenge, but his firmness of purpose. Long may the heavens refrain and leave to the water its passions, but at last the tempest must fail and laugh at its own sense of grandeur. Then can our voices be heard from the distance if not from within

*Athena.* Father, I rush to the task I will rouse Telemachus from dreaming. The son of Odysseus must awake to his manhood His action, even in ignorance, will give force to the will of his father

*Zeus.* [*playfully*] Who better than you could teach children to rule over their parents?

*Athena:* [*with lightly mocking humility*] Surely I seek not to rule, even if such were my power, but parents need nudging by youth when their ways are too settled. Your reprimand loses its sting by your smile which is so badly hidden. [*Hermes has been laughing at her behind her back*] With deepest respect, I request the immediate departure of Hermes [*It seems like a banishment at first, but after his expression of mock surprise, she continues*] Let him relay our unchangeable will to Calypso She must provide Odysseus means for departure She must loosen her bonds of desire I will disguise myself as Mentès the Sage and do what I can with Telemachus. [*Exit*]

*Hermes:* As a man she will go, and a man she will appear to Telemachus, but her wiles are of woman; of this there can be no denial.

*Zeus.* She embodies them both She has the strength of a man and the gift of a woman. Only thus could she lead such a soul as Odysseus.

## Scene 2

[*Loud clamour and music. The suitors enter, some drunk, some joking. Most play*

*dice Some look on. Telemachus stands aloof Athena appears as Mentos He sees her and respectfully leads her aside, trying to avoid contact with the suitors ]*

*Telemachus*· Please excuse ill-treatment to you. My home is overrun with ruffians

*Athena*. How can this be? Where is the man of the household?

*Telemachus* I am all that there is and unable to clear the house of these vermin If these men could gaze once into the eyes of my father, they'd give their wealth for the lightest of heels As it is, they consume our wealth and bring shame to the home of the noble

*Athena*: And Odysseus?

*Telemachus* My father? You speak of my father? Do you know of his travels? Have you news? Is he living?

*Athena* Who has not heard of Odysseus and his deeds in the battle of Troya? Who has not heard songs of his craft and the wooden horse which brought down the walls Apollo himself had raised? He has many admirers, but I, Mentos, have the honour to call him my friend Yet no mortal I've met can tell me where he now tarries, nor even if he remains with the living His greatness should send out its ripples The world should be rocked by his movements

*Telemachus*: Yet these lords are stagnant, unmoveable They dare aspire to my mother! They wallow in the mud of their passions and seek to replace him who rides on the crest of the waves, but she avoids them as one does a puddle She would not soil her foot with their scum I dream of Odysseus coming with the force of the ocean behind him. On his flood they would rise bobbing and turning, and be washed away on the ebb

*Athena* But why do you stand here imagining? Telemachus! You are the son of this force that you dream of. Would he sire a weakling? Rise up! Take action! Seek him out.

*Telemachus* Where could I start when he takes all the world for his village? Perhaps an ant could seek out a hawk?

*Athena*: At least an ant would not speak of futility, but would follow its trail to the end. You're a man descended of men Seek out your elders! Act and the gods can then guide you Self-pity they treat with disgust. Go to Nestor or brave Menelaus Start the search and then see what comes

*Telemachus:* [*Pause as he lets this sink in*] Mentos, I thank you. It is as if a god had descended to give heart to my purpose. My father will not come to find me sitting here idle. What can I give you in return for what you have done for me? Accept some precious jewel of the family.

*Athena:* When I return then your offering will be gladly accepted. A gift of your heart will call forth one from my own.

*Telemachus:* But stay, you have not eaten! Please let me make you feel welcome.

*Athena:* Thank you. I know your good will, but I must go. The gods are with you, my boy. Do not fail to be worthy.

[*She touches him in blessing and he feels her presence and power. She exits. He turns, and the men are suddenly aware of his presence. Penelope appears. They stare at each other as the men have gone back to their drinking. Telemachus exits.*]

*Sutor:* [*mockingly*] Our brave young host! How sullen he looks and with what ill grace he treats his honourable guests.

*Eurymachos* [*also mocking*] Do you suppose we have worn out our welcome? Still half of his wealth is left to him, a full third of his herds. Is he so ungenerous of heart that he would save some for himself or perhaps his descendants?

*Antinous:* Bah! It is Penelope's fault. How long can she continue this weaving of shrouds? Odysseus's father, Laertes, must need the finest of threads, patterns most intricate to justify this interminable weaving. Her ladies protest when we say she must not be working. They say her loom never rests till the daylight retires. We hear the shuttle ourselves as it clacks out the minutes and months of our waiting. We drown out the sound with our feasts, but the beats are relentless in even our rare times of silence. The sound maddens me now where once it meant progress. It never will end, it will drown out even our death knell.

*Sutor* [*trying to placate Antinous—change his mood*] But meanwhile the mutton is tender and the wine—the rarest of Ithaca.

*Sutor:* Relax! Our company's rife with the sounds of full laughter.

*Sutor:* What more could you need to make you patient in waiting? One day she will choose and then our party is ended. Only one will remain while the others return to their homes and their drudgery.

*Noeman* [*enters saying*] Telemachus has sailed! His ship will soon reach the horizon!

*Antinous*: Sailed? I never thought he would move! I deemed his courage to be only for tournaments. In those, it is true, he does shine, but in life he seemed only a lamb

*Noeman*: [*Lifts up a leg of lamb*] Then perhaps he has marked how many companions were led to the slaughter.

*Sutor*: Where has he gone? What could be his intention?

*Sutor*: Whatever it is, it is clear he is no longer our plaything.

*Antinous*: If a man he pretends to be now, then as a man he must face us. The strait between Samos and Ithaca is narrow. There we can wait and easily trap him. Father and son have too long been parted. Poor Odysseus, long dead, must yearn for his son! We'll send Telemachus to meet him in Hades

*(To be continued)*

NANCY WHITLOW

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## A TREE

It has  
 many branches  
 A welter of words  
 in it  
 within it  
 several curves  
 a few points of excellence  
 depths  
 subtleties  
 patterns of sound  
 the stillness of silence  
 Time has stopped  
 in that stillness  
 I find myself

NAKULAN

(Translated from the Tamil by M S Ramaswami, courtesy *Skylark*, 1984-85)



## NOBEL PRIZES

VERY few of us in India seem to be interested in the announcement in October of Nobel awards by the Royal Swedish Academy, obviously because none from the country is expected to come up in any of the fields of award—and rightly so but for different reasons. The Nobel prize is considered to be the most prestigious award in the world. This was instituted by Alfred B. Nobel on 27 November 1895 with the income of his life's earnings, nine million dollars from the discovery of dynamite. These prizes are offered every year by the Royal Swedish Academy in the areas of Physics, Chemistry, Medicine/Physiology, Peace, Literature and Economics to those persons who excel in a particular year in their respective field. The Academy seems to have an excellent and trustworthy mechanism of inviting nominations from expert individuals and institutions of the world. The fact that the author of this article, a small man in his field, was invited to nominate a suitable candidate for Chemistry in 1983 speaks volumes of the objectivity and openness with which the Academy works. The award of the prizes was started from 1901 and each prize carries an approximate sum of rupees three crores.

Americans seem to excel in all the six fields, for they have bagged about two hundred prizes so far. Universities at Harvard, Stanford and Berkeley in the US, and Oxford and Cambridge in Britain, each have more than a dozen Nobel Laureates. Harvard University tops with more than two dozen awardees. Germans have bagged about eighty prizes. In India Rabindranath Tagore got the prize in Literature in 1913 for *Geetanjali* and C. V. Raman in Physics in 1930 for the discovery of the effect that goes by his name. Three other Indians who settled abroad and got these prizes are, S. Chandrashekhara (no more living now) in the US in Physics in 1983 for theoretical work on the structure and evolution of stars, Hargobind Khorana in the US in Physiology/Medicine in 1968 for genetic coding and protein synthesis, and Amartya Sen in Britain in 1998 for his work on welfare economics. Two foreigners who came and settled in India, Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama, won the peace-prize in 1979 and 1989, respectively. Mahatma Gandhi was one Indian very near the Nobel Prize for Peace, he would have won it had he been alive for a couple of more years. Munshi Prem Chand was the other Indian who revolutionised the social structure existing then in India by his writings and deserved a Literature prize; but his writings, being in Hindi, could not be recognised even in India. Another Indian who richly deserved a prize in Literature was Sri Aurobindo and he was nominated for the same in the late 40s, but since his writings and their awareness did not have the publicity required for the mechanism of nomination, the academy missed to honour him.

Women too had their contributions in all the six fields and in sharing the awards. Twenty-four women so far have won Nobel Prizes, nine of them being for Peace. Some of them are Pearl S. Buck and Selma Lagerlöf in Literature; Barbara McClintock and Rita Levi-Montalcini in Medicine/Physiology, Aung San Suu Kyi and Bertha von Suttner (1911 and 1905, respectively) for Peace; Marie Curie and Irene

Joliot-Curie in Chemistry, Maria Geoppart-Mayer in Physics

There are examples where husband-wife, mother-daughter, father-son and uncle-nephew have won Nobel Prizes. Pierre Curie and Marie Curie who shared the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903 were husband and wife. Joliot and Irene Joliot-Curie, husband and wife, shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1935. All the above four Nobel Laureates belong to one family since Irene was the daughter of Marie. Niels Bohr and Aage Bohr, father and son, won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922 and 1935 respectively, the former for the structure of the atom and the latter for the structure of the nucleus. W. H. Bragg in London and W. L. Bragg in Manchester, father and son, got the Physics prize in the same year in 1915 for their work on the determination of the crystal structure by X-rays. C. V. Raman and S. Chandrasekhar were uncle and nephew. Van Vleck and P. W. Anderson who were teacher and student working in different laboratories shared the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1952. If J. J. Thomson found the electron as a particle, his son G. P. Thomson observed it to have a wave-like character, both were Nobel Laureates.

There are instances of scientists winning the Nobel Prize twice. M. Curie shared the Physics prize in 1903 for the discovery of radioactivity, and then in Chemistry in 1911 for the discovery of radium and polonium. Linus Pauling had the Chemistry-prize in 1954 for his work on Quantum Mechanics and the book *The Nature of Chemical Bond* and then, most surprisingly, for Peace in 1962. John Bardeen was awarded the prize in Physics twice, once in 1956 for the transistor effect and then in 1972 for the theory of superconductivity. Frederick Sanger won the prize in Chemistry twice, first in 1958 for working on the structure of insulin and then in 1980 for working on the base sequences in nucleic acids. It may also be mentioned that Pauling was very near winning the Nobel Prize for the third time in Medicine/Physiology in 1962 but missed it on account of keen competition. Pauling was considered to be the greatest scientist of his time. His valence bond theory in Quantum Mechanics dominated for five decades in the field of Chemistry.

Another aspect of some of the Nobel Laureates had been the fact that they started working in one discipline but gradually switched over to a different one winning the prize in it. Maria Geoppart-Mayer began as a chemist and ended up with the Nobel Prize in Physics as a theoretical physicist. W. Gilbert who was a theoretical physicist, having done his Ph.D. with Pakistani Nobel Laureate Abdus Salam, shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1980 with Frederick Sanger. M. Delbruck was a physicist in the thirties but later won the Nobel Prize in Medicine/Physiology. T. Koopmann was a physicist who shared the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1975.

Nobel had wished that the award each year should be made on the basis of one's unique contribution to mankind in the preceding year, but this was rarely followed. Chinese-American G. N. Yang and T. D. Lee won the 1957 Physics prize for the discovery of elementary particles, almost strictly in accordance with Nobel's wish. Donald Glazer got the idea of designing the bubble chamber after gazing at the beer bubbles in a mug of beer in a beer-shop and bagged the Nobel Prize in Physics in

1960 C. V. Raman and H. G. Khorana got their prizes within six years of the discovery. In general theoreticians had to wait for long for the experimental verification of their theories before they could be recognised for the award. Kapitza, a physicist, was one who would get the Nobel Prize for his low temperature work very late at the age of 85. Incidentally, Kapitza was the last of Rutherford's students among many to get the prize.

Prizes in Literature and Peace have been quite controversial. Persons like Emile Zola and Leo Tolstoy were bypassed in the very year of inception of the Nobel Prize. Tolstoy had been continuously nominated until his death in 1910, but his two great novels *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* went unawarded, though widely acclaimed and recognised. Similarly, Maxim Gorky, Thomas Hardy and Somerset Maugham were left out from the award in favour of less known recipients. René Sully-Prudhomme, Heyoe, Gjellerup, Pontoppiden and Benavente. Soviet poet and novelist Boris Pasternak and novelist Solzhenitsyn were great in their own ways but the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to them (1964 and 1970 respectively) purely on political grounds. On the other hand, Sir Winston Churchill, a war hero who made little contribution to Literature, was awarded a prize in Literature in 1953. He was a powerful orator, no doubt, and wrote good prose and history but most of it is demagoguery. The award for Peace has been even more controversial. The awards made to Mohammad Anwar Al-Sadat and Menachem Begin in 1978 raised a huge storm in the press. The award of 1994 for Peace shared by Yasir Arafat, and Shimon Peres and Itzhak Rabin was preceded by a threat of resignation by a member of the Norwegian committee. The Peace award to Pauling was not controversial in the beginning but became so later in the sixties when he issued several pamphlets against the belligerent policies of the two superpowers. He became unpopular in the medical profession too for advising a lot of vitamin-C as a remedy for cold. Notwithstanding all this the world honoured him by another prestigious Lenin Peace Prize. Awards in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine/Physiology have been made by and large to deserving persons, though not always to the best one. Sir C. K. Ingold, one of the great organic chemists of his time, could not win the prize. Sommerfeld was nominated for Physics so late that he didn't accept it.

In the context of our country, the award-picture of the Nobel Prize is none too happy—not because we lack in intelligence, skill, application or devotion, but because there is no will, teamwork and encouragement in the country. Khorana, Chandrashekhara and Amartya Sen having worked in foreign lands and excelled to win the prizes, more than proves the above statement. The basic fact is, if Ramana could work in odd conditions some seventy years earlier when the experimental facilities were far from satisfactory and win a prize in Physics, there is no reason why we should fall behind today. As far as the awards in Literature and Peace are concerned politics, non-publicity and lack of awareness may be the reasons, but what after independence? It is a pity that small countries like Holland, Denmark and Switzerland—which are about a thirtieth the size of India and with populations about a thou-

sandth that of India,—have four or five Nobel Laureates, in contrast to that India had only two (Tagore and Raman). Another shame for our country is the fact that foreigners (Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama) have worked and served in our country to get the prizes for Peace, but we who have been known for our philosophy, religion and culture, could not bag a single prize for it. Why? Perhaps because there is no right person in the right place with an appropriate environment—with the right type of awareness

YUGAL KISHORE GUPTA

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### THE BRAN-TUB

You can bring out many things  
 from the bran-tub of  
 your infancy. Not everything  
 is matter of poetry  
 Sometimes I grasp moments that  
 have no real shadow,  
 those are the hoardings I am most  
 fond of I'll continue my  
 exploration in the bran  
 until my fingers seize  
 one day  
 my birth.

RANAJIT SARKAR

# THE LIGHT OF PANINI

(Continued from the issue of December 1999)

## 21. The First Reform: The Renaissance of Vedic Speech

THE RIG Veda X.71.2 tells us about the first renovation of our speech through a household simile *Saktu* is a mixed powder of rice and dal. It is refined when net-strained through a *tita-u*. Fine grains fall through the strainer, the coarser ones remain behind. Thus unorganised, haphazard, shabby, immodest common speech was refined by the Rishis, by the power of their intuitive mind (*dhi-ra manasa manishinah*). Thus a well-dressed (*bhadra*), disciplined, exquisite, brilliant (Lakshmi) speech (*Vak*) was born. This birth and rebirth out of living experiences of the *kavi-rishus* was the Renaissance of the Rishi-speech, worded as our Luminous Saraswati, Mother of mothers, Ocean-filling flow of the River of rivers (RV II 41 16, I 3 12) From *a-krita-vak* to *krita-vak*. Our linguistic-cultural-dharmic history is told in a verse where Vedic speech Saraswati is made one with Bhadra Kali, Maker of all Knowledge.

## 22. Veda and Avesta

After Panini, the Parsis of the far North-West (Paschatrya) left our mainland Prithivi and slowly the speech became slightly different

Rishi Zarathushtra, meaning 'Nature Sun's Brilliance' (*jarath jri* to mature, *ush* light of Dawn, Ushā), was following the same sacrificial cult. Vedic Soma-savana became Haoma-havana with 'H' replacing 'S'. Arya became Airiya with epenthesis (coming of 'i' before 'r') and *samprasarana* (y, i). Districts of East Bengal still follow the same Avestan-Persian mode of pronunciation. Sakala > hakala, pari > fari, ja > za, āj > aij

In the early Veda there was little difference between Deva and Asura. Deva meant one radiating luminosity and vigour. Asu-ra meant self-poised radiating vigour. Both Indra and Varuna were synonymous with the Supreme Godhead. But in the later Veda and the Avesta we find the followers of these scriptures at loggerheads. Daeva (from 'deva') became derogatory in Avesta and Ahura Mazda, from Varuna Asura Medha (or, *majja*) became supreme God, meaning the self-possessed in the deep. Asura became derogatory in our Bhasha and in the later Veda.

Later on Sufis returned to the Upanishadic fold and Persian poets, like Hafiz, extolled Love as the elixir of life,—just as Soma-rasa of the Veda. The followers of Zarathustra were driven out of Persia who then returned to their mainland India.

## 23. Our Devasuri Mahabhasha Vak

Now let us return to our Prithivi, i.e. India, with the vigorous luminous millen-

numms-old Devasurī Speech, our *matri-tama Mahabhasha* Vak, our Mother-tongue She is sustaining us all the time without our knowing it, through Kalī-bhasha, Nishada-bhasha, Aranyaka (foresters’)-bhasha, Hara-bhasha (Hara-appa?), Veda-bhasha, Pali, Sanskrit, Sanskrit-breaking Prakrit Continuing down to our *matri-bhashas*, mother-tongues, we have at present a number of languages India is progressing under the guidance of the Rishis and Rishikas (seen and hidden) of the land Foreign culture and languages are welcome even as they mingle with ours SRI Aurobindo made English Vedic

This will be the third—already in vogue—reform of Vak from *krita-vak* to *sam-s-krita* and then to *nū-krita*, the old and the new giving rise to the new expressions. The Mother already declared that simple Sanskrit should be our *lingua franca*. But without a Chandragupta-Chanakya combine it is not becoming effective.

#### 24. The Light of Panini

The hypothetical Indo-European theory of language has to give place to a New VISION A much-travelled Continental man called Panini, who viewed the language of Prithivī, Greater India, has to arrive He will direct our eyes and ears to a new emergent India with one common language, Rāshtri Bhasha In it will flourish various mother tongues, each representing countless idiolects (individual languages), vigorous and luminous according to the capacity of each, leading to an interchange of words and idioms

The ‘giant order’ (*Savitri*, p. 88)—in our Mahabhasha, both in popular-speech and Rishi-speech—is persisting with a newer force, the needed brilliance, and will continue so because our psyche answers to the call of this Mahabhasha

(Concluded)

GAURI DHARMAPAL

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1999)

SRI AUROBINDO has given five chapters on literature in his book, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*—the first three being devoted to the *Veda* and the *Upanishads*—respectively, the fourth to Kalidasa and the poets of the classical age, and the last, to Purana and Tantra, to the Tamil poets, and the minstrels of God all over the country. What Sri Aurobindo was attempting is nothing less than a bird's eye-view of a three-thousand-year fairly continuous and reasonably diversified literary tradition.

Mr. Archer's criticism on Indian Literature would seem to have missed everything essential and made much noise over what is merely peripheral or casual. Sri Aurobindo's reply takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* in reverse.

“The fit parallel to this motive and style of criticism would be if an Indian critic who had read European literature only in bad or ineffective Indian translations, were to pass it under a hostile and disparaging review, dismiss the *Iliad* as a crude and empty semi-savage and primitive epos, Dante's great work as the nightmare of a cruel and superstitious religious fantasy, Shakespeare as a drunken barbarian of considerable genius with an epileptic imagination, the whole drama of Greece and Spain and England as a mass of bad ethics and violent horrors, French poetry as a succession of bald or tawdry rhetorical exercises and French fiction as a tainted and immoral thing, a long sacrifice on the altar of the goddess Lubricity, admit here and there a minor merit, but make no attempt at all to understand the central spirit or aesthetic quality or principle of structure and conclude on the strength of his own absurd method that the ideals of both Pagan and Christian Europe were altogether false and bad and its imagination afflicted with a ‘habitual and ancestral’ earthiness, morbidity, poverty and disorder. No criticism would be worth making on such a mass of absurdities, and in this equally ridiculous philippic only a stray observation or two less inconsequent and opaque than the others perhaps demands a passing notice.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo turns to the *Veda*, which is a remarkable, a sublime and powerful poetic creation by Rishis (a Vishvamira, a Vamadeva, a Dirghatamas) touching “the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry”<sup>2</sup>. The constant feeling of presence of the infinite, the sixth sense to see and tender to see and tender this presence through multifoliate imagery drawn from the psychic plane, and the leap of intuition that repeatedly achieves the transcendence of terrestrial into vaster spiritual realms, these three distinguishing marks of the best Vedic poetry provide also the inspiration for all the best Indian poetry to come:

“The real character of the *Veda* can best be understood by taking it anywhere and rendering it straightforwardly according to its own phrases and images. A famous

German scholar rating from his high pedestal of superior intelligence the silly persons who find sublimity in the Veda, tells us that it is full of childish, silly, even monstrous conceptions, that it is tedious, low, commonplace, that it represents human nature on a low level of selfishness and worldliness and that only here and there are a few rare sentiments that come from the depths of the soul. It may be made so if we put our own mental conceptions into the words of the Rishis, but if we read them as they are without any such false translation into what we think early barbarians ought to have said and thought, we shall find instead a sacred poetry sublime and powerful in its words and images, though with another kind of language and imagination than we now prefer and appreciate, deep and subtle in its psychological experience and stirred by a moved soul of vision and utterance. Hear rather the word itself of the Veda

‘States upon states are born, covering over covering awakens to knowledge: in the lap of the mother he wholly sees. They have called to him, getting a wide knowledge, they guard sleeplessly the strength, they have entered into the strong city. The peoples born on earth increase the luminous (force) of the son of the White Mother, he has gold on his neck, he is large of speech, he is as if by (the power of) this honey-wine a seeker of plenty. He is like pleasant and desirable milk, he is a thing unaccompanied and is with the two who are companions and is as a heat that is the belly of plenty and is invincible and an overcomer of many. Play, O Ray, and manifest thyself.’ (Rig Veda, V.19.)

Or again in the succeeding hymn,—

‘Those (flames) of thee, the forceful (godhead), that move not and are increased and puissant, unclinging the hostility and crookedness of one who has another law. O Fire, we choose thee for our priest and the means of effectuation of our strength and in the sacrifices bringing the food of thy pleasure we call thee by the word. . O god of perfect works, may we be for the felicity, for the truth, revelling with the rays, revelling with the heroes.’

And finally let us take the bulk of the third hymn that follows couched in the ordinary symbols of the sacrifice,—

‘As the Manu we set thee in thy place, as the Manu we kindle thee. O Fire, O Angiras, as the Manu sacrifice to the gods for him who desires the godheads. O Fire, well pleased thou art kindled in the human being and the ladles go to thee continually. . Thee all the gods with one pleasure (in thee) made their messenger and serving thee, O seer, (men) in the sacrifices adore the god. Let the mortal adore the divine Fire with sacrifice to the godheads. Kindled, flame forth, O Bright One. Sit in the seat of Truth, sit in the seat of peace.’



That, whatever interpretation we choose to put on its images, is a mystic and symbolic poetry and that is the real Veda.’’<sup>3</sup>

The Upanishads add a more specifically intellectual dimension to the poetry and the speculation, but they also connect with the higher spiritual thought of the civilised world, ancient and modern

“The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the West, and Sufism only repeats them in another religious language. The larger part of German metaphysics is little more in substance than an intellectual development of great realities more spiritually seen in this ancient teaching, and modern thought is rapidly absorbing them with a closer, more living and intense receptiveness which promises a revolution both in philosophical and in religious thinking; here they are filtering in through many indirect influences, there slowly pouring through direct and open channels. There is hardly a main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or a seed or indication in these antique writings—the speculations, according to a certain view, of thinkers who had no better past or background to their thought than a crude, barbaric, naturalistic and animistic ignorance. And even the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the truth of physical Nature formulas already discovered by the Indian sages in their original, their largest meaning in the deeper truth of the spirit

“And yet these works are not philosophical speculations of the intellectual kind, a metaphysical analysis which labours to define notions, to select ideas and discriminate those that are true, to logicise truth or else to support the mind in its intellectual preferences by dialectical reasoning and is content to put forward an exclusive solution of existence in the light of this or that idea of the reason and see all things from that viewpoint, in that focus and determining perspective. The Upanishads could not have had so undying a vitality, exercised so unfailing an influence, produced such results or seen now their affirmations independently justified in other spheres of inquiry and by quite opposite methods, if they had been of that character. It is because these seers saw Truth rather than merely thought it, clothed it indeed with a strong body of intuitive idea and disclosing image, but a body of ideal transparency through which we look into the illimitable, because they fathomed things in the light of self-existence and saw them with the eye of the Infinite, that their words remain always alive and immortal, of an inexhaustible significance, an inevitable authenticity, a satisfying finality that is at the same time an infinite commencement of truth, to which all our lines of investigation when they go through to their end arrive again and to which humanity constantly returns in its minds and its ages of greatest vision. The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge in a higher degree even than the Vedas, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, *jñāna*. Not a mere

thinking and considering by the intelligence, the pursuit and grasping of a mental form of truth by the intellectual mind, but a seeing of it with the soul and a total living in it with the power of the inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge is *jñāna*''<sup>4</sup>

The Upanishads, it must be admitted, are not all of a piece, there are the shorter metrical Upanishads, and there are the discursive tropically-rich Upanishads, and often story, fable, debate, hair-splitting, poetry, all co-exist cheek by jowl but on a total view, it is a legacy unparalleled elsewhere, and, besides, they reveal to us the contours of an extraordinary society, a unique culture, a rare intellectual and spiritual camaraderie Sri Aurobindo says

“The imagery of the Upanishads is in large part developed from the type of imagery of the Veda and though very ordinarily it prefers an unveiled clarity of directly illuminative image, not unoften also it uses the same symbols in a way that is closely akin to the spirit and to the less technical part of the method of the older symbolism. It is to a great extent this element no longer seizable by our way of thinking that has baffled certain western scholars and made them cry out that these scriptures are a mixture of the sublimest philosophical speculations with the first awkward stammerings of the child mind of humanity. The Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret. It begins by taking up the imagery and the ritual symbols of the Veda and the Brahmanas and turning them in such a way as to bring out an inner and a mystic sense which will serve as a sort of psychical starting-point for its own more highly evolved and more purely spiritual philosophy. There are a number of passages especially in the prose Upanishads which are entirely of this kind and deal, in a manner recondite, obscure and even unintelligible to the modern understanding, with the psychic sense of ideas then current in the Vedic religious mind, the distinction between the three kinds of Veda, the three worlds and other similar subjects, but, leading as they do in the thought of the Upanishads to deepest spiritual truths, these passages cannot be dismissed as childish aberrations of the intelligence void of sense or of any discoverable bearing on the higher thought in which they culminate. On the contrary we find that they have a deep enough significance once we can get inside their symbolic meaning. That appears in a psycho-physical passing upward into a psycho-spiritual knowledge for which we would now use more intellectual, less concrete and imaged terms, but which is still valid for those who practise Yoga and rediscover the secrets of our psycho-physical and psycho-spiritual being. Typical passages of this kind of peculiar expression of psychic truths are Ajatashatru’s explanation of sleep and dream or the passages of the Prashna Upanishad on the vital principle and its motions, or

those in which the Vedic idea of the struggle between the Gods and the demons is taken up and given its spiritual significance and the Vedic godheads more openly than in Rik and Saman characterised and invoked in their inner function and spiritual power.

“I may cite as an example of this development of Vedic idea and image a passage of the Taittiriya in which Indra plainly appears as the power and godhead of the divine mind

‘He who is the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he who was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal,—may Indra satisfy me through the intelligence O God, may I become a vessel of the Immortal. May my body be full of vision and my tongue of sweetness, may I hear the much and vast with my ears For thou art the sheath of Brahman covered over and hidden by the intelligence ’

And a kindred passage may also be cited from the Isha in which Surya the Sun-God is invoked as the godhead of knowledge whose supreme form of effulgence is the oneness of the Spirit and his rays dispersed here on the mental level are the shining diffusion of the thought mind and conceal his own infinite supramental truth, the body and self of this Sun, the truth of the spirit and the Eternal.

‘The face of the Truth is covered with a golden lid O fostering Sun, that uncover for the law of the truth, for sight O fosterer, O sole Rishi, O controlling Yama, O Surya, O son of the Father of creatures, marshal and mass thy rays the Lustre that is thy most blessed form of all, that I see, He who is this, this Purusha, He am I.’

The kinship in difference of these passages with the imagery and style of the Veda is evident and the last indeed paraphrases or translates into a later and more open style a Vedic verse of the Atris.

‘Hidden by your truth is the Truth that is constant for ever where they unyoke the horses of the Sun There the ten thousands stand together, That is the One I have seen the supreme Godhead of the embodied gods ’

This Vedic and Vedantic imagery is foreign to our present mentality which does not believe in the living truth of the symbol, because the revealing imagination intimidated by the intellect has no longer the courage to accept, identify itself with and boldly embody a psychic and spiritual vision, but it is certainly very far from being a childish or a primitive and barbarous mysticism; this vivid, living, luminously poetic intuitive language is rather the natural expression of a highly evolved spiritual culture.

“The intuitive thought of the Upanishads starts from this concrete imagery and these symbols, first to the Vedic Rishis secret seer words wholly expressive to the

mind of the seer but veils of their deepest sense to the ordinary intelligence, link them to a less covertly expressive language and pass beyond them to another magnificently open and sublime imagery and diction which at once reveals the spiritual truth in all its splendour. The prose Upanishads show us this process of the early mind of India at its work using the symbol and then passing beyond it to the overt expression of the spiritual significance. A passage of the Prashna Upanishad on the power and significance of the mystic syllable AUM illustrates the earlier stage of the process:

‘This syllable OM, O Satyakama, it is the supreme and it is the lower Brahman. Therefore the man of knowledge passes by this house of the Brahman to the one or the other. And if one meditates on the single letter, he gets by it knowledge and soon he attains on the earth. And him the Riks lead to the world of men and there perfected in Tapas and Brahmacharya and faith he experiences the greatness of the spirit. Now if by the double letter he is accomplished in the mind, then is he led up by the Yajus to the middle world, to the moon-world of Soma. He in the world of Soma experiences the majesty of the spirit and returns again. And he who by the triple letter again, even this syllable OM, shall meditate on the highest Purusha, is perfected in the light that is the Sun. As a snake puts off its skin, even so is he released from sin and evil and is led by the Samans to the world of Brahman. He from this dense of living souls sees the higher than the highest Purusha who lies in this mansion. The three letters are afflicted by death, but now they are used undivided and united to each other, then are the inner and the outer and the middle action of the spirit made whole in their perfect using and the spirit knows and is not shaken. This world by the Riks, the middle world by the Yajus and by the Samans that which the seers make known to us. The man of knowledge passes to Him by OM, his house, even to the supreme Spirit that is calm and ageless and fearless and immortal.’<sup>5</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

### *References*

- 1 *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol 14, p 257
- 2 *Ibid*, p 267
- 3 *Ibid*, pp 262-63
- 4 *Ibid*, pp 270-71
- 5 *Ibid*, pp 274-77

## THE AWAKENING OF KING ASHOKA

[The battle of Kalinga in Orissa in the third century B C had a profound impact on world history King Ashoka of the Mauryan empire inflicted a crushing defeat on the king of Kalinga. The suffering that this defeat caused the vanquished deeply hurt Ashoka He eschewed violence, became a Buddhist, and turned a little known sect then existing on the banks of the river Ganga in Bihar into a world religion The story is based on this incident.]

THE Mauryan king, Ashoka, had conquered the kingdom of Kalinga, had destroyed and burnt numerous towns, slaughtered the warriors, beheaded some chieftains and impaled or flayed others, and had imprisoned King Satkarni in a cell, when suddenly he heard a rustling near his bed and opening his eyes saw an old man with a long grey beard and mild eyes.

“You wish to execute Satkarni?” asked the old man

“Yes,” answered the king. “But I cannot make up my mind how to do it ”

“But you are Satkarni,” said the old man

“That’s not true,” replied King Ashoka. “Satkarni is Satkarni, and I am I.”

“You and Satkarni are one,” said the old man “You only imagine you are not Satkarni and that Satkarni is not you ”

“What do you mean by that?” said the king “Here am I, lying on a soft bed; around me are obedient men and women slaves, and tomorrow I shall feast with my friends as I did today; whereas Satkarni is imprisoned in a small cell, and tomorrow he will be impaled, and with his tongue hanging out will struggle till he dies, and his body will be torn to pieces by the dogs ”

“You cannot destroy his life,” said the old man.

“And how about the many thousands of warriors I have killed,” said the king. “I am alive but they no longer exist. Does that not prove I can destroy life?”

“How do you know they no longer exist?”

“Because I no longer see them. And, above all, they suffered but I did not. It was bad for them but not for me.”

“It only seems that way to you You tortured yourself in torturing them as all life is one.”

“I do not understand,” said the king.

“Do you wish to understand?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then come,” said the old man, pointing to a large pitcher full of water

The king rose and approached the pitcher.

“Now bend to enter the top of your head in the pitcher Do not put your nose in the water so that you can breathe freely ”

Ashoka did as the old man bade him.

“As soon as I begin to pour this water over you,” said the old man, “dip down your head”

The old man helped the King to put his head in the pitcher and then began pouring water from his tumbler

And as soon as King Ashoka was under the water, he felt he was no longer Ashoka, but someone else. And, feeling himself to be the other man, he saw himself lying on a rich bed, beside a beautiful woman. He had never seen her before, but he knew she was his wife. The woman raised herself and said to him

“Dear husband, Satkarni! You were wearied by yesterday’s work and slept longer than usual, and I have guarded your rest and have not roused you. But now your Princes await you in the Great Hall. Dress and go out to them.”

And Ashoka, understanding from these words that he was Satkarni, and not feeling at all surprised at this, but only wondering that he did not know it before—rose, dressed, and went into the Great Hall where his Princes awaited him.

The Princes greeted Satkarni, their king, bowing to the ground, and then they rose, and at his word sat down before him; and the eldest of the Princes began to speak, saying that it was impossible any longer to endure the insults of the wicked King Ashoka, and that they must make war on him. But Satkarni disagreed, and gave orders that envoys shall be sent to remonstrate with King Ashoka; and he dismissed the Princes from the audience. Afterwards he appointed men of note to act as ambassadors, and impressed on them what they were to say to King Ashoka.

Having completed this business, Ashoka—feeling himself to be Satkarni—rode out to hunt for wild boars. The hunt was successful. He killed three wild boars himself, and, having returned home, feasted with his friends and witnessed a dance of girls. The next day he went to court where he was awaited by petitioners, suitors, and prisoners brought for trial, and there, as usual, he decided the cases submitted to him. Having finished this business, he again rode out for his favourite amusement: the hunt. And this night he spent in the company of his wife, whom he loved intensely.

So, dividing the time between kingly duties and pleasures, he lived for days and weeks, awaiting the return of the ambassadors he had sent to that King Ashoka, who used to be himself. Not till a month had passed did the ambassadors return, and they returned with their noses and ears cut off.

King Ashoka had ordered them to tell Satkarni that what had been done to them would be done to King Satkarni himself also, unless he immediately sent a tribute of silver, gold and precious stones, and came himself to pay homage to King Ashoka.

Satkarni, formerly Ashoka, again assembled the Princes, and took counsel with them as to what should be done. They all with one voice said that war must be made against Ashoka, without waiting for him to attack them. The king agreed; and leading his army met that of Ashoka on the fourth day of his march in a broad valley. Satkarni’s army fought bravely, but Satkarni, formerly Ashoka, saw the enemy swarming down the valley like ants, overwhelming his army. Satkarni fell from his

chariot and realised he was wounded but continued fighting with his sword till taken prisoner and locked in a cell

In his cell Satkarni suffered not so much from hunger and his wounds as from shame and impotent rage. All he could do was to deprive his enemy of the pleasure of knowing all he was suffering; so he firmly resolved to endure courageously, without a murmur, all they could do to him. He saw his relatives and friends led out to death; he heard the groans of those who were executed: some had their hands and feet cut off, others were flayed alive, but he showed neither disquietude, nor pity, nor fear. He saw the wife he loved, bound, and taken by two eunuchs. He knew she was being taken as a slave to King Ashoka. That, too, he bore without a murmur.

At last two executioners opened his cell door, and having strapped his arms behind him, led him to the place of execution, which was soaked in blood.

“This is death, destruction!” thought Satkarni, and forgetful of his resolve to remain bravely calm to the end, he sobbed and prayed for mercy. But no one listened.

“But this cannot be,” he thought. “Surely I am asleep. It is a dream.” And he made an effort to rouse himself, and did indeed awake, to find himself neither Ashoka nor Satkarni, but a small boy playing in an open grassy field with another boy. A short distance away sat a poorly dressed Ashoka, like an ordinary man, under a shady tree, gazing vacantly into space. Laughing, the other boy ran towards his father—Ashoka—and hiding behind a tree he squealed.

“Can you see me, father?”

“Yes, I can,” replied a laughing Ashoka and began a mock run to catch his son.

The boy ran playfully forward but suddenly something flew near with a whistling sound and hit him in the side, and with its sharp point entered his skin and flesh. Feeling a burning pain, Ashoka rushed towards his son, when another arrow in full flight struck the boy’s neck. Before Ashoka could reach his son, a man ran up to the boy and, shouting “Death to the enemy”, stabbed the boy to death.

“This cannot be, it is a dream!” thought Ashoka, and made a last effort to awake. “Surely I am not Satkarni nor the ordinarily dressed Ashoka. I am Emperor Ashoka.”

He cried out, and at the same time lifted his head out of the pitcher. . . The old man was standing by him, pouring over his head the last drops from his tumbler.

“Oh, how terribly I have suffered! And for how long!” said Ashoka.

“Long?” replied the old man, “you have only dipped your head under water and lifted it again, see, the water is not yet finished in my tumbler. Do you now understand?”

Ashoka did not reply, but only looked at the old man with terror.

“Do you now understand,” continued the old man, “that Satkarni is you, and the warriors you put to death were you also? Life is one, and yours is but a portion of the same common life. And, only in that one part of life that is yours, can you make life better or worse—increasing or decreasing it. You can only improve life in yourself by removing the barriers that divide your life from that of others, and by

considering others as yourself and loving them By so doing, you increase the value of your life. The life of those you have slain has vanished from your eyes, but is not destroyed By destroying life you achieve nothing, except suffering for yourself ”

Having said this the old man vanished

Next morning King Ashoka gave orders that Satkarni and all other prisoners should be set at liberty and that the executions should cease.

A few days later Ashoka embraced Buddhism and spent the remainder of his life preaching the message of Buddha

ANIL CHANDRA

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## REGENERATED WORDS

WORDS, words bewilder me,  
weaken my thoughts,  
ideas get crippled,  
imagination featherless  
Running here and there  
I stop at a still-point,  
words cracked, misspelt  
regenerated now  
become sweet and silent

I keep totally mum,  
My pen mute  
and motionless;  
Your fond memories  
invade gently  
a heart, a mind  
away from words  
and worries

ASHALATA DASH



## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**A Hundred Devotional Songs of Tagore** translated by Mohit Chakrabarti, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan 731 235 First Published 1999, Price Rs 150, M/S Motilal Banarasidass.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE lived a rich life of sweetness and song in the midst of all the harsh contradictions of existence. This itself is a marvel. When on 7 August 1941 he died at 80, we may say that the death was too early for him; he was still growing,—growing, that his song and sweetness had not yet shown any sign of withdrawal.

Although Tagore was primarily a poet, his poetry yet flowed in many streams through novels, dramas, short-stories, lyric-musical compositions, choreography, painting, he was an actor, director, innovator in dance-drama, educationist, essayist, philosopher,—if we have to just name a few. At the same time keenly aware as he was of the problems of the contemporary society, we also see in him an ardent patriot and an internationalist. He was a citizen of the world, possessing the greatness of Universal Man or *viskwa-mānava*.

By any reckoning this is something very unique inasmuch as it also shows the best that refined and cultured human capability and possibility can achieve. Belonging to the Indian renaissance, Tagore could easily be considered as a good candidate for the higher life of the spirit. Through a kind of aesthetic sadhana he certainly had arrived at the portals of the true and the beautiful. His was a devotion simple and joyous, which was at the same time serene and poignant with a delicateness of thought and feeling.

It was out of this devotion that Rabindranath wrote song after exquisite song in which his worshipping heart found a rhythmic expression to pour in abundance all his emotions. A creator of no less than three thousand lyrics, he made his language mellifluous and even aromatic. A new breathing world of sense and sensibility was born with it. In his hands “Bengali fiction underwent a radical change in that he made a clean break with Bankim Chandra’s language of stiff formalism and brought in a scintillating prose style along with introducing the genre of psychological novels.”

*A Hundred Devotional Songs of Tagore* by Mohit Chakrabarti is yet another illustration of these soft and tender-affectionate qualities so characteristic of him. Here we have a representative selection rendered line by line into English with the original Bengali compositions in italic script preceding them. The translator submits that he shall feel happy if the “revered readers might tune on within themselves in moments of deep involvement with some of these songs.” The following is perhaps a good sample of the tone and contents of the songs we have in the present selection.

Thou hast remained standing on the other bank of my song,  
 My tunes beget feet, I fail to have thee.  
 O what a wind blows, fasten not the boat any more—  
 Come, O come sailing along in the midst of my heart  
 With thee is my play of songs and distance.  
 All day long the flute plays on in pain  
 When wouldst thou come of thy own with my flute playing on  
 In the poignant darkness of night joyous and silent. (p 33)

The renderings are generally smooth in flow and read well. However, if the translator has taken certain liberties in view of the exigencies of another language, he cannot be reproached. As long as the spirit of the original is conveyed with sufficient poetic faithfulness we may say that he has succeeded creditably in this difficult task. But we do not know if the last line in the above, for instance, carries that hauntingly weighty atmosphere which is there in the original *anandamay nirab rater nibid andhare*. While we can appreciate the devotee's sense of poignancy in the expectant darkness of the night, the psychological thickness and density of *nibid* gets lost. Similarly, the swinging lilt of *tomar shathe ganer khela durer khela* he is altogether missing in "With thee is my play of songs and distance."

More important, however, could be the question which we may have to put one day or another regarding our placement of Tagore in the ranks of world-class poets who live on for centuries to come. His *Gitanjali* and *Fruit-Gathering* are perhaps sufficient to give us an idea of what this genre of poetry at its best is capable of achieving, an idea which is not furthered in any way by additional three-thousand songs. Can we with all these wonderful achievements of his put him anywhere in the company of poets such as Valmiki, Vyasa, Kalidasa even if we go by the Indianness of his compositions in terms of their substance and essentiality of emotion? Tagore certainly drew extensively from the cultural past, in that his myth-laden creations have also given us new aesthetic expression and sensibility. Yet the deeper layers of thought and imagination, subtleties and nuances in the richness of their hues and echoes seem to be missing in him.

Thus when Gandhiji broke his fast on 26 April 1932 in the Yaravada jail, Tagore sang the most moving number from *Gitanjali*. When the heart is dry and parched come thou with a burst of song, *jiban jakhan shukae jae karuna dharae esho*. Which only means that the poignancy of his songs acquires its merit only in circumstantial contexts. When Gandhiji met him in Santiniketan, in 1925, Tagore was the first to address him as Mahatma who in return called him Gurudev. Did Tagore possess that Rishihood in him to be called so? Did he have the Mantric word to initiate us in the effecting power of its truth-potencies?

Speaking about the Vedic tradition of the Ramayana and Mahabharata Sri Aurobindo writes as follows "The poets wrote with a sense of their function as architects and sculptors of life, creative exponents, fashioners of significant forms of

the national thought and religion and ethics and culture. A profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society, a certain strain of philosophic idea run through these poems and the whole ancient culture of India is embodied in them with a great force of intellectual conception and living presentation''

Tagore falls considerably short of this requirement of Rishihood and assessment of him as a poet needs to be undertaken again in the deeper values of the spirit in its active dynamism of life. Another study and presentation of Tagore is overdue.

R Y DESHPANDE

*Students' Section*

**THE GRASS FLOWER**

I BLOOM by the garden path  
On a slender stalk of grass,  
A little brown flower

I don no rose's clothes  
Nor imitate  
The lily's looks  
I am just a tiny cluster  
Of hair-like filaments

The busy bees  
And the flamboyant butterflies  
Snub me

People coming to collect  
The garden flowers  
Tread on me.

But children  
Are my admirers  
They look at me  
With natural eyes

Yesterday,  
Two little ones  
Came rambling  
They bent over me  
In sheer delight  
One exclaimed  
"How cute it looks,  
Like my tooth-brush!"  
The other child said  
"How sweet it smells  
Like rain-made slush!"

M L THANGAPPA