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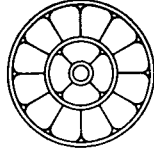
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LIII

No. 9

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## LIFE DWELT PARKED

THEN journeying forward through the self's wide hush  
She came into a brilliant ordered Space.  
There Life dwelt parked in an armed tranquillity,  
A chain was on her strong insurgent heart.  
Tamed to the modesty of a measured pace,  
She kept no more her vehement stride and rush;  
She had lost the careless majesty of her muse  
And the ample grandeur of her regal force;  
Curbed were her mighty pomps, her splendid waste,  
Sobered the revels of her bacchant play,  
Cut down were her squanderings in desire's bazaar,  
Coerced her despot will, her fancy's dance,  
A cold stolidity bound the riot of sense.  
Her spirit's bounds they cast in rigid lines..  
The Spirit's almighty freedom was not here  
A schoolman mind had captured life's large space,  
But chose to live in bare and paltry rooms  
Parked off from the too vast dangerous universe,  
Fearing to lose its soul in the infinite.  
Even the Idea's ample sweep was cut  
Into a system, chained to fixed pillars of thought  
Or rivetted to Matter's solid ground:  
Or else the soul was lost in its own heights  
Obeying the Ideal's high-browed law  
Thought based a throne on unsubstantial air  
Disdaining earth's flat triviality:  
It barred reality out to live in its dreams...  
Life's empire was a managed continent .  
Life was consigned to a safe level path,  
It dared not tempt the great and difficult heights  
Or climb to be neighbour to a lonely star  
Or skirt the danger of the precipice  
Or tempt the foam-curl'd breakers' perilous laugh,  
Adventure's lyrist, danger's amateur,  
Or into her chamber call some flaming god,  
Or leave the world's bounds and, where no limits are,  
Meet with the heart's passion the Adorable  
Or set the world ablaze with the inner fire  
A chastened epithet in the prose of life,  
She must fill with colour just her sanctioned space,

Nor break out of the cabin of the idea  
 Nor trespass into rhythms too high or vast.  
 Even when it soared into ideal air,  
 Thought's flight lost not itself in heaven's blue:  
 It drew upon the skies a patterned flower  
 Of disciplined beauty and harmonic light.  
 A temperate vigilant spirit governed life  
 Its acts were tools of the considering thought,  
 Too cold to take fire and set the world ablaze,  
 Or the careful reason's diplomatic moves  
 Testing the means to a prefigured end,  
 Or at the highest pitch some calm Will's plan  
 Or a strategy of some High Command within  
 To conquer the secret treasures of the gods  
 Or win for a masked king some glorious world,  
 Not a reflex of the spontaneous self,  
 An index of the being and its moods,  
 A winging of conscious spirit, a sacrament  
 Of life's communion with the still Supreme  
 Or its pure movement on the Eternal's road  
 Or else for the body of some high Idea  
 A house was built with too close-fitting bricks,  
 Action and thought cemented made a wall  
 Of small ideals limiting the soul  
 Even meditation mused on a narrow seat;  
 And worship turned to an exclusive God,  
 To the Universal in a chapel prayed  
 Whose doors were shut against the universe  
 Or kneeled to the bodiless Impersonal  
 A mind shut to the cry and fire of love:  
 A rational religion dried the heart.  
 It planned a smooth life's acts with ethics' rule  
 Or offered a cold and flameless sacrifice.  
 The sacred Book lay on its sanctified desk  
 Wrapped in interpretation's silken strings:  
 A credo sealed up its spiritual sense.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 495-98)

## THINGS SEEN IN SYMBOLS

THERE are four who are Beyond and they rule the mighty game of evolution. It is they who build the universe with their thoughts and imaginations. Vishnu or Virat puts them in front each in turn and they govern each a cycle. All the sons of immortality come forth from them and return to them, all the children of Earth are their portions. One stands in front, the others incarnate to help him. They are God Himself in His fourfold manifestation. Once in each *caturyuga* they come down together,—the *caturvyūha*, Śrīkrishna, Balarama, Pradyumna, Aniruddha

\*

Śrīkrishna contains all the others and puts them out from His being. He is Ishwara, Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu. Lordship is His manifestation, Might and Wisdom are His *gunas*. Balarama is the second Power. Force is His manifestation; strength and wrath are His attributes. Pradyumna is the third Power. Love is His manifestation; sweetness and delight are His attributes. Aniruddha is the fourth Power. Desire is His manifestation; bodily enjoyment and worldly reason are His attributes.

\*

Śrīkrishna is the Brahmin served by the Kshatriya. He has the divine Knowledge and uses His might under the guidance of the Knowledge. Balarama is the Kshatriya. He allows Śrīkrishna in Him to guide His strength and wrath, but He does not guide them Himself, He enjoys them. He is Rudra. Pradyumna is the Vaishya. He is for *dāna*, *prema*, *karunā*. He gives Himself to men and buys their love in exchange. He is the universal philanthropist. He is the sweet and throbbing heart in things. Aniruddha is the Sudra. He is the *kāmin*, the *bhogin*, the scientist, the user of material means, the democrat, the leveller.

\*

The Satya is full of Śrīkrishna, it is the Golden Age when men are full of might and wisdom. The Treta is full of Balarama; the Chakravartī Raja is the incarnation of the Treta, it is full of great wars and mighty sacrifices. The Dwapara is full of Pradyumna. He prepares in the Dwapara the love which supports men through the Kali. Aniruddha, the Sudra reigns in the Kali. He breaks the ancient moulds, He shatters to pieces the *ācāra*, He questions everything, destroys everything, levels everything, rebuilds everything. He is a Sudra and has the passion for work and service; He puts off lordship in order to become the divine Slave of humanity.

\*

For each of Them is not simple in Himself, but contains the other three and their attributes, only His own are usually foremost. Each is not a part but God Himself in His fullness They are not different, but the same, Four who are One, One who is Four. That One is Srikrishna

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Harmony of Virtue, SABCL, Vol 3, pp 452-53)*

---

## WORD OF REMAKING

STAR-ISLANDS in wide welkin lake,  
 A continent of moon,  
 The firestones with their shimmery wake  
 Through deeps of anti-noon

Soothlight—true being's underwork—  
 With a welter of Nothing between,—  
 May Light prevail where shadows lurk  
 Of empty, lonely teen

Then utter argosies of Light  
 Across the Unshape sea,  
 Refashion worlds arrayed with Sight  
 At speech of 'Let Love Be'

October 9, 1935

ARJAVA

Arjava. I am afraid this is far from being coherent and unified?  
 Sri Aurobindo: On the contrary it is very coherent, unified, well-built—very beautiful in idea and image and execution.



## ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS

CONSCIOUSNESS is not, to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing or interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of yoga, e.g., a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporary manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Purusha.

Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on the surface, but silent and immobile, it is there even when it is invisible on the surface, not reacting on outward things or sensible to them, but withdrawn and either active or inactive within; it is there even when it seems to us to be quite absent and the being to our view unconscious and inanimate.

Consciousness is not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. It can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions, it can not only answer to forces, but create or put out from itself forces. Consciousness is Chit but also Chit Shakti.

Consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range which no more exhausts all the possible ranges of consciousness than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or human hearing all the gradations of sound—for there is much above or below that is to man invisible and inaudible. So there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which the normal human has no contact and they seem to it unconscious,—supramental or overmental and submental ranges.

When Yajñavalkya says there is no consciousness in the Brahman state, he is speaking of consciousness as the human being knows it. The Brahman state is that of a supreme existence supremely aware of itself, *svayāṃprakāśa*,—it is Sachchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Even if it be spoken of as beyond That, *parātparam*, it does not mean that it is a state of Non-existence or Non-consciousness, but beyond even the highest spiritual substratum (the “foundation above” in the luminous paradox of the Rig Veda) of cosmic existence and consciousness. As it is evident from the description of Chinese Tao and the Buddhist Shunya that that is a Nothingness in which all is, so with the negation of consciousness here. Superconscient and subconscient are only relative terms, as we rise into the superconscient we see that it is a consciousness greater than the highest we yet have and therefore in our normal state inaccessible to us and, if we can go down into the subconscient, we find there a consciousness other than our own at its lowest mental limit and therefore

ordinarily inaccessible to us. The Inconscient itself is only an involved state of consciousness which like the Tao or Shunya, though in a different way, contains all things suppressed within it so that under a pressure from above or within all can evolve out of it—“an inert Soul with a somnambulist Force”

The gradations of consciousness are universal states not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality, rather the outlook of the subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its typical nature or its evolutionary stage

It will be evident that by consciousness is meant something which is essentially the same throughout but variable in status, condition and operation, in which in some grades or conditions the activities we call consciousness can exist either in a suppressed or an unorganised or a differently organised state; while in other states some other activities may manifest which in us are suppressed, unorganised or latent or else are less perfectly manifested, less intensive, extended and powerful than in those higher grades above our highest mental limit

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol 22, pp 233-35)

N B While narrating his experiences Nagin-bhai once referred to Sri Aurobindo's letter on consciousness, see *Mother India*, July 2000, p 522 The above reproduces the said letter —R Y D

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

(Continued from the issue of August 2000)

वि ते विष्वग्वातजूतासो अग्ने भामासः शुचे शुचयश्चरन्ति ।  
तुविम्रक्षासो दिव्या नवग्वा वना वनन्ति धृषता रुजन्तः ॥

(Rīgveda, 6.6.3)

Wide everywhere, O pure-shining Agni, range driven by the wind thy pure shining lustres (*bhāmāsaḥ*); forcefully overpowering the heavenly Nine-rayed ones (*divyā navagvāḥ*) enjoy the woods (*vanā vananti*, significantly conveying the covert sense, 'enjoying the objects of enjoyment') breaking them up violently (*SABCL*, Vol. 10, p. 156)

O Fire, thy lights range wind-impelled on every side, pure as thou art pure Many things they violate and break in their rashness and enjoy the forests of their pleasure, heavenly lights, seers of the ninefold-ray. (*SABCL*, Vol. 11, p. 258)

ये ते शुक्रासः शुचयः शुचिष्मः क्षां वपन्ति विषितासो अश्वाः ।  
अध भ्रमस्त उर्विया वि भाति यातयमानो अधि सानु पृथेः ॥

(Rīgveda, 6.6.4)

O thou of the pure light, they bright and pure assail (or overcome) all the earth, they are thy horses galloping in all directions Then thy roaming shines widely vast directing their journey to the higher level of the Various-coloured (the cow, Prishni, mother of the Maruts). (*SABCL*, Vol. 10, pp. 156-57)

O Fire of the burning purities, pure and flaming-bright are these thy horses that loosed to the gallop raze the earth. Then wide is thy wandering and its light shines far as it drives them up to the dappled Mother's heights. (*SABCL*, Vol 11, p. 258)

त्वमग्ने प्रथमो अङ्गिरा ऋषिर्देवो देवानामभवः शिवः सखा ।  
तव व्रते कवयो विद्यनापसोऽजायन्त मरुतो भ्राजदृष्टयः ॥

(Rīgveda, 1.31.1)

Thou, O Agni, wast the first Angirasa, the seer and auspicious friend, a god, of the gods; in the law of thy working the Maruts with their shining spears were born, seers who do the work by the knowledge. (*SABCL*, Vol. 10, p 158)

O Fire, thou becamest the first of the sages, a flame seer, a god and benignant comrade of the gods, in thy act and motion the Maruts with their blazing lances were

born, seers whose works are by knowledge (*Sri Aurobindo. Archives and Research*, Dec 1980, p 143)

धन्या चिद्धि त्वं धिषणा वष्टि प्र देवाञ्जन्म गृणते यजध्वे ।  
वंपिष्ठो अङ्गिरसा यद्द विप्रां मधु च्छन्दो भनति रेभ इष्टौ ॥

(Rigveda, 6 11 3)

For in thee the thought even though full of riches desires still the gods, the (divine) births. for the singer of the hymn that he may sacrifice to them, when the sage, the most luminous of the Angirasas, utters the rhythm of sweetness in the sacrifice (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p. 159)

स्वादुषसद पितरो वयोधा कृच्छेश्रित शक्तीवन्तो गभीरा ।  
चित्रसेना इषुवला अमृध्रा सतोवीरा उरवो व्रातसाहा ॥

(Rigveda, 6.75 9)

The Fathers who dwell in the sweetness (the world of bliss), who establish the wide birth, moving in the difficult places, possessed of force, profound, with their bright host and their strength of arrows, invincible, heroes in their being, wide overcomers of the banded foes. (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 160)

तव श्रिये व्यजिहीत पर्वतो गवा गोत्रमुदसृजो यदङ्गिर ।  
इन्द्रेण युजा तमसा परीवृत बृहस्पते निरपामौब्जो अर्णवम् ॥

(Rigveda, 2 23 18)

For the glory of thee the hill parted asunder when thou didst release upward the pen of the cows; with Indra for ally thou didst force out, O Brihaspati, the flood of the waters which was environed by the darkness (*SABCL*, Vol 10, p 161)

सो अङ्गिरोभिर्ङ्गिरस्तमो भूद् वृषा वृषभि सखिभि सखा सन् ।  
ऋग्मिभिर्ऋग्मो गातुभिर्ज्येष्ठो मरुत्वान् नो भवत्विन्द्र ऊती ॥

(Rigveda, 1 100 4)

May he become most Angirasa with the Angirasas, being the Bull with bulls (the bull is the male power or Purusha. *nr*, with regard to the Rays and the Waters who are the cows, *gāvah, dhenavah*), the Friend with friends, the possessor of the Rik with those who have the Rik (*rgmubhir rgmī*), with those who make the journey (*gātubhiḥ*, the souls that advance on the path towards the Vast and True) the greatest, may Indra become associated with the Maruts (*marutvān*) for our thriving (*SABCL*, Vol 10, pp 161-62)

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Sampadananda Mishra)

## PERSONAL EFFORT IS ALWAYS NECESSARY

You remember, we spoke once of the attitude of the baby cat and that of the baby monkey<sup>1</sup> If you agree to be like a docile baby cat (there are also baby cats which are very undisciplined, I have seen them), like a docile little child, this may go very fast Note that it is very easy to say. "Choose the attitude of the baby cat", but it is not so easy to do You must not believe that adopting the attitude of the baby cat lets you off from all personal effort Because you are not a baby cat, human beings are not baby cats<sup>1</sup> There are in you innumerable elements which are accustomed to trusting only themselves, which want to do their own work, and it is much more difficult to control all these elements than to let oneself go in all circumstances It is very difficult First of all, there is always that wonderful work of the mind which likes so very much to observe, criticise, analyse, doubt, try to solve the problem, say, "Is it good thus?", "Would it not be better like that?", and so on So that goes on and on, and where is the baby cat? For the baby cat does not think<sup>1</sup> It is free from all this and hence it is much easier for it<sup>1</sup>

Whatever be the way you follow, personal effort is always necessary till the moment of identification. At that moment all effort drops from you like a worn-out robe, you are another person what was impossible for you becomes not only possible but indispensable, you cannot do otherwise

You must be attentive, silent, must await the inner inspiration, not do anything from external reactions, you must be moved by the light that comes from above, constantly, regularly, must act only under the inspiration of that light and nothing else Never to think, never to question, never to ask "Should I do this or that?", but to know, to see, to hear To act with an inner certitude without questioning and without doubting, because the decision does not come from you, it comes from above. Well, this may come very soon or one may have to wait perhaps a long time—that depends upon one's previous preparation, upon many things Till then you must will and will with persistence, and above all never lose patience or courage. If necessary, repeat the same thing a thousand times, knowing that perhaps the thousandth time you will realise the result.

You are not all of a single piece Your present body is often an accident. If you have within you a conscious soul which has influenced the formation of your body, you are infinitely better prepared than someone, a soul, which falls head foremost into a body without knowing where it is going, in this latter case much hard work is needed to lift up the consciousness which has thus fallen into obscurity. The inner preparation may come from previous lives or from the present life, or you have reached a turning-point in your integral growth and are in just the right relation with the circumstances necessary for the last step to be taken But this does

<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a disciple can choose one of two attitudes: the passive trust of the baby cat which lets itself be carried by its mother (this is the way of surrender—the surest) and the active attitude of the baby monkey which clings to its mother (the way of personal effort)

not mean that you have not lived a thousand times before reaching this turning-point

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM, Vol 4, pp 94-95)*

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## EN ROUTE TO AUROVILLE—APRIL 22, 1975

I SAW in flaming moon-gold softly draped  
 Down the star-cut steps of consciousness  
 Descending, Angels of the night's surcease.  
 A daylight dream it was and hard the sun  
 Blazed violently the cloud-webs of my eyes  
 Feet of such white silence, breath be held,  
 The moment not to break with sound or sighs.  
 Then waking I slept while knowing dream more real  
 Than the rushing of the stream of leafless thoughts  
 That trouble the hour and the age awaiting.

Return journey to the patient trees, the earth  
 Her Grace has nourished Still am I upheld  
 And grow amongst the stones, vessels of force  
 Contained, yet conscious though slowed past breathings pace  
 And ultimately my faith a blossom stands  
 Held firmly in the calyx of an hour,  
 And death and dying meaningless, behold  
 This life engendering town of promised bliss.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## TWO LETTERS

### 1

THANK you for your letter—both typed and handwritten—and for the literature enclosed in another envelope. Please forgive my not having replied earlier.

I am glad my book *The Spirituality of the Future A Search apropos of R. C Zaehner's Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin* chanced into your hands and you found it valuable. My publishers—Associated University Presses—don't seem to have done much to bring it into the light. Periodically I receive from them my royalties—a check transmitting \$ 0. There will be a positive number once the sale has exceeded 800 copies: that was one of the terms of the contract. By the way, I wonder why you find Zaehner offensive. Or have I misread the epithet you have given him?

Now to your two questions.

1. The experience of a Presence silently radiating love from the heart is surely of the psychic being. But the psychic being itself is something of the Divine flowing out to Everything of the Divine beyond ourselves from the same Everything within us. In order to be truly psychic, the radiation you speak of has to be of a deep quiet intensity that gives and gives and never feels wasted if there is no response from the human recipient, for it really goes forth to the Divine who has worn the face and form of this or that person. Actually it streams out not only to persons but also to non-human living beings and even to objects: that is, to all manifestation. I may add that it creates in one a happy constant sense of self-dedication and self-consecration to the Supreme.

2. In the course of individual evolution it is the psychic that “grows” through the various experiences from life to life. The apparent movement is towards the True, the Good, the Beautiful, but inwardly the movement is towards the Divine and when this inward fact is recognised the authentic mystical life has begun and one is aware of one's psychic being directly and not only of the reflection or rather emanation of it in the mental-vital-physical complex. I may add that no matter how much the psychic being grows it still remains a child—simple, straight, trusting, humble. But this child is at the same time an extremely wise one, with the experience of ages enriching it and a spontaneous truth-feeling derived from its transcendent origin. Nor is it a weakling: its inherent immortality gives it a natural strength—strength to endure, to help, to conquer circumstances—strength born from the unfailing intuition of an omnipotent Loveliness accompanying it: it is the psychic being that says—in Sri Aurobindo's words—

Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a Flute go before us.

### 2

Why were you “mildly disappointed” that neither Sri Aurobindo nor I had been

bachelors? Is it because you can't imagine spirituality with having had a wife by one's side? Surely we were not born Yogis. And, while Sri Aurobindo became very much of a Yogi, I am afraid my feet are still of clay to a marked degree. But I may hazard the intuition that there are people who, no matter how much they may be married, remain single at heart with a flame burning ever upward in a secrecy of windless air which makes that fiery tongue declare an unwavering warmth to the Divine Beloved alone.

I was interested to learn of your past movements in the line of spirituality and to find that, truly speaking, all has dwindled in sight of the Aurobindonian vastness that has suddenly opened up and enfolded you with both light and love. Sri Aurobindo and his co-worker whom we call the Divine Mother will never leave you. Already they have made you their child with the equanimity and the strength they have infused into you. I may add that in the days to come you will realise that nothing is worth more than feeling intensely and constantly that you are their child. Our coming together was predestined, for you had to meet for your own self-knowledge one who had ever clung to them with the frail soul's infant cry at all times.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless. O abide with me!

You have ended your letter with an account of your meeting your long-cherished friend and spending a short time of perfect harmony with him. It makes me happy to learn that he has given back to you the self-esteem you had lost as a result of an unfortunate past relationship, but what makes me happiest is the observation and recognition of a great truth by you when you write "a confidence and security have replaced all the previously felt patterns and the compatibility and mental telepathy I now experience I attribute to the grace bestowed on me at the Samadhi." There is here not only the reaching of a deeper level of linkage by you with your loved one there is here also a sense of *free* acceptance of whatever linkage is present. Within the more tranquil, the more self-confident devotion that you experience I discern a subtle shade of transcendence of all "human bondage." Still a far cry in anything approaching the Upanishadic vision "When the knot of the heart-strings is rent asunder, the mortal even in this body enjoys immortality."

Of course, by "immortality" the Upanishad does not mean, as common parlance does, the mere survival of death by the soul while yet remaining "human, all-too-human." The Upanishad's meaning is the soul's realisation of its essential nature as a spark of the Divine, as an evolutionary representative of the Ever-Perfect, as a projection of the Eternal and the Infinite into an individual time-process under the aspect of mortality. Yes, distant still is such an ideal state, but I see a faint hovering on the threshold of it. Nothing that is precious in our humanness is lost—the tender warmth, the sweet sympathy, the eager fellow-feeling remain, but a soft smiling freedom accompanies them and looks beyond all things towards the feet of Sri



Aurobindo that have reached life's goal and towards the hands of the Mother which are extended from the depths of beatitude to help us cross over to those feet.

Have I been flying too high? Well, let me now answer your question about St. Xavier's College. Yes, I was a Xavierite all through my education. I took my B.A. Honours in Philosophy and was preparing for the M.A. when the great Call came and I settled in the Ashram four months before the exam and missed my degree gladly, having found the most glorious MA with those extended hands I have spoken of.

1986

AMAL KIRAN  
(K D SETHNA)

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## THROUGH MY WINDOW

BEHOLD there, beyond my window  
the blue sky with its passing clouds  
some are dark and some are light  
but all pass my window's sight.

And as my vision spans, I happen to glance  
at the top of a lone coconut tree  
the leaves of which merrily dance.

I see birds, in clustered groups  
amidst the twilight sky's golden hues  
they pass across in happy spright  
all prepared to meet the falling Night

A little near, I see a green young plant,  
its dark red flowers swaying in the gentle breeze  
warmly secure, in the bosom of rustling leaves.

G SIVARAMAN

## ABOUT ARJAVA'S ILLNESS—A CORRECTION

AMAL has written in *Mother India* (p 336, May 2000) that Arjava died of cancer I wrote to our young Editor that Arjava died of rheumatic fever and not of cancer and requested him to correct that mistake committed by Amal He accepted my objection, but requested me to give some details of his illness. It is a long story but I shall make it short The story is very pathetic indeed

When my niece and myself visited the Ashram for the first time, I came to know him, in the early thirties. Even at that time he used to limp and walk with the help of a stick We became very friendly, perhaps because I had been to England He was not so friendly with Dilip though both of them lived in the same house With my next visit I had come for good and was put in charge of the Ashram Dispensary I noticed some change in Arjava. He had shifted from Dilip's house and had a room of his own elsewhere He was not keeping well and needed medical treatment I gave him some Ayurvedic drug I don't remember under whose suggestion he took this treatment The Mother advised me to keep this drug always available At times he used to visit the Dispensary for the medicine

I came to know that he was composing poems and they were very much appreciated As I was also trying my hand at English poetry I requested him to teach me metre, rhythm, etc. He agreed and after a while he asked me to compose. I tried and he corrected I used to write to Sri Aurobindo about it Now and then Arjava fell ill and I had to visit and attend on him I used to notice a heap of journals (*Manchester Guardian*) in his room. He would not allow anybody to remove them. Some change had taken place in him I noticed that he had become friendly with Indian boys and was composing poems on them They would catch some tortoises and present them to him He would leave them in our tank and play with them

To make the story short, once he fell ill with fever The knee joints were swollen. There was high temperature As there was no remission, I consulted a local physician Seeing no satisfactory effect, the Mother suggested the name of a good French physician in Bangalore and asked me to refer the case to him. I sent him the case history\* But, he said, the patient had to be shifted to Bangalore Arjava was not very willing. But it was decided to take him to Bangalore Everything was arranged and the next morning he was to start The Mother and others came out on the terrace to bid him farewell Everything went well but at night the condition of the patient became worse and he died The biopsy showed that there was fluid behind the capsule of the pericardium, so our doubt was correct It was a case of pericarditis (rheumatic)

The Mother remarked later on that the death took place just when she had fallen asleep.

\* When the report was read out to Sri Aurobindo he said "It is very well written"—Nirodbaran tells me

It is a pity that he died so young when he was composing poems which were incomparable in beauty, carrying Sri Aurobindo's Force and inspiration.

NIRODBARAN

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## MY DEAR MUMMY

It seems I hear your voice, Mum, saying:  
 "Open your left hand, use it"  
 My ears were closed,  
 My thoughts used to take me away far from that  
 Forgetful of the reality  
 Forgetful of the joy hidden in the left side of my body  
 Probably you cried many times,  
 Your daughter, so lazy, so nervous,  
 Does not want to listen to you  
 Oh, Mum, I am succeeding, now, really!  
 Thanks to the Divine!  
 I would like to share my joy with you  
 I would like to come back home  
 And find you waiting for me  
 Immediately I would show you my hand,  
 The moment we were going to die long ago  
 It has been transforming in Infinite Love and Joy.  
 You are not here any more  
 I feel your presence  
 I see your blue eyes smiling at me  
 "Oh, you are good! you are using your left hand"

SUSMITA (MADDELENE)

# THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of August 2000)

## The Book of Eternal Night

To win back the soul of Satyavan, Savitri must first follow Death into his own realm, the Night of the Inconscient out of which our world has emerged. There Death is king. From there the destroying force derives its hitherto uncontested right to impose its law on all that exists in the material universe. But Savitri was born to challenge the omnipotence of Death and the reign of material laws and to assert the freedom and power of the embodied spirit. To do this, she must pursue the spirit of Death into regions from which none has returned alive.

It is in Books Eight, Nine and Ten that Savitri encounters, debates with and triumphs over Death. Sri Aurobindo's first draft of the passages that developed over the years into those three books seems to have been written with extraordinary fluency during a period of three days, from the 17th to the 19th of October, 1916. These dates in the earliest known manuscript of *Savitri* are among the few precise dates that can be given in the long history of the composition of the epic. The fact that Sri Aurobindo dated these particular pages suggests that he was observing the rapid progress of the poem at this stage with special interest.

On 8-9 August 1916, he had written a draft of the opening of *Savitri* consisting of a little more than a hundred lines. Then he started again from the beginning, a couple of pages later in the same notebook, but did not date this version until he reached the twelfth complete page on October 17th. Where the first draft of the opening breaks off, work on the poem may have been interrupted, perhaps accounting for the gap between August and October. Nothing in the manuscript suggests a discontinuity between the undated portions of the longer version and the dated passages that follow. So it seems likely that Sri Aurobindo's first almost complete draft of *Savitri* was written more or less continuously in the month of October, 1916.

It is not certain exactly where in the manuscript the passage written on October 17th begins. The notation "Oct 17 18—1916" is found at the bottom of a page below lines that are almost the same in the final version of Book Eight.

Sometimes her eyes looked round as if their orbs  
Might see the dim and dreadful god approach

The two dates evidently mean that the passage which ends with these lines was written on the 17th and revised on the 18th. Possibly what was written and revised on those days began about fifty lines earlier, where there is a blank space in the manuscript after the line

Swiftly the fatal day came striding on

Supposing this to be where Sri Aurobindo began on 17 October, the second occurrence of that date a few pages after its first occurrence would seem to indicate that on this day he wrote nearly a hundred and fifty lines, the first draft of what was to become Book Eight and the first canto of Book Nine. On the 18th, he rewrote the last hundred or so lines of what he had drafted on the previous day and wrote almost two hundred new lines which he revised the next day.

The dates "Oct 18, 19" occur at the end of this draft of Savitri's debate with Death in the worlds symbolised by night and twilight—the present Book Nine, Canto Two, and Book Ten. Below these dates, there are two lines that break off abruptly:

Even as she spoke, they left the twilit world.  
It ended not, it vanished Savitri

After this, instead of continuing and finishing the first draft, Sri Aurobindo returned to passages he had already written and began the process of rewriting, expanding and perfecting that was to go on during the next thirty-four years. The last part of the notebook includes some passages related to the eventual Book Eleven, "The Book of Everlasting Day", but these were not connected together and there is nothing that corresponds to the Epilogue. The first draft of the poem thus remained incomplete. Extending to about eight hundred lines, it proved to be the first sketch of an epic that grew ultimately to thirty times that length.

In the facsimiles at the end of this instalment, the last page and a half of what Sri Aurobindo wrote on 17 October 1916 are reproduced from the notebook in which he appears to have begun the composition of *Savitri*. Unlike the facsimiles in previous issues, which have usually been reduced to fit the page size of *Mother India*, the actual size of the pages of this small, thick, bound notebook is shown here.

Sri Aurobindo used the front sides of the pages for his first draft, leaving the reverse sides blank for revision and rewriting. This explains the missing number between the page numbers "60" and "62" seen in the upper right corners of these pages. (The numbers were not written by Sri Aurobindo; the 130 pages with his writing on them in this 160-page notebook have been numbered in pencil for reference purposes.) Pages 57, 59 and 61, on the backs of pages 56, 58 and 60, were used by Sri Aurobindo on 18 October 1916 for rewriting what he had drafted on the previous day.

This notebook was not used only for *Savitri*. Among its other contents, perhaps the most notable is a free rendering of part of Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* in blank verse similar to that of the early versions of *Savitri*. The drafts of *Savitri* occupy pages 27-96 and 113-129 of the notebook. The version partially reproduced in this issue begins on page 34 and continues, mainly on the even-numbered pages, to page 72. Dates are found on page 56 ("Oct 17 18—1916"), page 62 ("Oct 17 ", as seen in the facsimile), page 64 ("Oct 18"), page 68 ("Oct 18") and page 72 ("Oct 18, 19").

The section of the first draft that corresponds to the opening of the later Book Nine begins with four lines found at the bottom of page 58 in the notebook. The description of the figure of Death as it appears to Savitri starts in the last of these four lines and continues at the top of page 60, where it can be read in the facsimile

Yet first she gazed not up, but leaned remained  
 Over her husband with her soul intense  
 Gathered into a painful ecstasy of will,  
 Then raised her eyes. A mighty figure stood  
 Before her, grand, majestic, gloomy, dire  
 Robed in tremendous deity The Form  
 Bore the deep pity of destroying gods  
 In its appalling eyes Abysmal night  
 Seemed there to stand, compelling all that lives  
 Into its fathomless heart, and round its brows  
 Was silence and beneath its feet was life

This passage and those that follow illustrate the power of the inspiration that compelled Sri Aurobindo to begin writing *Savitri*. The first draft often, though not always, lacks the amplitude and inevitability of expression Sri Aurobindo would later bring to the poem. But the essential force of vision that distinguishes *Savitri* was present from the beginning to such a degree that its evolution was largely a gradual working out of what was latent in its first form.

In this case, the working out began almost immediately. Within two weeks, Sri Aurobindo had started depicting the change that came on Savitri at the moment of Satyavan's death. In a version dated 1 November, the first three lines quoted above had already been replaced by twenty, beginning

So was she left alone in the huge wood,

and the phrase "ecstasy of will" had been taken up into the line found in the final version

A high and lonely ecstasy of will

In the rest of the above passage, one line of the first draft—

Bore the deep pity of destroying gods

—would remain unchanged through all subsequent rewriting. Several more such lines were introduced in the version of this passage written and revised in the first week of November 1916. The following is an excerpt

And like a tree recovering from the wind  
 She raised her noble head. Fronting her eyes  
 Something stood there unearthly, sombre, grand,  
 A limitless denial of all being,  
 That wore the wonder of a shape The Form  
 Bore the deep pity of destroying gods  
 In its appalling eyes Eternal Night  
 In the dire beauty of an immortal face  
 Pitying arose, receiving all that lives  
 Into its fathomless heart for ever Its limbs  
 Were monuments of transience and beneath  
 Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids  
 Aware of adamant Necessity  
 Silent beheld the writhing that is life.

The continuation of the first draft, to the point where Sri Aurobindo stopped at the end of the day on 17 October 1916, is best transcribed without disturbing the flow of the narrative with comments or comparisons

Then to her ears there came a mighty voice  
 Entering her stricken heart ‘‘O Savitri,  
 Thy spirit’s immortal energy forbids  
 Too long my hands, and while thou holdst his soul,  
 Its body cannot leave the physical robe  
 Clasped in thy arms of too constraining love.  
 Thy husband suffers’’ Savitrie removed  
 The lifeless head from her unwilling lap  
 And laid it softly on the gentle grass.  
 Then Death the King leaned down, and so it seemed,  
 Another Satyavan arose and stood  
 Between the mortal woman and the god  
 Like one who seeing not waits for some command  
 It seemed to her a shape of shadowy light  
 Other than owes its lustres to the sun  
 But now it moved away, behind him Death  
 Went slowly like an awful herdsman dark  
 Behind a wanderer from his subject herds.  
 And Savitri arose and followed them  
 Into the silence of that monstrous world

Now so it seemed to her that through the wood  
 They travelled still and though her eyes [were] fixed

Upon the luminous shadow pacing on,  
 Yet still her senses were aware of trees  
 And the birds calling and the siege of life  
 And felt the insistence of the summer sun  
 But now the two before her seemed about  
 To leave her and escape beyond her soul  
 And terror fell on her and all her spirit  
 Seized upon Satyavan as one afraid  
 Of falling clings to a support; then all  
 Her mind and body and senses only saw,  
 Felt only, lived only in Satyavan's pale form  
 Nor of the earth they knew, nor thought of life;  
 All was expunged save Satyavan alone  
 Next waking she beheld another space  
 Nor knew whether an earthly road she paced  
 That led into a passage twixt two rocks  
 Sombre and high, beyond them all seemed dark.  
 And Satyavan before that portal paused  
 As if unable to advance, and turned  
 To Savitri the sombre, dreadful King.  
 "Return, O Savitri, into thy life  
 For joy or woe, even as thy spirit wills  
 To take the touches of the human world  
 But in this soul thou hast no more a part  
 Since it belongs to other kingdoms. Cease,  
 O mortal creature, to compel the gods."

Here Sri Aurobindo wrote the date, "Oct 17." He left the rest of this page blank. When he resumed work the next day, he went back and rewrote much of what he had drafted the previous day, using the reverse sides of the pages and expanding ninety lines to a hundred and twenty. Death's speech at the entrance to the realm of darkness was made to end as it does now:

Impermanent creatures, sorrowful foam of Time,  
 Your transient loves bind not the eternal gods "

Sri Aurobindo put "Oct 18" in the left margin next to the last line. The new passages written on that date begin at this point and continue for several pages. Savitri survives the entry into the "tenebrous world" and Death speaks to her again

"O Savitri, who first in human limbs  
 Hast traversed without death the living night,



Turn back. Whatever boon thy heart desires  
 Save this that shakes the order of the world  
 Ask ”

Savitri accepts boons for her husband, but asks nothing for herself except the life of Satyavan. Death expounds high spiritual philosophy as he tries to turn her from her purpose.

Only the Self eternal is, and there  
 No Satyavan is, there no Savitri,  
 Names that must perish, bodies that must cease.

Savitri counters this otherworldly wisdom with a deeper truth.

“O Death, who reasonest, I reason not.  
 I am, I love, I will ” Death answered her  
 “Know also; he who knows can say he is,  
 For without knowledge, these are but a dream.”  
 But Savitri replied for man to Death:  
 “When I have loved entirely, I shall know,  
 Meanwhile my mission is to conquer thee ”  
 Death bowed his head and ceased; by her compelled  
 Phantasmal through the twilight moved the three.

Here Sri Aurobindo again wrote “Oct 18” This was far from being the end of the day’s work, for the same date is repeated after a few pages. But it completed the draft, begun the previous day, of what thirty years later would be called “The Book of Eternal Night”.

Within a year or two, the length of this portion of the poem had quadrupled and “Night” had become the fourth of six cantos into which *Savitri* was then divided. In 1946, Sri Aurobindo took an early manuscript of “Canto IV. Night” and, dictating extensive revisions and insertions in some places, but leaving other passages almost as they were, turned it into Book Nine in two cantos. Subsequent revision marked on the fair copy and the typescript was relatively light. Finally, in November 1949 and February 1950, Book Nine (misnumbered “Book Seven” for some reason) came out in *The Advent* and in separate fascicles. In the second canto, three new lines not found in the typescript, as well as half a dozen changes in wording, show that Sri Aurobindo had given it a last revision before it appeared in print.

If one compares “The Book of Eternal Night”, as published, with what Sri Aurobindo had written before 1920, one discovers that here he left his early version intact in an unusual number of places. When he came back to this part of the poem in the 1940s, evidently he found that his original inspiration had often achieved almost

from the start a perfection that could hardly be improved upon, though it might be expanded. A typical example will illustrate the relationship between the earlier and later versions.

By the time Sri Aurobindo wrote the version entitled "Canto IV Night", Savitri's last two-line speech in the passage from the first draft quoted above had become eight lines. When that manuscript was read to him in 1946, Sri Aurobindo did not make any change in these lines he had written so many years before. However, he inserted six new lines. In the early version, the speech began.

"When I have loved for ever, I shall know  
Love in me knows the truth all changings mask.  
I know that knowledge is a vast embrace

The lines dictated in the 1940s enlarge upon this. They answer the life-negating Vedanta ascribed to Death with the integral God-vision of Sri Aurobindo's no less Vedantic life-affirming realisation, expressed in the impassioned language of the heart.

I know that every being is myself,  
In every heart is hidden the myriad One  
I know the calm Transcendent bears the world,  
The veiled Inhabitant, the silent Lord  
I feel his secret act, his intimate fire,  
I hear the murmur of the cosmic Voice

Savitri's reply to Death concludes memorably with lines already found in their final form, like so many lines in Book Nine, in a manuscript dating from the first year or two of Sri Aurobindo's work on the poem.

I know my coming was a wave from God  
For all his suns were conscent in my birth,  
And one who loves in us came veiled by death  
Then was man born among the monstrous stars  
Dowered with a mind and heart to conquer thee "

*(To be continued)*

RICHARD HARTZ

A lone that, grand, majestic, stern  
 Abode in mountains, steep, the frown  
 From the deep pit of darkness & gloom  
 Drove a appalling, eyes. A royal might set wide  
 The beams of shadow, <sup>illuminating</sup> and life and light  
 Into its fatherless heart, with round its brow  
 Its column and beneath its feet through  
 There he, ears, there came a mighty voice  
 Calling to <sup>the</sup> <sup>king</sup> <sup>U Savitri</sup>  
 My <sup>strong</sup> <sup>energy</sup> <sup>hand</sup> <sup>held</sup> <sup>fast</sup>  
<sup>in</sup> <sup>my</sup> <sup>hands</sup>, <sup>and</sup> <sup>what</sup> <sup>do</sup> <sup>thou</sup> <sup>bellest</sup>  
<sup>thy</sup> <sup>king</sup> <sup>leaving</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>dephical</sup> <sup>role</sup>,  
<sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>name</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>two</sup> <sup>compelling</sup> <sup>love</sup>  
 Thy hand suffer? <sup>Scorn</sup> <sup>thou</sup> <sup>thou</sup> <sup>removed</sup>  
 The <sup>ladder</sup> <sup>lead</sup> <sup>from</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>unwilling</sup> <sup>hand</sup>  
<sup>and</sup> <sup>delivered</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>softly</sup> <sup>on</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>path</sup> <sup>from</sup>  
<sup>They</sup> <sup>trough</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>king</sup> <sup>beamed</sup> <sup>down</sup>, <sup>and</sup> <sup>out</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>seemed</sup>,  
<sup>Another</sup> <sup>Satyavan</sup> <sup>rose</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>stood</sup>  
 (1) <sup>He</sup> <sup>rose</sup> <sup>into</sup> <sup>seeing</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>await</sup> <sup>for</sup> <sup>some</sup> <sup>command</sup>  
 (2) <sup>Between</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>mother</sup> <sup>woman</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>god</sup>  
 It seemed to her a shape of the day light  
 She then saw its lustres to the sun.  
 It then moved away; behind <sup>of</sup> <sup>Death</sup>  
<sup>It</sup> <sup>stood</sup> <sup>like</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>hopeful</sup> <sup>shadow</sup> <sup>dark</sup>  
<sup>Behind</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>wonder</sup> <sup>from</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>black</sup> <sup>hand</sup>.  
<sup>And</sup> <sup>Savitri</sup> <sup>arose</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>followed</sup> <sup>them</sup>  
<sup>To</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>presence</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>that</sup> <sup>mother</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>it</sup>

Now so it seemed to her that through the wood  
 She travelled still and though her eyes fell  
<sup>Deep</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>luminescent</sup> <sup>shadow</sup> <sup>peering</sup> <sup>in</sup>,  
<sup>That</sup> <sup>still</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>senses</sup> <sup>were</sup> <sup>aware</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>trees</sup>  
<sup>And</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>birds</sup> <sup>calling</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>rustle</sup>  
<sup>And</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>confidence</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>sun</sup> <sup>now</sup> <sup>sun</sup>.  
<sup>But</sup> <sup>now</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>bars</sup> <sup>before</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>seemed</sup> <sup>bars</sup>.  
<sup>To</sup> <sup>leave</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>escape</sup> <sup>beyond</sup> <sup>her</sup>  
<sup>And</sup> <sup>terror</sup> <sup>fell</sup> <sup>on</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>all</sup> <sup>her</sup> <sup>thought</sup>  
<sup>Seized</sup> <sup>upon</sup> <sup>Satyavan</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>was</sup> <sup>afraid</sup>  
<sup>of</sup> <sup>falling</sup> <sup>away</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>support</sup>; <sup>then</sup> <sup>and</sup>  
<sup>her</sup> <sup>mind</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>body</sup> <sup>senses</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>all</sup>

Although, lived out in Satyawati's hole from  
 the top of the earth they buds, no thing that life;  
 still was expunged from Satyawati above.  
 As if content he be held an other space  
 that led onto a passage through two rocks  
 towering and high, beyond them all seemed dark.  
 And Satyawati before them <sup>the</sup> passed  
 as if unable to advance, and turned  
 to Savitri the son of a dreadful thing  
 "Behold, O Savitri, into the world life  
 my way comes, even as the spirit will  
 To face the touch of the human world.  
 But in this world there is no more a path  
 Since it belongs to other kingdoms. Cause,  
 Demoralization, to compel the gods."

A passage in the first manuscript of *Savitri* (1916)

## THE AVATAR

THE word Avatar means a descent; it is a coming down of the Divine into the human world or status. It is the full and conscious descent of the Unborn acting in the frame of a mental being and the appearance of man. India has from times ancient held strongly a belief in the reality of the Avatar, the descent into form, the revelation of the Godhead in humanity. In the West this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind of the race. The inner Divinity is the eternal Avatar in man, the human manifestation is the sign and development in the external world. The Avatar comes down not to live and die in vain but to impress upon us that "we are sons of God and must be even as he" (*Savitri*, p. 67)

Sorrow and human suffering he assumes only to show how that suffering may be a means of redemption of man. At times when incalculable forces clash in the field, innumerable ideas meet and wrestle in the arena of the world, the Avatar takes possession of the hearts and thoughts of men. He chooses his own place, time, body for the manifestation. He is necessary when a special work is to be done and in the crises of the evolution. He does not proclaim himself as an Avatar except on rare occasions as to an Arjuna, or, to a few bhaktas. It is for us to find out what he is. He gives a hint as in the saying of the Gita, "I am He."

At this point we have to remember that Mahomed himself would have rejected the idea of being an Avatar. We may regard him as a prophet, a Vibhuti. Christ is the Son of God who is one with the Father—he must therefore be an *amsāvatāra*, a partial incarnation. There is no consciousness of a descent or pressure of spiritual forces in the case of Leonardo da Vinci, mysticism is not his forte and fortune.

It is universally acknowledged that Krishna is an Avatar, his birth is part of the world arrangement. Arjuna's poem, *The Avatara* deals with the birth and life, mission and message with a "certain glow and clarity", attractiveness and poetic technique, though the global vision is not there. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo's sonnet on Krishna gives us the profoundest experience of the Transcendent Grace of the Divine Lover descending in answer to the human aspiration and therefore fulfilling the age-long quest and making the creation or manifestation meaningful and significant. It is the meaning of the manifestation in matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. Both the poems are given below.

C SUBBIAN

### THE AVATARA

Magnet of all the world's desire,  
Soul of all music, shepherd of starry gyre,  
Gopal, Yasoda's foster-child, the demon-slayer,  
The beauty-hungry hearts to Thee aspire—  
Limber and lovely Lord, Brindavon's fluteplayer

Blue lotus borne on stem of gold,  
 Mace, discus, trumpet did Vasudev behold,  
 And Devaki, while wind and rain and levin weltered;  
 Thus were the kingdom and divinity foretold—  
 Doom of Mathura's house by Kansa's dungeon sheltered

Cradled in Vasudeva's arms  
 The Peerless One finds haven from those harms  
 Of throne-usurping Kansa where the hallowed dream-way,  
 Named Yamuna, mirrors the guardian palms  
 Of Gokula and spreads to the moon her fleckered gleam-way

Singing with joy, Yasoda knelt,  
 In Nanda's house the Flawless Beauty dwelt.  
 The Golden Age is here, the rhythmic waters brimming—  
 No more mid arid harshnesses unfelt  
 And hearts have heard the flute-breath of Vaikuntha's hymning

December 7, 1932

Arjava

### KRISHNA

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth  
 \* Into this universe terrible and sweet,  
 I who have felt the hungry heart of earth  
 Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,  
 And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,  
 And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise  
 And sorrow in my heart for ever mute

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,  
 Life shudders with a strange felicity,  
 All Nature is a wide enamoured pause  
 Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be

For this one moment lived the ages past;  
 The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last

Sri Aurobindo

[N B Sri Aurobindo's comment on Arjava's *The Avatara* is as follows "The poem is well enough from the point of view of technique, but its expression seems to me too facile and the inspiration and vision that are peculiarly your own are not there. There is a certain glow and clarity—it is not without attractiveness, but your native quality is not in this style" R Y D ]

## THE MUSICIAN OF THE SPIRIT

IT COMES as a great surprise when certain knowledgeable critics assert that Sri Aurobindo might have been a great writer, thinker, or a spiritual person, but was never a poet. Even if they happen to read his innumerable lyrics, sonnets, narratives, or translations, or come across his experiments in writing poetry based on true quantity in English, or a full-fledged epic in the classical quantitative metre, or half a dozen poetic dramas, or his widely acclaimed creation *Savitri*, they yet refuse to consider him capable of writing genuine poetry in a medium which was not his mother tongue. “English learned as a foreign language can never nourish the invisible roots of poetry,” so states Kathleen Raine<sup>1</sup> She clarifies further that “its beauty lies in its ability to convey the very nature of England, its woods and flowers and weather and animals and people with their peculiarly English attitudes”<sup>2</sup> Take away this local habitation and this local name and what we have is only an acquired sense which cannot speak for “the particular group-soul, grown on a certain kind of earth, under certain skies, and conversing for centuries upon certain themes.” In that case “to wish to write in an alien language seems to me,” she maintains, “a failure to perceive and experience that which poetry is—words in their feeling-content and their local sense-impression. There is involved, in such a wish, a separation of abstractions from words—the very antithesis of poetry”<sup>3</sup> Again, “the language of the poet is a language of image and symbol—there must be forms to contain the abstractions which are, without these containing vessels, what Yeats has called ‘Asiatic vague immensities’ Blake writes of the ‘minute particulars’<sup>4</sup> and of these there are virtually none in Sri Aurobindo’s poem. One longs for a blade of grass ... Certainly *Savitri* is an ambitious and impressive attempt—an impressive failure”<sup>5</sup> Apropos of Sri Aurobindo’s *Ilion* written in the style of the Greek hexameter “But why should any twentieth-century poet want to write in the metre of Homer? Of course it can be done as an exercise—a piece of virtuosity (which *Ilion* is) but I do not find in that poem its *raison d’être*. It is like a prize-poem set in a Public School or University, to write in a certain language and a certain metre. It is an imitation of poetry. . . The true poet does not await Utopia or a superpoetry but gathers eternal beauty from the dust and the light his eyes see daily.”<sup>6</sup> But then she makes a most amazing statement that whereas Sri Aurobindo “understands poetry in general, he has little sense of the precise—or rather of the associative magic of the words themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Here we have another damning statement, that in using blank verse Sri Aurobindo was “trying to pour a quart into a pint pot.”<sup>8</sup> In her opinion blank verse can be written by the yard and yet it is only the England-born who alone can experience the charm of “this litel spot of erthe”<sup>9</sup> and give in it true poetry to us. A non-English author can never be successful in writing poetry in English, blank verse or for that matter any other kind of verse, be it classical or romantic or modern, and there is nothing like spiritual or mystical poetry when this earth is of no concern to it.

K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) took great pains to persuade the English lady to see

that there is genuine poetry in English written by Sri Aurobindo. He argued extensively, from all angles, positive and negative, but his untiring attempts finally did not avail anything worthwhile. If such is the built-in obstinacy, then one even begins to wonder whether there is any point in breaking one's head, or perhaps more appropriately one's heart, to sing in the face of such a deafness the glories of *Musa Spiritus* who ever offers her gifts in great abundance which, in whatever language those be, we can receive only if we can breathe in her living presence.

From what Kathleen Raine calls a school-boy prize-poem,—*Iliou* based on classical Greek hexameter and having a heroic theme,—let us take an example or two. The first is about the doom that is to befall Troy in the ancient war that later shaped a whole new civilisation. Cassandra is cursed by Apollo that she will speak the truth but none will ever believe her words. She foretells the coming event even as she cries in pain:

Woe, thrice woe, for my birth in Troy and the lineage of Teucer!  
 So do you deal. O gods, with those who have served you and laboured,  
 Those who have borne for your sake the evil burden of greatness.  
 Woe unto me for my wisdom which none shall value nor hearken!  
 Woe unto thee, O King, for thy strength which shall not deliver.  
 Vainly your hopes with iron Necessity struggle, O mortals  
 Virtue shall lie in her pangs, for the gods have need of her torture.  
 None shall avail in the end, the coward shall die and the hero.  
 Troy shall fall in her sin and her virtue shall not protect her,  
 Argos shall grow by her crimes till the gods shall destroy her for ever..<sup>10</sup>

And then here is the herald of Argos, aged and lean Talthybius, arriving at the portals of Troy in the dim light of the dawning:

One and unarmed in the car was the driver, grey was he, shrunken,  
 Worn with his decades. To Pergama cinctured with strength Cyclopean  
 Old and alone he arrived, insignificant, feeblest of mortals,  
 Carrying Fate in his helpless hands and the doom of an empire.  
 Iliou, couchant, saw him arrive from the sea and the darkness.<sup>11</sup>

Do we not hear in these eloquent narratives the music that rolls down from the Olympian heights in a full measure of the ancient gods who moulded the destiny of men and nations? Indeed, the majesty and loftiness of the reverberant *Iliou*-hexameter belies the statement that poetry in English based on quantity is not possible. But Sri Aurobindo looked into the deeper problem of the language and suggested that in "true quantitative verse stress-lengths and intrinsic-lengths can and must be equally accepted because they both carry weight enough to burden the syllable with an enhanced sound-value."<sup>12</sup> Not only did Sri Aurobindo suggest these criteria, not only



did he reveal the true nature of quantity in English, he also used it as an expressive vehicle for another voice that poetry can imperially offer us in its creative delight. It has the strength and speed of a galloping Pegasus and at the same time the sweetness and happy spontaneity of the Olympian fountain Hippocrene.

If we strictly analyse the statement that English learned as a foreign language can never nourish the invisible roots of poetry, it amounts to just saying that Sri Aurobindo might have been a poet with a certain kind of talent with some three thousand pages of writing to his credit, but he was a bad poet in English because, unfortunately, he chose a medium that was not his own. He did not have enough intimacy with it to somehow win the language for a pleasing creative-expressive purpose that comes only after being born in it. He employed "words for uses they never were born for." Perhaps that was the tragedy of Tagore and Yeats too when they wrote in English. But then is it also not true that words are not frozen icebergs? Are they not capable of growing and acquiring newer warmer shades of meaning and newer powers of expression, newer associations and subtleties, rich in many proportions? And in that sense has not a newer possibility been opened out by Sri Aurobindo for English? After all, words can take new birth and can gain new sense and sound and sensibility, new joys and new significances which they have been always doing in their ever-widening urge to reach out to that which is happy and beautiful and unfalsifiably true, immutably beautiful.

Criticism like that of Kathleen Raine becomes suspect, even untrustworthy, when it does not make itself aware of the writings of a particular author it is commenting upon. In that case should we not apply Eliot's dictum that a good critic should have a great "sense of fact"? If the sources are secondary, tertiary, or impressionistic, then indeed we need not attach much value to such observations. And this is exactly what should happen in the case of Kathleen Raine who had not read Sri Aurobindo but preferred to freely voice opinions that seem to be so wise but are actually otherwise. We must remember that Sri Aurobindo was not only the Prophet of Future Poetry expressing the soul's highest aspiration and its fulfilment, he also demonstrated it in practice. This is a new dimension he has added and perhaps the modern mind with its utilitarian outlook and tendency to run after quick successes in its professionalism is not quite ready to receive it in the profundities and niceties that need another refined and delicate sense of aesthetic enjoyment. It is strange that several decades ago a critic in the *Times Literary Supplement* should have said that Sri Aurobindo's poetry did not have the magical rhythm of Tagore, Iqbal and Sarojini Naidu,—which only shows that he was not perceptive of the deeper and subtler rhythms that go far beyond just the lyrical. But if there is a certain universality in what Sri Aurobindo is proposing then we should profit by it. We have been fed upon commercial literature so much that we have lost contact not only with academic but also with refined spiritual values and expressions.

Anushtubha metre in Sanskrit was 'revealed' to Valmiki, says Kathleen Raine. If she means that it is for the first time that this metre came into use, then she is wrong.

It is as ancient as the Vedas. Thus we have in this metre Rishi Vamadeva's hymn to Indra praying to bestow the finest riches through Aryaman, Pushan, and Bhaga<sup>13</sup>

वाम वाम त आदुरे देवो ददात्वयमा ।  
वाम पूषा वामं भगो वाम देव करूळती ॥

Not only a beautiful prayer for the plenitudes sought, it is also excellent poetry with the full force of consonants ringing through the lines with a certitude that the incantation will bring what it desires. Mark the repetition of *vāmam*—beautiful, splendid, noble, lovely, dear—five times in the shloka. That is Vamadeva the greatest of the mystic singers, as said by Sri Aurobindo<sup>14</sup>

But what Valmiki did to the metre was to give to it an epic lift and run. Take any verse at random from the Ramayana and we immediately feel the power of the creator that he was, creator of an exquisite poetic world<sup>15</sup>

आदीप्तानिव वैदेहि सर्वत पुष्पितान् जगान् ।  
स्वै पुष्पैः किंशुकान् पश्य मालिन शिशिरात्यये ॥

The exiles are on their way to Chitrakoot when Rama tells the Princess of Videha that the *kinshuka* trees are laden with blossoms on all the sides. The vernal—*shushur*—flowers illumine and adorn them as though with garlands.

Yet another life is breathed into the Anushtubha when we come, say, to the Gita<sup>16</sup>

नैन छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैन दहति पावक ।  
न चैन क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥

Here is the idea-force that goes straight in a negative way to assert the power of that Infinity from where it came. Nothing can destroy or even touch it. Weapons, fire, water, wind are too gross to reach the edge of its subtlety. Coming like hammer-beats, it strikes us with the surety of a divine utterance. Negative statements though, like the Second Law of Thermodynamics, they hold in them all the governing impossibilities that can yet shape our actions in a definite way.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

#### Notes and References

1 *The English Language and the Indian Spirit*, Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K. D. Sethna (1986), p. 7

2 *Ibid.*, p. 30

3 *Ibid.*, p. 46

4 He who would do good must do so in minute particulars, general good is the plea of the scoundrel

5 *Indian Poets and English Poetry*, Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K D Sethna (1994), pp 29-30

6 *Ibid* , pp 73-74

7 *Ibid* , p 131

8 *Ibid* , p 29

9 *Ibid*

10 *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol 5, p 454

11 *Ibid* , p 392

12 *Ibid* , p 358

13 Rīg Veda, IV 30 24

14 "Vamadeva, at once one of the most profound seers and one of the sweetest singers of the Vedic age " *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol 10, p 296

15 *Ramayana*, Ayodhyakanda, 56 6

16 *The Gita*, II 23

## THE PROPHET OF ISLAM—YOGISHRESHTHA

(Continued from the issue of August 2000)

FROM the discoveries made in the 19th century the ancient Mesopotamian contacts are clear Mecca must have been a very ancient place both for pilgrimage and as a sanctuary Psalm LXXXIV mentions a ‘valley of Baca’ Greek geographers knew of a sanctuary, ‘Makoraba’, which in a South Arabian language means ‘sanctuary’, and may refer to Mecca It is a pity that when in the 3rd century of Islam, i e in the 9th century AD the mythology of Mecca was collected and published in book form, apart from names of places and of tribes very little was either remembered or thought necessary to record about events which preceded the rise of the Prophet

Some deductions can, however, be made from legends

The ‘Black Stone’, the ‘Cube’ or the ‘Ka’ba’ was brought from Mesopotamia by the Koreish tribe They protected the Ka’ba, which was identified in pre-Islamic times with ‘Allah’ ‘Allah’ was not just the ‘god’ of the community as western scholars assume but the Supreme Divine

In the Sanskrit *Atharvaveda*, the fourth Veda, which finds acceptance in the *Gita*, ‘Allah’ is equated with ‘Parameshvaram’, the Supreme, a status equal to that of Varuna In the same verse also occurs the name of ‘Mohammad’ as a godhead The ‘atharvansukta’ in the *Atharvaveda* runs as follows

‘‘Allaho jeshthang shreshthang paramang purnang brahmanamallang mahamadra-  
kang barasya alloho allahang’’ ‘‘Ilahakabar ilahakbar ilalla anadiswarupa  
arthabarni shakhang hung hring hree kuru kuru phat’’

It is known that the *Atharvaveda* contains many magic spells It seems probable that the above verse in Sanskrit was a spell or a cure, containing the names of ‘Allah’ and ‘Mohammad’ The grouping of these names with the names of ‘Mitra’, ‘Varuna’, ‘Indra’, the Rigvedic gods quoted in a dated treaty of 1350 BC between a Hittite king and one ‘Dussaratha’ indicates that ‘Allah’ in pre-Islam was accepted as the Highest Godhead ‘Mohammad’ was the name of a ‘Vasu’ There were eight ‘Vasus’ in mythology who sometimes had to take human birth; ‘Bhishma’, the eighth of the Mahabharata, had to live long though he had the power of willing his own death

The reference to ‘Allah’ and ‘Mohammad’ in the *Atharvaveda* is surprising but is understandable. Pre-Islamic Arabia had a history going back to 900 BC, if not 1500 BC, and had extensive trade with India then

Some Sanskrit scholar might have known the faith of the Koreish in Mesopotamia, in the ancient past, or in Saba Further, it must be remembered that the Prophet, originally Ahmed, took the name ‘Mohammad’ later. The Divine that he had named ‘Rahaman’ (from the Jewish ‘Rahamanu’) was called by him ‘Allah’

for pragmatic reasons. Earlier, also, he had no faith in any idolatry, even towards the “Ka’ba” nor was he drawn to various rituals prevalent in pre-Islamic times. He used to pray facing the direction of the holy city of Jerusalem

The Prophet discovered that the Jews were too rigidly attached to their two holy books, the *Turah* and the *Misnah*, and to the strict rituals they observed. Finding also their mutual quarrelling tendencies and a lack of martial spirit, the Prophet turned to Arab tradition. He Islamised their myths, incorporated suitable parts of the pilgrimage procedure into the “Ka’ba” whose ancient links were then ‘revealed’ to have been connected with the prophets, Ibrahim and Ishmael, and yet beyond and before, to Adam. A continuity with the distant past was thus established down to the time of the Prophet. Thus he built on tradition. His own gifts to Arabia and to mankind were Revelations from the Supreme. In 114 chapters of the Koran, revealed to him from the Eternal Book of the Supreme, through an intermediary on the spiritual plane, the Nature of God, man’s purpose in life and his proper conduct, revolutionising both the inner and external man, were detailed.

The Prophet abolished the worship of tribal gods, of the sun, the moon and some stars and numerous local deities. He even replaced the chief god of the “Ka’ba”, Hobal. He accepted the term “Allah”, of the Koreish tribe, as the Supreme One, represented by the “Black Stone”. Tribal gods/idols at Mecca that used to be about the god “Hobal” were abolished. Everything in custom or ritual in pre-Islamic practice, favourable to Unity, was adapted by the Prophet. Even the goddesses ul-Uzza were taken as daughters of “Allah”, the One Supreme God. But he abandoned the corresponding female deity, “Al-lat”. The spiritual vision adapted the traditional, favourable and known, to minimise difficulties and make acceptance easy. In abolishing the non-essentials, the Prophet also freed the ordinary people from the tyranny of a host of priests who acted as intermediates between the laymen and the idols for their economic advantage. This fact needs emphasis.

To rational scholars of the Prophet in the West, to the discoverers and decipherers of the rich Arabian heritage, mankind owes a good many facts. But one need not accept their conclusions on Islam based as they are on the “mental” plane. We can try and enter into a flexibility of richer harmony that the Prophet himself hinted at. as Sri Aurobindo called him the Highest of the “Yogins” (Great souls who unite themselves with God).. The Prophet of Islam proved in his life that “If Yoga is a reality, if spirituality is anything better than a delusion, there must be such a thing as Yoga-force or Spiritual Force” (Sri Aurobindo in his letter dated 7.12 1935 on “Yoga Force I”).

By a look, he won over his arch-enemies

He made caravan leaders great Generals

In his “flight” to escape assassination in 622 A.D. he had only the faithful Abu Bekr with him

He inspired the Medinese to unparalleled courage. About 2000 of them became the nucleus of an army that routed two imperial powers in Arabia

### The Uniqueness of the Prophet

He found an ancient land, once prosperous and wealthy, divided, and suffering from inter-tribal conflict, poor under foreign occupation. In the north, the Arabs were under the Greeks, referred to as ‘‘Rumis’’ In the south, east, and west there were the Persians and the Abyssinians. Many Jews had emigrated south and many Arabs had accepted Judaism.

Not only did the Prophet have the highest spiritual experiences, but he also seems to have used spiritual force through suitable agencies. He appealed at once to religion and patriotism. He gave out the techniques for the kingdom of God within, as had Jesus, but added to it the kingdom of God without, on earth. He freed Arabia in his lifetime. Within another five years all Arabs had been liberated and offered Islam. Syria, Iraq, and Egypt were under the Caliphate by 637. These had been Arab lands. Islam became a variety of imperialism when Omar I (634-44) ordered his forces in Syria and Iraq to destroy the Sassanids in Persia, as they did in the final battle of 643. The Prophet’s forecast was to be fulfilled: ‘‘For thirty years after my death, they will follow my path. Then will come kings and princes.’’ By 645, Arab armies were at the border of China (Oxus) and at the Indus. The entire Persian empire, Sistan, Mekran and Khorasan were under the Arabs. From a liberated national state an empire was born.

The Great, who pour out from within intense invisible energies directed towards their aims, seldom live truly on the surface. It is no wonder that the Muslims object to any image or drawing of the Prophet as human. But we must correct certain impressions created by the intellectual and rational West. This is not to deny the value of Western scholarship and research, but to caution us against arrogance of the intellect, largely linked to nineteenth century economic prosperity.

The prophet was not given to epilepsy. His spiritual experiences were in trance, easily understandable to Indians. His great physical courage in battles made him a born leader of men, an ability he must have communicated to his cousin Ali in particular. It was Ali who successfully quelled rebellions in southern Arabia in 633, when he conquered the ancient Saba, Yemen.

Let us not forget the humble beginnings of the Prophet. Born in the noblest family, the Koreish, losing his parents at an early age, the Prophet, named Ahmed, was brought up by his uncle Abu Talib. The family of Abu Talib was economically dependent, at least partly, on Abbas, the forefather of the Abbasid Caliphs. At an early age, the Prophet travelled and mixed with many Bedouin tribes. They were of great help to him by way of intelligence and succour. He had learnt to read and write, was not illiterate, as some scholars tend to describe him. His personality and knowledge of the countryside, of the Bedouins in particular, made him an obvious agent for commercial matters, involving caravan trips to Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Abyssinia. The wealthy lady Khadija in Mecca chose him as her agent, without any guardian’s permission. As an adult in Mecca had to be 40 years of age, Khadija

probably gave out that age for herself, so that she could appoint Ahmed her agent without prior permission from any guardian. This obvious explanation of the alleged “wide difference” in their respective official ages never occurred either to Western scholars or to later Muslims. Hence the former suggested that the Prophet married for financial reasons, and the Islamic “pundits” had to evolve a theory that the child-bearing age of the Koreishi women was much longer than that of other women.

The couple had two sons and four daughters. The sons, Quasim and Tahir (also named Abu Manaf after Abu Talib who had raised the prophet), died in infancy. His daughters, Zainab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum, and Fatimah, lived and were married. The second and the third married Othman, the third Caliph. The last married the Prophet’s favourite cousin Ali. Later, the prophet, possibly to bind the followers together, married into the family of the rising leadership. He married daughters of Abu Bekr (Ayesha), his closest follower, and the lady Hafsa, daughter of the redoubtable Omar I. After capturing Mecca in 630, in keeping with traditions of kings the Prophet set up a royal harem. Each wife had a room where she “reigned”. The Abyssinian king sent him rich presents and two Coptic girls. By Mariyah (Mary) the Prophet had a son, Ibrahim. This boy, his last son, died on 27 January 632. The Prophet passed away after the “Farewell Pilgrimage” in A.H. 10 (632) in the arms of his favourite young wife Ayesha on 7 June 632. No son survived him. Only Fatimah was to outlive him by a year. His three married daughters died in his lifetime.

After this “superficial” biography of the Prophet, we turn now to the spiritual biography, bearing in mind the fundamentals. He had said that he had access to an “ocean of knowledge”, and he had implied that not even to Abu Bekr, who was closest to him, had he revealed all. In the early stages, a vast literature sprang up from his sayings. There were different versions even of the Koran. For example, there were serious differences in the readings of manuscripts held by Syrian troops and those in Persia at the time of Othman, the third Caliph, shortly after 644. In 634, twelve years after the passing away of the Prophet, were collected four copies of a manuscript containing the Prophet’s Revelations by his secretary Zaid Ibn Thabit. The single manuscript was the result of a suggestion by Omar I to Abu Bekr, the first Caliph, since many of the early Muslims were dying in wars, and notes of the original “suras” which they possessed were being lost. Zaid Ibn Thabit collected them as thoroughly as he could. The manuscript was given to Abu Bekr, was then passed on to Omar I, and after Omar’s death to his daughter Hafza, one of the Prophet’s widows. In 645 four copies of this manuscript were made. Caliph Othman sent one copy each to Medina, Kufa, Basra, and Damascus. All other versions which differed from the exemplar were ordered to be destroyed. No record was made nor any comments noted regarding the versions held by the troops.

Apart from the Koran the next source of authority in Islam is the “Tradition” (*Sunnah*), the manner of the life of the Prophet contained in the Hadith (*al-hadith*). At first, the Sunnah was regarded as supplementary and explanatory to passages in the Koran. It was a matter of pride that while the Jews had two books, the *Turah* and the

*Misnah*, the Muslims had everything necessary in one, the Koran. For a century, the stories of the Prophet's way of life had passed from mouth to mouth. But during Omayyad rule, piety was not considered the highest quality. Some narrators invented traditions to justify their own ways of life. Sectarrians used "traditions" similarly to spread their own teachings. What the Prophet meant by *Sunnah*, whether it referred exclusively to his manner of life or that of any community, was not examined.

The pious Omayyad Caliph Omar II (712-20), conscious of forged traditions and much confusion, had a collection made of "authoritative" traditions of the Prophet. The learned Ibn Shihab uz-Zuhuri prepared an exhaustive "case laws". The vast mass of "traditions" on religious life and practice was shifted only in 815-912. Bukhary, whose work *Kitab ul jamu us Sahih* is most respected, had to travel for sixteen years in all Muslim lands, collect some six hundred-thousand traditions, and put 7,275 in his book. The *Sahih* of Muslims, an Abbasid Caliph (817-88) is also rated high. Thus, this important source of authority in Islam, where the Koran was not specific, came to be compiled over 250 years after the passing away of the Prophet. Islam was becoming "technical", controversial. Priests and sects, abolished by the Prophet, regained their social status. A liberal, dynamic religion, essentially "yogic", relying on faith, practice and ideals, meant possibly for a national Arab state, lost much of its glory in the hands of "world conquerors", the Omayyad and the Abbasid Caliphs. Buffeted on one side by the Arabic translations, in the eighth and ninth centuries, of the entire body of Greek philosophy and science, and much of Sanskrit, and on the other side by the contempt of the Turks and the Mongols, divided into numerous sect, the Caliphate decayed.

(To be continued)

GUNINDRA LAL BHATTACHARYA



## MILLENNIAL CONCEPT OF GOD: BEQUEST OF SRI AUROBINDO

*(Continued from the issue of August 2000)*

EMPHASISING his concept of God as the Divine Mother, Sri Aurobindo adds: "To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster, only two things are needed, two that go always together—the Grace of the Divine Mother and on your side .faith, sincerity and surrender" Resuming his elucidation of his concept, he says further, "...there are three ways of being of the Mother," viz., (i) "Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she. links the creation to the. mystery of the Supreme," (ii) "Universal, the Cosmic Mahashakti" who "creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces" and (iii) "Individual" who "embodies the power of these two and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature " He further elucidates

The one original transcendent Shakti, the Mother stands above all the worlds and bears in her eternal consciousness the Supreme Divine... The Supreme is manifest in her for ever as the everlasting Sachchidananda, manifested through her in the worlds as the one and dual consciousness of Ishwara-Shakti and the dual principle of Purusha-Prakriti . All is her play with the Supreme, all is her manifestation of the mysteries of the Eternal, the miracles of the Infinite All is she, for all are parcel and portion of the divine Conscious-Force.... That which we call Nature or Prakriti is only her most outward executive aspect.... Each of the worlds is nothing but one play of the Mahashakti of that system of worlds or universe. .

Nearer to us are the worlds of a perfect supramental creation in which the Mother is the supramental Mahashakti, a Power of divine omniscient Will and omnipotent Knowledge...spontaneously perfect in every process.... But here where we dwell are the worlds of the Ignorance, worlds of mind and life and body separated in consciousness from their source, of which this earth is a significant centre and its evolution a crucial process. This too...is upheld by the Universal Mother, this too is impelled and guided to its secret aim by the Mahashakti.

The Mother as the Mahashakti of this triple world of the Ignorance stands in an intermediate plane between the supramental Light, the Truth life, the Truth creation which has to be brought down here. . she stands there above the gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action and she sends down emanations of them into these lower worlds...

According to Sri Aurobindo, there are four such "Powers of the Mother", "four of her outstanding Personalities, portions and embodiments of her divinity through

whom she acts on her creatures''<sup>11</sup> and who

have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes . . . that they bring with them into the world

Sri Aurobindo gives them "the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati" and adduces a detailed account of the supreme importance of each power in taking the evolution of Consciousness to its ultimate goal of supramentalising and transforming the earthly life into the life divine. According to him: "The supramental change is . inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness, for its upward ascent is not ended and mind is not its last summit. But.. there is needed the call from below" and "the sanction of the Supreme from above The power that mediates between the sanction and the call is the presence and power of the Divine Mother The Mother's power . can alone. bring down into this world ..Truth and Light and Life divine and the immortal's Ananda "

Clearly, these four names are at once an inclusion and extension of the Tantric names,—Shiva-Shakti, Mahashakti, Brahma, Lakshmi, Shivan and others referring to the Supreme Divine Mother employed as feminine names for the Absolute, the Spirit, the Divine.

Yet this is not all A still greater integration of all the terms and epithets Sri Aurobindo employs as equivalents of the Western term God is found in certain charts he has left behind to signify the validity or viability of plurality of terms for the Divine, as well as the demolition of the gender bias regarding the Spirit. More interestingly, these charts show that Sri Aurobindo employs yet other feminine terms for the Divine, viz, Aditi, Adya-Shakti, Parameshwari, Parashakti, Para Prakriti, Mahamaya, belonging to all the various ancient traditions in the Indian subcontinent. The charts also introduce various additional masculine terms for the Divine Following are the relevant charts containing Sri Aurobindo's holistic integration of numerous terms for God, both masculine and feminine, which he has culled from the same traditions:<sup>12</sup>

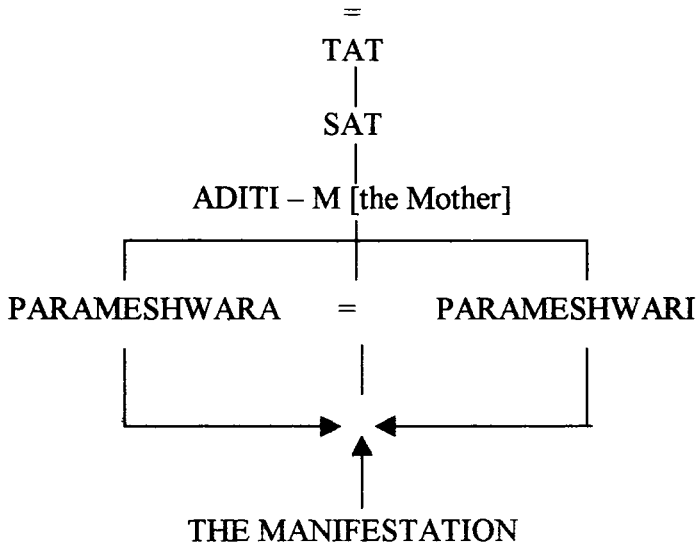
1. SUPREME SELF-CONTAINED ABSOLUTE

First Absolute—Tat. The Absolute Transcendent, the Supreme, Paratpara, (containing all, limited by nothing).

Second Absolute—Sat. The Supreme self-contained absolute Existence, Sachchidananda, (Ananda uniting Sat and Chit), holding in its absolute unity the dual Principle (He and She, *saḥ* and *sā*) and the fourfold Principle, OM with its four states as one.

Third Absolute—Aditi—M [the Mother] <sup>11</sup> Aditi is the indivisible consciousness, force and Ananda of the Supreme; M [the Mother], its living dynamis, the supreme Love, Wisdom, Power. Adya-Shakti of the Tantra=Parabrahman

Fourth Absolute—Parameshwara of the Gita=Parameshwari of the Tantra



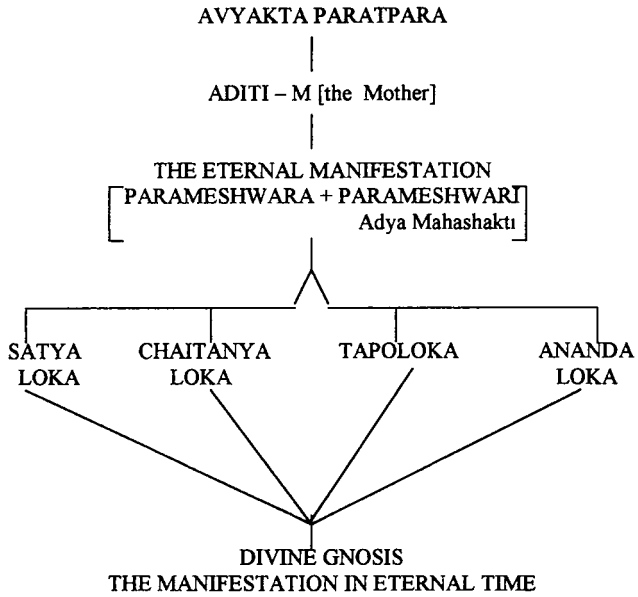
2. THE MANIFESTATION

I

First Absolute—The complete Avyakta Supreme, self-involved Sachchidananda, Parabrahman (Parameshwara-ishwari)

Second Absolute—Aditi—M [the Mother] containing in herself the Supreme The Divine Consciousness, Force, Ananda upholding all the universes—Para Shakti, Para Prakriti, Mahamaya (*yayedam dhāryate jagat*).

Third Absolute—The Eternal Manifestation (The supreme Satya loka, Chaitanya loka, Tapoloka, Ananda loka—not those of the mental series).

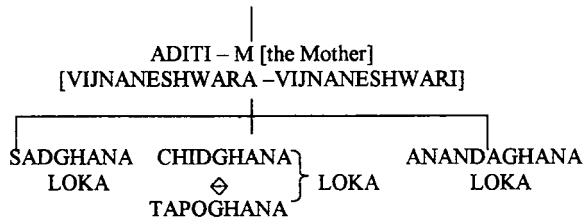


II

The Manifestation in Eternal Time  
DIVINE GNOSIS  
Satyam Ritam Brihat

=

AVYAKTA PARATPARA



The Thrice Seven Supreme Planes of the Mother

VIJANA LOKA

|

TRUTH - MIND

|

TRUTH - LIFE

|

TRUTH - FORM IN PERPETUAL SUBSTANCE

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The Temporal Manifestation

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The foregoing account and analysis of the various terms, names, definitions and descriptions employed by him as equivalents of the terms Deity, Divine and God used by Western scholars, reveals the original, holistic approach Sri Aurobindo felt impelled to evolve and present to the modern world, probably in order once again to establish the absolute and amazing universality as well as plurality of the nature of the entity conceived as God, Deity or Divine. He has done so, entirely because of his realisation that the so-called Creator is not different from the creation he brought into being, and vice versa. This belief of his will probably be found not quite acceptable to the Western mind. Nevertheless, it is commonplace for those who seek and acquire the essential message of the Vedas as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo.

*(Concluded)*

SANJYOT D PAI VERNEKAR

*References*

11 *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol 25, pp 19-41

12 *The Hour of God* (1998 ed), pp 78-82

13 In this and subsequent cases Sri Aurobindo has written only "M". The editors have expanded this abbreviation within square brackets

## IMAGERY IN SRI AUROBINDO'S EARLY POETRY

THE early poetry of Sri Aurobindo is quite varied in thematic range and craftsmanship. It is lyrical and narrative and there are poems dealing with Nature, love, experiences of personal life and meditations on God and the mysteries of this creation. A study of his early poems shows the acuteness of his observation, the width and many-sidedness of his interests and the ever-developing verve and adroitness of his poetic skill

Quite a large number of the early poems of Sri Aurobindo present a colourful picture of the world of Nature, luxuriously decorated with flowers and fruits, sunlight and moonlight and animated with the imaginative vigour of the poet's first flush of creative urge. Amarnath Jha has rightly remarked: "He muses on nature with a poet's eye and with the ardour, the thrill of a lover. He listens to the voice of nature and finds in it much to elevate, to soothe, to instruct"<sup>1</sup>

But that which has the capacity to elevate, to soothe, to instruct in Nature was discovered by Sri Aurobindo at a later stage of his poetic development. In the poems of *Songs to Myrtilla* Nature is treated mainly as a storehouse of luscious flowers, dancing rivulets, sunlight and moonlight and all these beautiful aspects of Nature have been described by Sri Aurobindo in an exuberant and decorative style

The colourful sensuous images drawn from the world of Nature show that the poet does not only see the various beautiful aspects of Nature, but also hears the various melodies in it, feels the softness of its touch and also tastes what is sweet and cool in it. He, as a matter of fact, observes and enjoys Nature with all his sense-faculties acutely alive and perceptive "What fires from the bud proceed, / As if the vernal air did bleed"<sup>2</sup> Here the image of fires proceeding from the bud like the bleeding of vernal air conveys a visual impression and is based upon a perception of colour-similarity between fire and blood

Besides sensuousness, an elaborate pictorial manner is another outstanding quality of the images of Sri Aurobindo's early poems. The method of creating word-pictures invariably leads him to adopt the art of personification:

When o'er the glimmering tree-tops bowed  
The night is leaning on a luminous cloud,<sup>3</sup>

and

The blue sea dances like a girl  
With sapphire and with pearl  
Crowning her locks.<sup>4</sup>

The word pictures here are appealing. At his early stage the poet seems to have developed the capacity to capture in words only those sense-perceptions which he has

actually experienced in life, but his iconic presentation of the abstract seems somehow weak

Allied to this pictorial manner of Sri Aurobindo's early poetry there is an unfortunate predilection for conventional props in his imagery like "ruddy lights of spring",<sup>5</sup> "flowery murmur",<sup>6</sup> "autumn's pale decay",<sup>7</sup> "Vernal radiance",<sup>8</sup> etc. Such image-making art which chiefly subsists upon lavish drapery and embroidery is an old device much exploited by poets.

Apart from colourful and decorative nature-imagery of the early period of Sri Aurobindo, we get another category of imagery which is chiefly drawn from ancient European myths and legends. This category of imagery is mainly found in poems dealing with Ireland. The two poems named *Lines on Ireland, 1896* and *Hic Jacet* which are collected in *Songs to Myrtilla and other Poems* are primarily poems on political themes, questions of political subjugation of Ireland to England and the various factors leading to this debacle. In both the poems the images are drawn from mythical and legendary sources but whereas in *Lines on Ireland, 1896* the images, which are long-drawn-out and mainly Homeric in nature, are employed chiefly for illustrative purposes, in *Hic Jacet* the images form an essential and organic part of the basic conception and evolution of the poem.

For a better understanding of the development of Sri Aurobindo's poetic art towards a meaningful and functional use of imagery as an integral part an analysis of his poem *Transit, Non Perit* written on the death of his grandfather can be of great help to us. The idea that death does not destroy the soul of man, that death simply means omnipresent Thought has taken back an earthly manifestation of its part—it is that which forms the thematic basis of the sonnet. The images of 'darkness' and 'light' are used as formulae of arranging the thoughts and emotions. The image of 'darkness' which is identified with ideas of complete annihilation and oblivion in the opening lines of the sonnet

Not in annihilation lost, nor given  
To darkness art thou fled from us and light<sup>9</sup>

recurs with a palpably diminished force in the tenth line of the poem. This denotes a deliberate negation of the destructive power of death by the poet. On the other hand, the images of light, which distinctively dominate the poem, are used in different contexts with varying meanings. The image of light in the second line of the poem appears, at first, quite a casual image used as a counterpart of the image of darkness occurring in the same line, but it acquires a much deeper meaning from the context in which it is used. It is connotative of the light of the earthly existence of a man. But when for the second time this image of light occurs in the poem, its meaning moves from generality to particularity as we see in the eighth line of the poem

Thou has not lost thy special brightness .<sup>10</sup>

when it stands for the individual aura or glow that is believed to encircle a “strong and sentient spirit”.<sup>11</sup> And yet another variation is played upon the same image when it recurs for the third time in the tenth line of the sonnet “unseen for blinding light”<sup>12</sup> where it is associated with the blinding brilliance of the omnipresent Thought in which the special light of the strong and sentient spirit has merged itself. Thus the images of light with their varying overtones of contextual meanings are made to move along with the emotional curve of the poem. They perfectly assimilate each other and are assimilated in the overall emotional design. But the most conspicuous image of the sonnet which is at once elaborate and sustained and which pictures the abiding concept of the poem, is presented in the last four lines

As when a sacred river in its course  
Dives into ocean, there its strength abides  
Not less because with vastness wed and works  
Unnoticed in the grandeur of the tides <sup>13</sup>

The picture of a sacred river diving into an ocean and yet retaining its individual force, although, “unnoticed in the grandeur of the tides,” is merely an amplification of what has already been conveyed with suggestive brevity by the images of light and darkness in the first ten lines of the poem. This sort of elaborate and illustrative image in the limited space of a sonnet seems to be a structural blemish in an otherwise perfectly designed sonnet of Sri Aurobindo

Even in long narrative poems written during the early days of his poetic career, in *Urvastie* and *Love and Death*, Sri Aurobindo has not attained any exemplary success in the use of elaborate images. But a study of such images used in these longer poems shows the ever-expanding area of experiences and observations from which they are drawn. If these expanded similes and images of Sri Aurobindo do not achieve the required amount of poetic success because of their incapacity to get integrated into their individual emotional content, the brief images and metaphorical expressions employed in these poems stand out for their consummate success and suggestive power. Besides brief images which successfully capture the human drama of love in its psychological as well as physical aspects, there are also many images in *Urvastie* which embody with brevity and freshness magnificent metaphysical visions of the poet

. He drank  
And understood infinity, and saw  
Time like a snake coiling among the stars <sup>14</sup>

Just as in *Urvastie*, in *Love and Death* also the brilliance of meaningful but brief images is captivating and through them Sri Aurobindo has conveyed quite a thrilling variety of human experiences and visions. If the rapturous delight of Ruru tasting the



freshness of love-experience with his bride Priyumvada has been captured in the metaphorical image:

exulting in the sting and swift  
Sharp-edged desire around his limbs .<sup>15</sup>

the picture of Priyumvada living amidst fearful objects in the underworld is crisply put in the lines

Dumb drooped she, round her shapes of anger armed  
Stood dark like thunder-clouds<sup>16</sup>

The ominous death-like silence of the Underworld has been captured in one single image of sweeping vehemence:

A fierce  
And iron voicelessness had grasped those worlds.<sup>17</sup>

*Baji Prabhou*, a narrative poem based on the historical incident of the tremendous self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhou Deshpande, employs the same medium of blank verse as *Urvashi* and *Love and Death*, but avoids, as it were, very carefully any temptation to plunge into an intricate mass of elaborate images. The similes and images of *Baji Prabhou* are short and apt, appropriate to the context and fully organised and orchestrated. Sri Aurobindo is able to maintain a sequence in the development of various images of this poem which gives it a compactness of form and successful artistic finish.

Among the various images used in *Baji Prabhou* the images of tiger, lion and surging waters are predominant. The image is first introduced in the lines:

At last they reached a tiger-throated gorge  
Upon the way to Raigurh<sup>18</sup>

The man who led the small contingent of fifty Mahratta soldiers to thwart the progress of the Moguls beyond the tiger-throated gorge was no less formidable and mighty. It is this impression of Baji Prabhou that Sri Aurobindo has tried to create by employing images from the animal world

Loud like a lion hungry on the hills  
He shouted, and his stature seemed to increase  
Striding upon the foe<sup>19</sup>

Besides images drawn from the animal world, the images of surging waters, rivers, oceans, recur in this poem with astounding rapidity. The poet portrays Bajı Prabhıu, the protagonist of this heroic poem, as a wild wave

Ever foremost where men fought,  
Was Bajı Prabhıu seen, like a wild wave  
Of onset or a cliff against the surge <sup>20</sup>

And again, the advancing Moslem surge is thwarted by the small contingent of soldiers fighting under the leadership of Bajı Prabhıu.

The confident high-voiced triumphant surge  
Began to break <sup>21</sup>

Thus, in *Bajı Prabhıu*, assault after assault, clash after clash and retreat after retreat of the Moslem army have been harmoniously pictured by a skilful handling of imagery. It really goes to the credit of Sri Aurobindo as a poet that in this action-packed narrative of nine hundred odd lines, a heroic poem in which the incidents change with breathless rapidity, he has been able to maintain a cohesive pattern of unified imagery. All the images have the qualities of being vivid, concrete and appropriately picturesque, without being extravagantly decorative or colourful.

The growth and image-patterns with their varying functions from poem to poem show Sri Aurobindo's ceaseless and arduous quest for a medium which would communicate his poetic visions in a really effective manner. Sri Aurobindo's explorations into this field lead him to creations of highly sensuous and colourful images in the manner of the early Keats, elaborate and picturesque personifications in the manner of Spenser, highly embroidered and conceit-coloured style in the manner of Elizabethan lyricists, meticulously elaborate and expanded similes in the manner of Milton and, lastly, to the use of brief and vividly concrete images in *Bajı Prabhıu*. The images which, in the beginning, are only decorative gradually become illustrative and then to a large measure functional.

The bunch of early lyrical and narrative poems of Sri Aurobindo are certainly not the kind of poetry for which his greatness as a poet should be recognized. These poems, to paraphrase the poet himself, are specimens of 'vital poetry' in which the appeal to the sense or sensation, to the vital thrill, is so dominant that the mental content takes quite a secondary place. Here the nerves and blood are thrilled, but the mind and soul do not find an equal satisfaction <sup>22</sup>. This limitation which so conspicuously marks the thematic contents of these early poems is reflected in its true aspect and colour in the images used in them. The images are mostly confined to the physical and the concrete, and it is not always that they communicate the inspiration of the poet. It is only in the later poetry of Sri Aurobindo that one can find images which radiate peak after peak of spiritual and mystical experiences—images which

are, no doubt, colourful, but at the same time replete with extraordinary meanings, flashes from the realms of the Illumined Mind

ASTHA SUMAN

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- 3 *Ibid* , p 1
- 4 *Ibid* , p 2
- 5 *Ibid*
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- 22 Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, pp 32-33

## IDEAS ARE NOT PERSONAL PROPERTY

THE ideas that pass through your mind are not yours. You are the witness. Your reality is pure consciousness. Neither thoughts nor emotions can be owned. They are to be observed without attachment. Many inventions emerge in different countries at the same time. The scientists involved are not in contact with each other. It just happens that they are focused on the fundamentals of a problem and have prepared themselves independently to receive the solution. Can man really claim an invention if all ideas come from the mind of God? Today patents and intellectual property rights are topics of discussion. The reason for patents is purely economic. In order for a company to make money an idea must be patentable. This logic distorts the true nature of the mind.

What is mind really? The answer to this question requires an understanding of the constitution of man. The soul is the vehicle of the spirit, and personality is the vehicle of the soul. There are seven planes of matter through which the spiritual essence experiences the world.

1. Adi, the divine
2. Monadic, our source
3. Atmic, will
4. Bauddhic, unity consciousness
5. Manas, the intuitive mind and the concrete mind
6. Astral, emotion
7. Bhautic, Physical

Human activity takes place for the most part on the physical, emotional and mental planes. Our goal is the spiritual triad, which consists of the Atmic, the Bauddhic and the intuitive mind, but all seven planes are right here now. As you purify your physical, emotional and mental bodies you can begin to access the higher and subtler planes of matter within you.

The mind is dualistic and the attachment to thoughts throws us into a consciousness of polarity; good and bad, male and female, we and they, success and failure. As long as man is firmly anchored on the level of the mind, separation and conflict will be the nature of our reality. The Bauddhic plane, the level of unconditional love, can only be realised when the mind becomes quiet as in meditation. Today humanity is moving from polarity consciousness to unity consciousness. The correspondence in the chakra system of the body is from the "I want" of the solar plexus to the "I love" of the heart chakra. This is a big step for average humanity but more and more people of all faiths in all countries are further along in this process than they realise.

How do we cooperate in the evolution of consciousness? Quiet the mind through meditation and a balanced life style. Look for the truth beyond the categories of the mental world. Learn to stop the mind (it is not too hard). Share your ideas and they will grow, the more people who accept an idea the bigger it becomes. Ideas are yours to use, not to own.

## SETHNA: THE PROSE WRITER

(Continued from the issue of June 2000)

### SETHNA AND SISIRKUMAR GHOSE: TWO DIFFERENT STYLES

THE two masters who have dominated the post-Aurobindo scene have also been the most neglected elite in the last four decades. Although they have worked as satellites to the central sun called Sri Aurobindo, they have also been genuine artists seeking to discover fresh modes in fresh contexts. Comparisons are ‘‘odorous’’—Dogberry told us. And yet comparisons are necessities. A comparison here will throw light on the two specialised modes—the two are opposites—used by the two masters in the post-Aurobindo scene.

By and large, Sethna employs the exhaustive manner, the masterful expositions of grand issues ranging from Sri Aurobindo’s works down to the subtle interpretations of Indian history, philosophy and culture in general. The flowing Ciceronian and the extended Senecan abound in his majestic efflux. Often they are combined. However, he is a master of the Ciceronian, as we see in the following passage from *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*

Indeed, to bring the battle of the ages, the slow travail of phenomenal Nature to a rapid victory by not merely extending the limits of our vital and mental faculties but by predominantly seizing on the true psyche, the inmost soul, hidden behind life and mind, the spontaneously spiritual part of our nature which possesses the dynamic to develop the vision, the faith and the will required for the discovery of our supra-mental Self with its masterful ability to perfect by its highest law our entire earth-life—this indeed is the practical outcome of all spiritual philosophy. It is what Sri Aurobindo calls Integral yoga.  
(p. 6)

The last sentence which stands in isolation, concludes the argument by clarifying the dense texture that has preceded. This is the usual Sethna, logical and inspired at the same time, but always with that force which is never satisfied by the touch-and-go and which is only satisfied when the argumentative texture has reached its final conclusion.

Sisirkumar Ghose employs the opposite mode, the brief style, the blend of the Lucian and the Wildean, the cryptic and the paradoxical. His force is Sri Aurobindo; his defect is also there. For he is too fond of using phrases from *Savitri*, often overdoing the practice in his journalistic notes. He is best when he is not under the spell of Sri Aurobindo’s scintillating exterior. He is best when he is thinking out himself in brilliant aphorisms. His critics tend to underrate him by branding him as merely flamboyant, a stylist with a strong attachment to Sri Aurobindo. This is not

true For Sisir Kumar has his moments of glory, frequent moments of glory, when he summarises and re-tells Sri Aurobindo in a very modern style. Quite often his cryptograms are pregnant with thought, bitter thoughts mostly, but the bitter is also part of our yogic experience and certainly more important than any passage from Nirad C or Khuswant Singh, the gods of our mediocrity

The irrational city is every city, its inhabitants Everyman The major ills of our time are brutally, urbanly articulate, concentrated and depressingly familiar an ever-expanding vicious circle of unplanned growth, inner-city decay, suburban sprawl, conflict, violence, slum, traffic, pollution inequality—a portmanteau of anarchy and ugliness to which, each according to his ability, we all have contributed. There is a pall of gloom on the night sky The City might go up in flames any moment. Its citizens do not sleep There is a curse on the City, more a slovenly hospital than a well-appointed home.

*(Meditations on Matricide, p 22)*

Unlike Sethna, Sisir Kumar, to borrow an interesting phrase from *Savitri*, was 'caught in a dark spider's web', from which he was struggling to get out His prose was ideally suited to his sad story of seeking an enlightened path Sethna's expository prose mirrors a satisfied soul interpreting Sri Aurobindo with unhurried details

GOUTAM GHOSAL

# NEW STARS AND COSMIC EXPLOSIONS EARLY IN THE LAST MILLENNIUM

## 1. An Astronomical Conjunction in Prehistoric Drawings

ASTRONOMICAL conjunctions happen when several planets line up in the sky, sometimes with a sliver of the moon nearby. These, like what happened on 6th April, 2000 are fairly common. They continue to generate interest in extraterrestrial affairs in the public mind, perhaps not entirely due to scientific motivations. Imagine the surprise on the face of an ancient sun-worshipping priest among the Anasazi Indians to see a bright new star which appeared near the lower tip of the moon one fine early morning of July 5th, AD 1054. The Anasazi Indians (prehistoric Pueblo Indians) lived in what is now known as New Mexico, U S A. They had a Sun-watching shrine in Chaco Canyon with a view of the sunrise throughout the year. They observed summer and winter solstices to establish a calendar, possibly for some agricultural and social purposes. The moon and the bright new star, separated by about a couple of degrees in the sky rose an hour or so ahead of the morning sun. The moon and the star motif appears on a sandstone roof in the shrine of Chaco-Canyon. The same type of pictograph was discovered at other prehistoric sites nearby,— a notable one was found by two American astronomers, Helmut Abt and William Miller, in the early 1950s in a cave in White Mesa, in the neighbouring state of Arizona. It was painted in red haemetite on the wall of the cave.

When planetary conjunctions take place, the objects congregate into a small region of the sky, soon to disperse to different regions within a few days. The bright new star remained in the same part of the sky in the constellation of Taurus the bull. It remained visible in that position for almost two years before fading away. The planets and the moon move so quickly across the sky because they are relatively close to the earth. The fact that the new star remained “motionless” implies (to the modern astronomers) that this new object was far, far away.

## 2. The Guest Star of AD 1054 and its Records in the Ancient Far East

Unknown to the sun-priest of the Anasazi Indians, the same bright star was observed also in AD 1054 by the Chinese court astronomer, going by the name of Yang Wei-te. He presented his findings to the Emperor, lying prostrate before him, perhaps somewhat fearful of not having been able to foretell the coming of the “guest star”. Medieval Chinese records of the Sung dynasty further inform us that the guest star was visible in the daytime, like Venus “with pointed rays in every direction”, whose “colour was reddish white” and “was seen like that for twenty-three days altogether”. After this it ceased to be visible in daytime, but remained in the evening sky for 630 days, finally fading from view to the naked eye in the evening twilight of AD 1056.

Astronomy was a risky business in the Middle Ages. Legend has it that the Chinese astronomers Ho and Hsi (two brothers) were beheaded by their emperor for failing to predict a solar eclipse. The guest star of AD 1054 was also seen by Japanese astronomers in June of the same year and recorded. This could possibly have been the reason why Yang seemed to be apprehensive while reporting his discovery. He made references to the position of the guest star not being in a nearby star cluster of the Hyades which he made out to indicate that a person of great wisdom and virtue was to be found in the part of China under the Emperor. This was an oblique compliment which was well received by the Emperor and the discovery was recorded by the office of the archives, only to be stored and copied and recopied by Chinese record keepers over the centuries.

The guest star of AD 1054 was not the only example of its kind. Chinese and Japanese astronomers have recorded several other such events in AD 1006 and AD 1181 which also appeared unprecedented and bright in a region of the sky, remained motionless and slowly faded away over a long period of time. We now know that these are spectacular explosions of massive stars in the sky called Supernovae where temporarily, the brightness of the exploding single star becomes comparable to that of an entire galaxy of stars. These explosions happen only a few times per century in a galaxy like ours, the Milky Way, but are the source of all heavy elements which are important to life and the well-being of all things living. The event of AD 1054 has now been convincingly associated with the remnant of the Crab Supernova (discovered in the modern era by the English amateur astronomer John Bevis in 1731 and independently by the French "comet-seeker" Charles Messier several years later).

### 3. Modern Identification of the Past Event

When one is confronted with a new object or an unknown process out in the big universe, often the first few questions astronomers ask are how and where did such an object come into being, what did the parent object look like, etc. The process of unravelling the mystery of the new objects in the universe often takes many years, and sometimes the search for it is as exciting as a chase. The new star of AD 1054 noted by ancient sky-watchers around the world remained unconnected with the Crab supernova explosion of the modern era until several pieces of the jigsaw puzzle came together. This involved several astronomers in the twentieth century, and had all the trappings of a behind-the-scenes, exciting scientific collaboration between nations even during times they were formally at war with each other. To recount this part of the story, a few steps in the logical connection need to be recalled. After all, how does one know whether what the oriental sky-watchers saw nearly a thousand years ago, is one and the same object that one can only see through powerful telescopes today?

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, technological advances replaced direct visual observations of nebulae and other extended objects in the sky by



astronomical photography. In 1921, using the 60-inch reflecting telescope at the Mount Wilson Observatory near Pasadena, California, J. C. Duncan saw that the filamentary structures in the Crab nebula were undergoing expansion. He measured the rate of this expansion by comparing the photograph with a similar one taken eleven and a half years before. In the same year of Duncan's publication of the expansion of the nebula, K. E. Lundmark from Uppsala Observatory, Sweden, gave a list of suspected novae (or new stars) chronicled by the sky watchers in ancient China, and this list contained the event of AD 1054 July. He noted that the approximate position given in the chronicles of the nova of AD 1054 was near that of what the modern astronomers called the Crab nebula. Although Lundmark may have been the first to associate the AD 1054 event with the Crab nebula, it was in 1928 that the American astronomer Edwin Hubble first noted that the nebula's size and the rate of expansion indicated the birth of a new star about 900 years earlier. This matched the event noted by the Chinese both in position and time. It was then a case of: if it looks like a dog and barks like a dog, it must be .

#### 4. A Most Energetic Explosion

That the Crab nebula belonged to the "Super" novae class, which are much more powerful than other lesser violent explosions such as ordinary novae (which, generally, fade more quickly) became clear once the distance to the nebula was established to be more than 5000 light years away. The apparent brightness of a source of light diminishes as one moves away from it. Even at such enormous distances, the brightness of supernovae still remained large enough to be comparable to that of Venus which is only our next door neighbour, in astronomical terms (Venus is at the longest separation 14 light-minutes away from the earth). The Crab nebula was the first of its category of objects which has left remnants of this enormous and previously unknown type of explosion called a supernova. The distance to the Crab nebula (and the intrinsic luminosity) was established by N. U. Mayall who measured the position of known (atomic) lines in its spectrum. Much as the whistle from a receding train has a lower pitch, the speed of the moving gas of the shells in the nebula could be determined by the shape and shifts of the lines in the Crab's optical spectrum. Comparison of this speed along the line of sight to the speed determined earlier by Duncan (in the plane of the sky) immediately gave the Crab's distance and the<sup>1</sup> intrinsic luminosity as known from the records of the Chinese and Japanese ancient sky-watchers.

When the well-known Dutch astronomer Jan Oort visited the U.S. before the second world war in 1939, these new findings interested him greatly. On his return to Leiden, Oort sought the help of a Professor of Chinese Language at Leiden University, J. J. L. Duyvendak. Holland was already under occupation by Nazi Germany and eventually the University at Leiden would be closed down. Nevertheless, Duyvendak located additional Chinese records which contained the new piece of information that

the star was visible in daylight for 23 days and in the night sky for two years. The results were sent out of Nazi occupied Holland by Oort to the U.S. via neutral Sweden where they were published in a journal managed by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. Oort appended a note to Duyvendak's findings regarding astronomical implications and disclosed a possible slight discrepancy in the reported position of the guest star in Sung dynasty records. This is a remarkable example of international scientific cooperation across disciplines and national boundaries even among scientists of nations belonging to enemy camps during the time of a major war

### 5. Other Pre-Renaissance Supernovae

Most notable among the other supernovae in the pre-Renaissance era were those of AD 1006 and AD 1181. The first occurred in the constellation of Lupus on April 30th, in the southern hemisphere and was particularly bright. The second was in Cassiopeia on August 6th. Sung dynasty records show that the star of AD 1006 shone so brightly that objects could be seen by its light and it cast shadows. It was also seen by Japanese and Arab astronomers. It was visible for about three and a half months after which it disappeared behind the glare of the sun as the earth's position moved in its orbit. It reappeared after seven months, this time in the morning sky. The star was visible like this, off and on, for at least two years, Chinese records state that it was visible until AD 1016, i.e., for ten years. The object of AD 1181 was observed from multiple sites, two of which were in China (northern Chin empire and southern Sung empire) and also from Japan. There may have been another supernova in AD 1408, for which there are Ming dynasty records from late October of that year. This could be associated with the (modern) object CTB 80 seen by radio, optical and x-ray telescopes, but this association is still under professional debate.

Neither any European nor South Asian description of the AD 1054 supernova event from old historical records has been found so far, although possible middle eastern sightings (by Ibn Butlan who lived in Cairo and Constantinople between 1052 and 1055) have been mentioned. This is somewhat surprising, since the earlier SN 1006 was seen by Hepidannus in St Gall in Switzerland and the SN of AD 1054 would have been directly overhead in much of central India during summer nights. Although the months during which it was visible in the daytime were during the monsoon, it is unlikely that it would be missed for so many nights due to cloud cover. What was it like in the Indian subcontinent and its environs at that time? Where would one look for any evidence of these new stars?

*(To be concluded)*

ALAK KANTA RAY

## THE MORNING GLORY

SHE always gave me the impression of the flower called Morning Glory. Delicate, fresh, full of grace, radiating a soft light all around her, her very presence emanated happiness—that was Rita-di. Was? Yes, she left us so soon, barely in her early sixties, on the threshold of a higher and luminous existence.

Not that I was ever a very close acquaintance of hers or knew her even distantly. Just a few encounters, three or four, in all these years of Ashram life and that is the impression her presence conveyed to me. She rarely came out of her house or, when she did, I was in my home. So I hardly even saw her.

The only occasions were when late at night I would rush to Dr. Dutta's house to inform him about my mother's sudden heart ailment. She would open the door, wearing a spotless white sari the Bengali way, her head covered by the sari and would say gently "He is coming." In my nervous condition her calmness, her quiet presence was assurance personified. Maybe I would be a bit jittery, wringing my hands and looking expectantly at the door. She would feel my anxiety and say, "He is coming, he is coming just now," and would be standing at the door-step till Dr. Dutta came. She would then close the door softly and give a reassuring smile. Did she ever feel my gratefulness, my gratitude towards her? I being a reserved person never mentioned it to anyone, let alone to her. How deeply grateful I still am to her!

These were just a few face-to-face encounters. Soon we felt the need to install a phone in our house. Dilip-da made a special request to the Telecom Department as he felt the urgency and did not want us to rush to his house at odd hours of the night (not that his house is far from ours). But that is Dr. Dutta, considerate and ever helpful.

Now the connection with Rita-di was over the phone. Her husband being a very busy doctor, I am sure it would have been exasperating to attend to phone calls from so many people, so very often. But did I ever notice or distantly hear any shade of stress or strain in her voice? Never—Never! Her voice would be as concerned, loving, reassuring as was her presence.

What a lovable person the morning glory was—so distant yet so close to my heart. My gratitude has no bounds.

The earth will miss this glory but in my heart she will remain ever in bloom, glorified—the flower Gratitude.

ANONYMOUS

# SULJA

Translated from the Original in Tamil

(Continued from the issue of August 2000)

## ACT II

### Scene 1

(A garden in the Sultan's palace in Delhi The Sultan is seated on a marble platform )

Sultan (*getting up and walking to and fro, deep in thought*)

The soldiers of Malikafur went down South and decimated many kings and zamindars and brought gold, elephants, horses, etc Over six hundred elephants, twenty thousand horses and ninety-six thousand *tolas* of gold and silver ornaments. All that is mine now.

Ya Khuda! If my darling daughter Sulja, if she had asked for all that I would have given it to her But she asked for this idol of the Kaffirs I thought she wanted to play with it (*He beats his head*) But now she does not want to part with it. Worse, she worships it. (*Again beating his head.*) How can I, a true Musalman, tolerate this idol worship? Allah alone is God and Mohammed his Prophet How can I separate my daughter from that blasted idol? (*Takes out a pearl necklace*) Shall I tempt her with this?

Hey, you guard! Tell Shahjadi that I am calling her (*Sulja comes singing happily. Even her gait betrays her joy*) Darling, why are you so happy today?

Sulja

Abbajan, do you know? My Lord smiled at me today

Sultan (*stung*)

Smiled?

Sulja

Baba, do you know? He has two beautiful dimples on his cheeks Oh! so beautiful If I see them I feel he is smiling at me

Sultan.

Who taught you to call that idol your Lord?

Sulja

It is that lady who came from the South along with our soldiers

Sultan (*changing the topic*)

Beti, I was told that you ordered the guard Ali not to beat your servant Gulam Fatima. Is it true?

Sulja

Yes, Baba. "Prem karo," love all, this is what the Lord says That lady told me

this (*full of joy*) I love all. I am happy. (*again starts singing*) My Lord smiled at me today

Sultan:

Oh! What a catastrophe? This madness is growing. Beti, Fatima Gulam, did she not do something wrong?

Sulja (*laughing*):

No Baba She did not do any wrong Hear this, Baba. She brought *kurma* for me. I rejected it.

Sultan

Why? Is not that your favourite dish?

Sulja (*shaking her shoulders with disgust*):

Oh no! My Lord told me "This hen is life, the goat is life How can you eat them happily?" I won't eat *kurma*

Sultan (*surprised*):

Oh! this too!

Sulja:

Hear me out, Baba I refused to take that *kurma* Fatima Gulam then took it away and, hiding behind the door, she ate it all. Somebody must have reported it to Ali. Then Ali came with a whip to beat Fatima. Then I said, "Ali, if you whip Fatima I will get you whipped by Abbajan" Poor girl, Fatima Gulam. Why should she be whipped?

Sultan:

Then do you allow her to steal?

Sulja.

No, indeed

Sultan

Then?

Sulja:

Why should we punish her? Allah will see to it Let us love everybody. Allah will punish or reward.

Sultan

Beti. shall we go to Kashmir?

Sulja (*enthusiastically*):

How wonderful? When are we going, Abbajan?

Sultan

Let us see When we get time, we shall go.

Sulja:

How?

Sultan:

Elephant, horse, palanquin, whichever you prefer, we shall take that.

Sulja:

We shall ride horses, Baba. I like to ride a horse. I shall make a new cushion of

*makhmal* and shall place my Lord on it in front of me. I shall teach Him how to ride a horse. I shall show Him the forests, mountains, rivers, etc. (*Laughs merrily* )

Sultan (*arising*)

No, No. You should not bring that idol

Sulja (*dejected*):

If so, I am not coming, Abbajan.

Sultan:

What is all this Kaffir talk?

Sulja (*weeping*)

I won't come to Kashmir. Even if you kill me I won't part with my Lord.

Sultan

Ya Khuda! Ya Allah! Is this my fate? Is this the retribution for destroying the Kaffirs? (*Taking out the pearl necklace from his pocket* ) See this, darling, a pearl necklace.

Sulja (*lifting her head*)

Oh! What a lovely necklace!

Sultan:

Do you want it, dear?

Sulja

Yes, Baba Shall I take it?

Sultan

Take it, Beti

Sulja:

I shall put it on my Lord's neck How lovely He will look with it! (*Goes away taking the necklace* )

Sultan

I am the most celebrated of the Lodi clan. I am the great Sultan of Delhi I have vanquishd thousands in war. I am the terror of the infidels, Kaffirs. But, Oh! How come my daughter, my Sulja, is roaming about like a madcap carrying that blasted idol of the Kaffirs Fie upon me! What a shame! How scandalous! Ya Allah! Ya Karim!

## Scene 2

*(The Sultan's Durbar. He and some of his ministers are seated. Music is heard at a distance. A soldier comes and salutes )*

Soldier:

Salam Shahensha Some Southerners have come to have audience with you.

Minister (*looking at the Sultan for permission*):

Let them in (*The pilgrim group troops in led by Rangadasar* )

Rangadasar.

Jaya Vijayee Bhava.

The Minister

Who are you? Whence have you come? Are you merchants?

(Rangadasar takes his Tanpura and sings. Some of the devotees dance to and mime the meaning of the song. They too join the refrain.)

### Scene 3

(The garden in the palace The minister, Rangadasar and Sthalathar are coming.)

The Minister

I am happy to say that the Badshah is immensely pleased with you. He was overwhelmed by your exhibition of extraordinary memory. He wants to make you a minister.

Rangadasar (*laughing*).

What do I do with a minister's job? I am a humble servant of the Lord. I was overjoyed at seeing you in Badshah's Court when I found that you can speak Tamil. It is nothing but the Lord's grace.

The Minister:

I too felt happy to see you all. I hail from Kancheepuram. It is almost twenty years since I came here. Because I am an adept in accounts the Sultan has appointed me as the minister for the Treasury. I was longing to see Tamil faces, yearning to hear Tamil spoken. I am really extremely happy to talk to you. Is it not that idol of Sri Ranganatha that brought you here?

Rangadasar:

Indeed! How did you know? Could the Sultan get it back from his daughter and give it to us?

The Minister:

No. That is impossible. He could not separate his daughter from her idol. He has tried all means. If you take it away he will be immensely happy. He has permitted you to take it. He is absolutely happy seeing your singing and dancing. He has asked me to give you money.

Sthalathar:

Shall we ask the Sultan's daughter? We shall demand it, saying it is ours.

The Minister:

I have already tried that. I sent word through a maid that the rightful owners of the Lord's idol are demanding it back. The princess slapped the maid who returned to me weeping.

Sthalathar:

Why not lift it away while she is asleep?

The Minister:

I shall take you there tonight. I have already informed the guards that the Sultan has permitted it.

Rangadasar.

We shall go there. Let us see what the Lord does.

The Minister

But I must warn you. The Sultan is a very unstable person. He will not stick to what he says. Because you asked for the idol he will say yes today. But the next moment if his daughter comes and weeps he will snatch it from you and will give it to his daughter.

Rangadasar

In that case the moment we get the idol we had better vanish from this place.

The Minister

That is it. I have a reliable person coming from Kalinga. He knows all the adjoining forests of Delhi. He will take you through a short-cut, to Avanti. From there you can proceed southwards easily.

Rangadasar

How shall I repay the debt I owe you, Sir?

The Minister:

Please do not mention it. I am the one indebted to you.

#### Scene 4

*(Sulja's chamber in the harem. An ante-chamber on the left is also seen. In Sulja's chamber, on a pedestal is seen the idol of the Lord. He has been garlanded and a few flowers are found at his feet as offering. A lamp burns. Both the chambers are dimly lit. Sulja is seen sitting before the idol.)*

Sulja

Lord! Lord! I hear your relatives have come. *(Outside the room, in the ante-chamber, the Minister, Rangadasar, Sthalathar, Parandaman, and Kaveriyan are seen coming and standing silently.)*

Lord! They want to take you. How can you leave me? Lord, I refused to go to Kashmir, because I could not bear to be separated from you. Then why do you want to go with them? No, I will never allow you to go with them. *(Weeps bitterly)*

The Minister *(surprised, in hushed tones)*

Your Lord tells her that He wants to go with you!

*(Rangadasar and others sing a plaintive song highlighting the pangs of separation felt by all. Sulja listens to the song and when the song ends she looks keenly at the idol. Then she gets up and wringing her hands goes round and round in her room. Again she sits before the idol.)*

Sulja.

The Lord says "I have to go. Don't they too weep for me like you? Send me away. Take heart Sulja, take heart." *(She weeps.)*

*(Rangadasar and others sing)*



Have you forgotten Kaveri?  
 Have you forgotten Srirangam?  
 Why did you leave thy temple,  
 O! Natha Hare, Ranga Natha Hare!

Everyone weeps for you  
 Have you not remembered your Devi?  
 Have you forgotten too your servants?  
 Do you not delight any more  
 In the music of the bards?  
 Oh! Natha Hare, Ranga Natha Hare!

Have you forgotten your consort?  
 Have you forgotten all those gala festivals?  
 Have you forgotten all those  
 Surging crowds hankering to see you?  
 Oh! Natha Hare, Ranga Natha Hare!

*(Sulja listens to this song, silently When the song ends she jumps up.)*

Sulja:

Never Never. This should never be done How can you go leaving me alone?  
 You are stone-hearted, rude. I feel like I am going mad  
*(Moves here and there distracted, wringing her hands and weeping piteously. Ranga-  
 dasar and others sing a hymn in praise of the Lord )*

Sulja *(listening intently with her head down Then she goes and sits before the idol.):*

Lord, Lord *(appealing to Him)* Why do you churn my mind, O Lord? My mind  
 says that what I am doing is wrong. My Lord, my Lord. I do not know what to do.  
*(Covers her eyes with her hands. Stays like that for a minute. Then she removes her  
 hand and picking up courage.)* Well, my Lord, I am your slave. I shall do what you  
 command me to do.

*(To be concluded)*

K BALASUBRAMANIAM

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of August 2000)*

IN 1918, Mrinalini Devi, wife of Sri Aurobindo, died. We have already recorded how her life was one of long separation from her husband even while he was in Baroda and Calcutta. But she bore it well in the tradition of a Hindu wife. After her husband's departure to Pondicherry and his immersion in Yoga Sadhana, her coming to join him was out of the question. On many occasions she sought his permission to come to Pondicherry but without success. At last he granted her request, but destiny had willed it otherwise. While she was making the journey she fell ill and died in Ranchi after a severe attack of influenza. Dr. Sisir Kumar, Mrinalini's brother and a medical practitioner, has testified to the fact that his sister "always bore the separation well and with satisfaction as she realised that although she was high in the estimation of her husband she would not be helping him in his way of life by insisting on his company, as any devoted wife would normally have done."

In August 26, 1931, Mrinalini's father Bhupal Chandra Bose writes

"Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house of her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta in the course of his search for a mate to share his life, and chose her at first sight as his destined wife. Their marriage took place shortly afterwards in April 1901. It is not possible for the writer or for anybody else to say what psychological affinity existed between the two, but certain it is that as soon as he saw the girl he made up his mind to marry her. The customary negotiations were carried on by Girish Babu on the bride's side. Sri Aurobindo was at the time employed either as a Professor or as Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College at Baroda. He was then 28 years 9 months old, and his wife was only 14 years and 3 months, the difference in age being over 14 years.

"The writer knows next to nothing about the married life of the couple at Baroda. After Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal and during the stormy years that followed, Mrinalini had little or no opportunity of living a householder's life in the quiet company of her husband. Her life during this period was one of continuous strain and suffering which she bore with the utmost patience and quietude. She spent the greater period of the time either with Sri Aurobindo's maternal relatives at Deoghar or with her parents at Shillong. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and received a frightful mental shock of which the writer and others saw a most painful evidence in the delirium of her last illness ten years later.

"The writer is unable to say from his own knowledge how far Mrinalini agreed with and helped her husband in his public activities, but he can say this much for certain that she never stood in the way of his work. She never evinced any aspiration for public work.

"The writer cannot throw any light on the mutual relations between Mrinalini

and her husband, except that they were characterised by a sincere though quiet affection on the side of the husband and a never questioning obedience from the wife. One can gather much in this respect from Sri Aurobindo's published letters. After Sri Aurobindo left Bengal, the two never met again, but all who knew her could see how deeply she was attached to her husband and how she longed to join him at Pondicherry. Fate however decreed it otherwise .

“She paid several visits to her husband at Alipore Central Jail in the company of her father. She never evinced any visible agitation during those exciting times, but kept quiet and firm throughout.

“Sri Aurobindo never called his wife to Pondicherry for Sadhana. They never met again. Her father made a serious attempt after his retirement from Government service in 1916 to take her to Pondicherry but the attitude of Government at the time prevented him from realising this wish.

“These long years of separation (1910-18) she spent with her parents at Shillong and Ranchi, paying occasional visits to Calcutta. She devoted these years almost exclusively to meditation and the reading of religious literature which consisted for the most part of the writings of Swami Vivekananda and the teachings of his great Master.

“The writer believes she perused all the published writings of the Swami and all the publications of the Udbodhan office. Of these she has left behind an almost complete collection.

“Mrinalini often visited Sri Ma (widow of Paramahansa Dev) at the Udbodhan Office in Bagbazar, who treated her with great affection calling her Bau-Ma (the normal Bengali appellation for daughter-in-law) in consideration of the fact that the Holy Mother regarded Sri Aurobindo as her son.

“Mrinalini desired at one time to receive *diksha* from one of the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her father wrote to Sri Aurobindo for the necessary permission but the latter in reply advised her not to receive initiation from anyone else and he assured her that he would send her all the spiritual help she needed. She was content therefore to remain without any outward initiation.

“Mrinalini passed away in Calcutta in the 32nd year of her life on the 17th December, 1918, a victim of the fell scourge of influenza which swept over India in that dreaded year.

“There was nothing notable about her death. In fact but for the fate which united her for a part of her short life to one of the most remarkable and forceful personalities of the age, her life had nothing extraordinary about it.

“Nothing happens in the world without serving some purpose of the Divine Master, and no doubt she came and lived to fulfil a divine purpose which we may guess but can never know.

“For some time before she passed away, she had been selling her ornaments and giving away the proceeds in charity and what remained unsold she left with her friend Miss Sudhira Bose, at the time Lady Superintendent of the Sister Nivedita School.

Soon after her death Sudhira sold off the ornaments and the whole of the proceeds, some two thousand rupees, was, with Sri Aurobindo's permission, made over to the Ramakrishna Mission and constituted into an endowment named after Mrinalini, out of the interest of which a girl student is maintained at the Sister Nivedita School.''<sup>2</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

*References*

- 1 R R Diwakar, *Mahayogi* (1953), p 52
- 2 *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, Vol II, No 2, pp 207, 208

# MY FATHER'S BICYCLE

## A Short Story

THE other day my eldest son smiled at me. I was rather taken aback...not because his smile was rare but because his smile was only a prelude to something that would drain my bank balance

“What’s it this time, my boy?” I asked hesitatingly

My son expressed his desire to drive a scooter.

“Oh, sure!” I said heaving a sigh “Take my scooter and before you run short of petrol, park it back.”

“No I don’t want yours,” he registered his protest, and said, “I want to drive my own scooter, with its R C book in my name.”

“I don’t mind getting you a scooter But where will you beg for the petrol expenses?”

My son he-hawed and said, “Why should I beg? Am I not my father’s son? Don’t I have a claim over his purse? And is it not his duty to take care of my needs until I finish my studies, secure a decent job, and stand on my own feet? Above all, aren’t you my father? Why should you disown me?”

I stood dumbstruck For a minute I appreciated my son by silently looking at him for his audacity and cursed myself for wanting in it when I was a boy

My father was the proud possessor of a Raleigh bicycle, English made. I have heard him say quite often that he had spent a month’s salary to buy it. I had never asked him the price of his bicycle. Neither did my mother know about his salary. I remember having asked my mother about it once. But all that I received as reply was an indistinct sound immediately followed by a pouting of her lips. Her action seemed to tell me that my father would not have cared to reply to such a question Later I understood that she never had guts to question him. And she didn’t take any step to instil courage into me.

My father used to get up before the sun, to be very precise even before the morning cock could open its wee beak and crow to the world it is awakening the slumbering sun I have always wondered what a loud-mouthed creature this cock is to put life back on its track

The very first thing my father did every day was to clean his bicycle and oil it He had a very tough piece of cloth which resembled the hide of a camel and he ran it on the frame of the bicycle, then on the mudguards and chain-cover. Holding the cloth in between his thumb and forefinger, he would press it against a spoke of the front wheel and run it up and down with such force that the spoke shone like polished silver He disinterestedly did the same to the other spokes in the front as well as the back wheel By the time he finished cleaning his bicycle, the tough cloth would not have left any part of the bicycle’s anatomy un-kissed.

Once the cleaning was over, he would view his bicycle from different angles, as

the in-laws would look at a bride. Satisfied, he would say, "Good . Very good ." Was he complimenting himself or his bicycle? Only he knew.

The first operation successfully performed, the bicycle was in for a second. He took a soft piece of cloth, which very much resembled toilet paper. God alone knew from where my father procured such pieces of cloth, hitherto unseen by me.

Folding the cloth four times, he would press his oilcan and sprinkle coconut oil on it. Like a sponge, it sucked the oil up but retained it intact for use. He would then rub the cloth against every part of the bicycle and by the time he completed his second operation, the bicycle glistened like the well-polished boots of a proud soldier.

Then he would plant a kiss on the seat of his bicycle before he moved to the backyard of the house to begin the day's journey. Years later, I read in history textbooks that it was customary for Alexander the Great to plant a kiss on his steed, Bucephalus, after it was given a wash.

By 6.30 in the morning, my father dressed in a dhoti and full-sleeved shirt tucked in and a tweed coat on, moved out of the house pushing his bicycle.

When he began to pedal his way to the Rodier Mill manufacturing textiles, where he worked as Chief Dubash to the Europeans, men and women of our village used to look up to him.

The bicycle remained our neighbours' envy. Oh, no, it remained the envy of our entire village.

Our village consisted of a little more than two hundred houses and every one of them housed not less than half a dozen members. But no house owned a bicycle. It was a time when everyone loved to go on foot regardless of the distance to be covered, and a bicycle, maybe because of its price, was considered a luxury item.

When no one in the village knew cycling, or rather didn't bother to learn it, my father bought a bicycle imported from England. And he had to pay through his nose for it by parting with a month's salary.

My father pedalled his bicycle majestically, with the attitude "I am the monarch of all I survey and my right there is none to dispute." The entire village looked at him and his bicycle as our ancestors in times of yore must have looked at their king on horseback.

My father, being the only educated man in the whole village, was very much respected by the villagers and the arrival of the bicycle made him the most respected.

I have seen both youngsters and elders bringing their palms together in salute when he passed by their houses. His enemies too forgetting their entire grudge against him began to smile at him and created for themselves an opportunity to talk to him. This they did with the great hope that one day they would have the pleasure of being a pillion rider.

My father rarely parked his bicycle outside the house. And whenever he did, many villagers pounced at the opportunity of looking at it at close quarters. Some looked around to ascertain the absence of my father, and then emboldened themselves to touch the bicycle. A few pawed it as they would the fur of a white rabbit. While a

few elderly women bent and kissed the bicycle, others touched it with the tips of their fingers and pressed them against their lips.

Once an elderly woman, with an insatiable urge to ring the bicycle bell, clink-clanked it, with a sense of joy pervading her face. But her joy disappeared, for the sound of the bell pulled my father out of the house

He stared everyone down and howled at them to go away, with a warning that they should not touch his bicycle again. They reluctantly moved away.

On another occasion a dark-complexioned grandma pointed at the chromium plated carrier fitted to the back of the bicycle seat and expressed her desire to sit on it and go around the village at least once before she breathed her last.

“Huh! What do you take me and my bicycle for?” retorted my father. “That seat is not meant for old bandicoots like you, when several young princesses vie with one another to occupy it.”

And when my mother was seen anywhere around, his answer would have different words. “Oh! It’s meant only for my wife and no other woman.”

With that answer, the men and the women of our village stopped dreaming of going around on his bicycle, leave alone pedalling it. But their admiration for my father and his bicycle didn’t diminish in the least.

During one summer, my father’s maternal uncle, a bhajan singer by profession, visited our house with his family on a sojourn. He had a bicycle of his own at his place. But that was an Indian make.

He beamed at my father’s bicycle, as if it was a Mercedes Benz. “Oh! You own an English Raleigh! That shows you are a well-to-do man now,” he said patting my father on his back.

My father smiled back as if he was in agreement with his uncle’s words.

On the evening of the next day, the bhajan singer dressed himself neatly and eagerly awaited my father’s return from the Mill.

My father returned. Parking his bicycle near the entrance of our house, he took the next step of locking the vehicle.

“No. No! Don’t...” cried the singer and continued, “I’ve some work in the town. Do let me use your bicycle.”

“No.. You can’t,” retorted my father. “There are three things that I neither lend nor borrow—my comb, my toothbrush and my bicycle. I’m sorry.”

“I’ll use your bicycle as carefully as you do. I never in my life rode an English Raleigh. Please let me have a chance.”

“I’ve already given my answer,” said my father, throwing his bicycle key in the air and catching it, as he walked into the house.

The bhajan singer too rushed into the house and yelled at his wife and children: “Hurry up. I’m insulted.. Let us catch the next bus and go home. Hurry up. I’m insulted. We should not stay here any more. And we should not look this side at all.”

His wife and children packed up their luggage without even inquiring into the matter.

My father simply stood staring at them, while my mother helplessly watched them move out of the house.

That was the end of their relationship with our family.

“Father could have lent his bicycle to his uncle,” I whispered to my mother

“Your father is a man of principles. At no cost would he go back on them,” said my mother.

I felt proud of my father.

Once in a way I had the pleasure of riding with my father. He took me to town where we had *bonda* and *iddli* with a lot of *sambar* at Mathru Café and then moved to the seashore to spend an hour or two there.

My playmates always pestered me to tell them of my riding experience with my father and I too concocted several things to add to my pleasure. To have someone envy you is a real joy indeed.

Once while they were listening to me with rapt attention, a friend of mine interrupted by saying: “When are you going to ride your father’s bicycle?”

“When my father gives it to me,” I replied.

“When? We are interested,” they shouted in a chorus.

“God knows when. . . Perhaps when I grow up and when my father thinks that I am worthy of riding a bicycle.”

An uncanny pause. I saw everyone looking at me in admiration.

“I doubt it,” said a boy and broke the silence. “My grandma told me that his father is very possessive about his bicycle and would not mind breaking his relationship with anyone rather than lending it,” he added with a giggle.

“But a son is a son. He is somebody to his father. I don’t think that my father would disown me if I ask for his bicycle,” I said to snub the doubter.

“Hmm! You seem to have a lot of confidence in your father. Why don’t you try?” the boy said with a grin.

Inspired by his words, and with a curiosity to know the true colour of my father, I mustered up courage when I had supper with him and said “I would like to learn cycling, Father.”

My father continued munching, as if he had not heard a single syllable I had uttered.

My mother, filling my half-empty tumbler with water, shook her head indicating to me that I should not talk about cycling.

Playing blind to her advice, I pulled my father by his sleeve. When he inquiringly looked at me, I said: “When will you give me your bicycle?”

My father smiled, stopped munching for a second, and said, with a side-glance at me: “When I die.”

“When will you die?” I asked instantly, without knowing the impact those words would have on my mother.

I noticed my mother’s face drain of colour and her hand fell heavily on my head. The half-munched rice flew in different directions from my mouth.



“Stop it,” howled my father. “After all he is a kid,” he said frowning his brow

“Didn’t you hear what he said?”

My father threatened her with his finger and knitted his brows “So what?” he said, “Say ‘fire’ and you burn your tongue, eh!”

My mother just sat in pained silence, staring at the floor as though fascinated by something going on there.

Brushing my ruffled hair back from my forehead, my father motioned me with a turn of his head to resume eating.

I sat disobeying him with tears in my eyes

“Don’t worry, my boy,” consoled my father “My bicycle is quite old. Why should you ride an old one? I’ll get a new one for you.”

My face brightened up. I resumed eating.

A week or so later, I asked my father when he would buy me a new one

He inclined his head gracefully to one side and mused. Several seconds later, he said, “Everything has to wait for its time, my boy. You’ll own one when you grow up.”

When I repeated his words to my playmates, they invariably giggled and said, “We know... we know.. you don’t need a father to say so When you grow up, you may not need the help of your father You’ll buy one with your own money.”

I stood musing over their words. A couple of sleepless nights instilled courage into me.

I decided to use my father’s bicycle, without his knowledge, of course.

When I told my friends about my plan, they approved of it and volunteered to help me learn cycling

The much-awaited Sunday came It was customary for my father to sleep for a little more than four hours on every Sunday afternoon.

I heard my father snore in his bed. I tiptoed my way into the bedroom, took the cycle key, slipped to the corridor, unlocked the cycle and made my great escape into the world of my playmates and freedom

My friends welcomed the bicycle with great shouts and cheers All of them touched it, pressed their fingers against the cushioned seat, placed their feet on the pedals, clink-clanked the bell, and did a hundred things in glee. Most of them were reluctant to withdraw their hands from the magic touch of the bicycle.

Then they lifted me physically and sat me on the bicycle seat. My hands held the handlebar and my feet rested on the pedals. Falling in two rows on either side of the cycle, with their hands still holding either the handlebar or the carrier, we moved along with the vehicle.

I didn’t pedal at all. Neither did I learn to balance the moving cycle. But the cycle carried me. Thanks to my friends They helped me move on the cycle, with the great hope that one Sunday they would have the opportunity of riding it

Time slipped through shouts and rejoicings But when my mother appeared on

the scene, all my friends suddenly disappeared, as if the earth had gobbled them up.

The cycle fell down with a thud and along with it I

My mother gave me a helping hand to get up. She dusted the dirt off my trousers, and we pulled up the cycle.

Twisting my right ear hard, she warned me of my father sleeping at home. The folktale that she had once told me of a sleeping giant flashed across my mind and I broke into a peal of laughter

“Laughing, eh! Little imp! You’ll know when your father awakes. Park this cycle at home, before he comes to know of your mischief,” she crowed.

My mother heaved a deep sigh when we reached home, for the ‘giant’ was still asleep I heckled her and parked the cycle on its stand making the least sound

“I will have to wait six more days,” I mumbled and unwillingly moved towards my desk to do my homework

With great difficulty, I muffled my laughter when I supped with my father. “I have cheated you You’ll never be able to find out At last I have found a way to use your bicycle,” I said to myself

My joy of cheating my father didn’t last long

I was startled out of my sleep when my father pulled me by my collar. I looked out through the window of the bedroom. Dawn was just beginning to break.

“Get up, you lousy fellow!” he howled, and physically dragged me to the corridor. I bumped and bucketed my way along.

“Where did you take my bicycle yesterday?” he yelled contemptuously.

“I didn’t..” My words got interrupted by the blow that fell on my mouth.

“A lie,” he said, clenching his teeth and raising his fist.

I looked at my mother, standing beside the bicycle She was blinded by unshed tears and she held her cheeks in her hands.

I understood the situation and confessed

“I know. You can’t cheat me. I’m four times older than you are Look at the muddy tyres of my bicycle Have you ever seen me pedalling my cycle in this condition? Have you ever seen me use it in rain?” He barked, threatening me with upraised arm

I stood dumbfounded

“Who gave you the courage to use my bicycle, and that too without my permission?” he threatened, and simultaneously began to strike me.

The blows fell quickly. I screamed in pain. But I found no mercy in my father.

I found myself in the hospital after that incident I was told that I became unconscious and developed high fever.

Three weeks later I was discharged Back home, I scorned the bicycle But it looked more majestic than ever, with not a speck of dirt on it

“Who is my father’s son? You or me?” I cried excitedly, almost violently at the bicycle.

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man** by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (Bloomsbury 1995, rpt New Delhi: Rupa 2000. Pp 493 Rs 150 )

THIS is truly an amazing biography, one of the best in its genre that I have read in recent years. The book straddles many disciplines: art, music, poetry, politics, sociology, education and literary history. Although largely adulatory in tone, the authors Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson do not gloss over problem-areas in Tagore's personality and the responses he made to events personal as well as public. Marked by empathy and objectivity, the book heralds Tagore as a product of historical forces as well as a shaper of Modern India.

It is, of course, hard to sift facts from legends in the world of Tagore. "I can now imagine a powerful and gentle Christ which I could never before," declared Darwin's granddaughter to a friend after meeting Tagore. Similarly, poet-soldier Wilfred Owen's mother recalled in a letter to Tagore that her son went to battle with a poem of Tagore's in his pocket. "When I go from hence, let them be my parting word" was the opening line he read. Other episodes such as Tagore's encounters with Fascism/Nazism and Bolshevism show him in less edifying terms. Yet others, such as Tagore's quarrel with the Mahatma, have been pushed behind a veil. Post-independent India likes to see the freedom struggle as the outcome of a grand national consensus. In reality, however, it would be seen that there were many approaches that ran parallel and often competed with each other for the goal of independence.

Largely employing a narrative mode of analysis with a stress on chronology, the authors of this biography meticulously document Tagore's genealogy and pedigree. We learn for instance that his grandfather Dwarakanath, business man, patron and philanthropist, launched the Union Bank in 1828 when he served the British East India Company. His exploits also included a series of meetings with Charles Dickens in 1842.

Known as Thakurbari, Tagore's home in Calcutta was located in Jorasanko, a congested area of North Calcutta. After his mother Sharada's death in 1875 young Tagore was drawn to Jyotindranath's wife Kadambari who was "highly affectionate, teasing and somewhat childish" in nature. Kadambari remained childless and somewhat lonely.

On an early visit to England during his adolescence, Tagore fancied "England to resound from one end to the other with the strains of Tennyson's lyre" Back in India, his marriage and bereavement of family members take place during 1883-84. Work in his estate in East Bengal shapes his conviction that Indians must help themselves and that India can regenerate itself by regenerating its villages, an idea he would put into practice at Sriniketan. Although an admirer of Western culture, Tagore often loved challenging middle class *bhadralok*-conventions in social and cultural gatherings by singing in chaste Bengali. Around this time a correspondence with

Jagadish Chandra Bose, who was in London to attend the international conference of physicists, brings out the self-respecting patriot in Tagore

Other events soon follow He begins to take interest in Shantiniketan, a “forest retreat” that Debendranath purchased in 1863 Daughters Bela (15) and Renuka (a mere 10) are married off, a decision that shows Tagore’s ambivalent attitude towards child marriage

Tagore won the coveted Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 Congratulating “Babindranath Tagore”, *The New York Times* wrote on 14 November that it was the first time that this prize was given to anybody but a white person. “Babindranath Tagore,” it added the next day, misspelling the name for the second time, “if not exactly one of us, is as an Aryan, a distant relative of white folk ”

Visiting Japan and the USA (1916-17) Tagore took part in the anti-imperialist struggle He expressed his strong indignation against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that took place on 13 April 1919

His growth as an international poet went side by side with his public life He met the Irish poet, theosophist and friend of Yeats, James Cousins “The shock of outside forces,” he remarked, “is necessary for maintaining the vitality of our intellect.” There were meetings with other celebrities as well, such as Nicholas Roerich, Beatrice Webb and Sylvan Levy

Tagore versus Gandhi marks a significant phase in the evolution of the former’s ideological career Described by the biographers somewhat melodramatically as a clash of titans, the relationship between the two was marked by mutual respect and acceptance of differences in thought and action. “No two persons,” Nehru once said, “could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore ” The latter thought that Gandhi was “manipulating the people with symbols” In September 1928, Tagore confided in a spirit of resignation to Romain Rolland that “I can no longer hide from myself that we are radically different in our apprehension and pursuit of truth”. However, Gandhi and Tagore were the first to refer to each other as “Mahatma” and “Gurudev” Gandhi as a conscience keeper of the nation paid homage to Tagore as “the great sentinel”; although he occasionally chastised the poet for his “begging expeditions”, he did secure help from G. D. Birla to tide over a financial crisis at Shantiniketan.

There were other differences as well One aspect related to Gandhi’s concept of Satyagraha “Expiation can truly and heroically be done,” maintained Tagore “only by daily endeavours for the sake of those unfortunate beings who do not know what they do.” Another contentious issue was Gandhi’s view that the recently occurred earthquake was the result of the evil practice of untouchability Both Nehru and Tagore rejected Gandhi’s belief that “supra-physical consequences flow from physical events.”

Considerable space is devoted in the book to the fate of Viswa Bharati Much of the travel that Tagore undertook abroad was for the sake of fund raising. Unfortunately, many of Shantiniketan’s faculties did not have a permanent source of support,

barring disciplines like Islamic Studies paid for by Hyderabad's Nizam. On the other hand, a project to settle Zionists from Palestine around Shantiniketan, in collaboration with Bengalis, never took off. Nor were the teachers a model of virtue. The atmosphere at Shantiniketan especially during the thirties was marked by an "insidious, repellant" and self-centered behaviour and "aggressive cynicism," a fact that was a considerable source of distress to Gurudev and must have contributed to the trips he made outside.

A noteworthy contribution of the book is the light it sheds on Tagore's encounter with contemporary ideologies such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism. Documented evidence, cited by the authors of this biography, shows that the poet's attitude towards Mussolini was ambivalent. In an admiring moment he once thought Mussolini possessed "a heroic personality", at another instance he referred to Fascism and Bolshevism as "symbols of unhealthiness". Not surprisingly, the fascist organ *Popolo d'Italia* abused him as "the poet of flowers, stars and pound sterling"

Tagore also seemed to suffer from a degree of intolerance. On one particular occasion, for instance, he wrote a scathing, pseudonymous review in Bengali in response to some of the negative remarks of Edward Thompson. In his self-defence, however, he once wrote to his daughter Mira that he had been attacked by many groups because he refused to belong to any camp. "No one will be able to put a chain on my feet," he concluded firmly before his death in 1941.

Excellent as it is, the biography misses out on crucial aspects of Tagore's relationship with eminent contemporaries such as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. No mention, for instance, is made of the poet's classic homage to Sri Aurobindo. Nor is there any mention of Tagore's meeting with Mirra Alfassa (later known as the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) and her husband Paul Richard in Japan. A photograph of this meeting is after all a part of the collection at Rabindra Bhavan in Shantiniketan.

Such omissions, however, do not invalidate the outstanding nature of this biography, complete with a substantial body of appendices, the book ought to find a place on the shelf of every educated Indian.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY