

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 2001

PRICE: Rs. 20.00

Revised Subscriptions
from August 2001, owing to considerable rise in costs of posting and paper

INLAND

Annual Rs 150 00
Life Membership Rs 1600 00
Price per Single Copy Rs 20 00

OVERSEAS

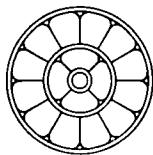
Sea Mail
Annual \$18 00 or £12 00
Life Membership \$252 00 or £168 00

Air Mail

Annual \$36 00 for American & Pacific countries
\$26 00 for all other countries
Life Membership \$504 00 for American & Pacific countries
\$364 00 for all other countries

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry For outstation cheques kindly add Rs 15 for annual membership and Rs 50 for life membership

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any enquiry The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with pin code number

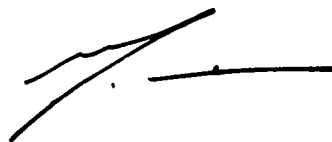


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



All Rights Reserved No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations

All correspondence to be addressed to

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Editor's Phone 334782

e-mail motherindia@sriurobindoashram.com

Publishers Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Editor K D SETHNA

Associate Editor R Y Deshpande

Published by HARIKANT C PATEL

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by AMIYO RANJAN GANGULY

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No R N 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LIV

No. 9

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

THE ALL-NEGATING VOID SUPREME (Poem)	643
TWO LETTERS TO SRI AUROBINDO AND HIS REPLIES	645
SOME LETTERS	655
TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO APROPOS OF INDIA	658

Arjava

EVENFALL (Poem)	660
-----------------	-----

Sampadananda Mishra

SRI AUROBINDO'S RENDERINGS OF SOME OF THE VEDIC RIKS (Compilation)	661
---	-----

The Mother

A SAPPHIRE TALE	663
-----------------	-----

Amal Kiran (K D Sethna)

TWO LETTERS	667
-------------	-----

Toru Dutt

THE BALLAD OF SAVITRI	669
-----------------------	-----

Narad (Richard Eggenberger)

THE HIDDEN SPRINGS OF POETRY (Poem)	673
-------------------------------------	-----

Richard Hartz

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI	674
----------------------------	-----

Georges van Vrekhem

OVERMAN—THE TRANSITIONAL BEING BETWEEN MAN AND SUPERMAN	681
---	-----

M. P. Jan

BE PLEASED (Poem)	686
-------------------	-----

Jugal Kishore Mukherjee

THE ASCENT OF SIGHT IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI	687
--	-----

Ranajit Sarkar

CENSURE (Poem)	692
----------------	-----

R. Y. Deshpande

CAN THERE BE AN INDIAN SCIENCE?	693
---------------------------------	-----

<i>K. B. Sitaramayya and Swarna Gouri</i>		
THE OPENING CANTO OF SAVITRI		
AS THE KEYNOTE OF THE COMPOSITION		700
<i>Manoj Das</i>		
THE SARASWATI SAMMAN 2000	...	705
<i>Meghnad Saha</i>		
ABOUT ASTROLOGY	.	708
<i>Fah Choksi</i>		
A TREASURY OF THOUGHTS		709
<i>Gleb Nesterov</i>		
THREE REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIA		710
<i>P. Raja</i>		
THOU WAST NOT BORN FOR DEATH, IMMORTAL BIRD!	..	712
<i>Suresh Dey</i>		
THE LANGUAGE OF THE SOUL	.	716
<i>Ved Dhingra</i>		
COULD DEATH BE MORE BEAUTIFUL?		718
<i>Nilima Das</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	..	720
<i>A Report</i>		
SOCRATES'S PRISON	..	723
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE		
<i>Anonymous</i>		
<i>Review of</i> THE MOTHER THE STORY OF HER LIFE		
<i>by</i> GEORGES VAN VREKHEM	..	725
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>		
<i>Review of</i> SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE-GENDER AND MYTH		
IN ANCIENT GREECE AND INDIA <i>by</i> WENDY DONIGER	.	726
<i>Pravir Malik</i>		
<i>Review of</i> LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW SCIENCE <i>by</i> MARGARET J WHEATLEY	...	731

THE ALL-NEGATING VOID SUPREME

High she attained and stood from Nature free
And saw creation's life from far above,
Thence upon all she laid her sovereign will
To dedicate it to God's timeless calm
Then even those stirrings rose in her no more,
Her mind now seemed like a vast empty room
Or like a peaceful landscape without sound. ..
But to her deeper sight all yet was there,
Effervescing like a chaos under a lid. .
Then this too paused, the body seemed a stone
All now was a wide mighty vacancy,
But still excluded from eternity's hush,
For still was far the repose of the Absolute
And the ocean silence of Infinity
Even now some thoughts could cross her solitude.
These surged not from the depths or from within
Cast up from formlessness to seek a form,
Spoke not the body's need nor voiced mind's call....
Then looking to know whence the intruders came
She saw a spiritual immensity
Pervading and encompassing the world-space...
And through it sailing tranquilly a thought
Then all grew still, nothing moved any more.
Immobile, self-rapt, timeless, solitary
A silent spirit pervaded silent Space.
In that absolute stillness bare and formidable
There was glimpsed an all-negating Void supreme
That claimed its mystic Nihil's sovereign right
To cancel Nature and deny the soul .
A pure perception was the only power
That stood behind her action and her sight.
All else grew unsubstantial, self-annulled,
Thus only everlasting seemed and true,
Yet nowhere dwelt, it was outside the hours. .
It met her as the uncaught inaudible Voice
That speaks for ever from the Unknowable
It met her like an omnipresent point
Pure of dimensions, unfixed, invisible,
The single oneness of its multiplied beat
Accentuating its sole eternity .

It held, as if a shield before its face,
 A consciousness that saw without a seer,
 The Truth where knowledge is not nor knower nor known,
 The Love enamoured of its own delight
 In which the Lover is not nor the Beloved
 Bringing their personal passion into the Vast,
 The Force omnipotent in quietude,
 The Bliss that none can ever hope to taste.
 It cancelled the convincing cheat of self,
 A truth in nothingness was its mighty clue
 If all existence could renounce to be
 And Being take refuge in Non-being's arms
 And Non-being could strike out its ciphered round,
 Some lustre of that Reality might appear.
 A formless liberation came on her
 She was no more a Person in a world,
 She had escaped into infinity
 She was a point in the unknowable
 Only some last annulment now remained,
 Annihilation's vague indefinable step
 A memory of being still was there
 And kept her separate from nothingness:
 She was in That but still became not That.
 Even now her splendid being might flame back
 Out of the silence and the nullity
 To show to the One-in-all its manifest face
 Or she might wake into God's quietude
 Beyond the cosmic day and cosmic night
 And rest appeased in his white eternity
 But this was now unreal or remote
 Or covered in the mystic fathomless blank
 In infinite Nothingness was the ultimate sign
 Or else the Real was the Unknowable
 A lonely Absolute negated all.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 543-50)

TWO LETTERS TO SRI AUROBINDO AND HIS REPLIES

[Mano Mohan Dhar was born on 6 February 1899 at Kainpur, Tipperah, now in Bangla Desh. He joined the Ashram on 16 February 1929 and remained here until his death on 8 April 1981. We reproduce here two of his letters written to Sri Aurobindo in 1933. In the facsimile pages, Sri Aurobindo's marginal answers are faint because they were written in pencil. The text of the letters is retained as was written to Sri Aurobindo —R Y D]

14th May 1933

MY Sweetest Mother, kindly accept my humble pranam and be pleased to carry the second to my kindmost Father

Ma! this morning after finishing my phoscao while I was loitering near the filter room, suddenly I found a picture of all-pervading beauty around me,—everything, not excepting a single object—not the wall, not the drain, the mosses in it, not even a small particle of sand on the ground. All these individual objects have constituted an undivided whole picture of beauty, but each individual itself is beautiful—the whole is the aggregation of all these individuals, and again, each individual is the aggregation of numberless particles or I may say atoms, for I find, that the beauty I see in each individual object is already there in each particle which has aggregated the form giving a whole view of beauty before us. Now, though the same beauty pervades everywhere yet we find different things giving different aspects of beauty—it seems it is because of the arrangement of the materials that have constituted the form and that arrangement chiefly concerns the consciousness that expresses itself through each individual. When I look at a dry leaf to compare with a green leaf to see which is more beautiful I cannot compare it—because I see both are beautiful—every part of each leaf manifests beauty, again each leaf as a whole gives an undivided view, no comparison can be made between the two—each has its own beauty—comparison can only be drawn between two things if they belong to the same category—with same constitution—and also from point of view of consciousness. Even the ugliest thing strips itself of its ugliness to this sight.

It is this beauty that presents its another aspect in movement what we call rhythm. In each movement there is a rhythm which regulates the movement very carefully. When a person walks, speaks or makes a movement of any kind, I find there something behind his action which rhythmically limits his movement, controls it—and regulates it—then the mind automatically is drawn to a conception of an intelligence behind all these—and behind it is a Consciousness and then the Divine Artist.

This beauty comes to me through every sound of whatever kind may it be—there is nothing that disturbs the ear—each giving a different tone.

This beauty comes as *rasa* through every other sense. I have seen the pungent or

bitter thing, though biting to our tongue yet there is a rasa in it which can be enjoyed peacefully For some days I have been experimenting curd or milk with sugar, or half sugar or no sugar. Each gives a different taste yet each is enjoyable Curd or milk without sugar—gives a very nice flavour—which cannot be found in sugar mixed one

Sri Aurobindo: You are quite right

It seems to me the taste without sugar is more superior in quality

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, the sugar covers the true taste and rasa of the thing

This is not the first time that I see these things—for some time past I have been experiencing these things but I could not manage to write to you because of the heaviness of the task. Whenever I have tried to put it before you it has threatened me with its shape of a long essay for which I had no materials from the side of language. Today I have been able to tell you nothing of my conception—I do not know whether you will understand a little of what I wanted to say.

Sri Aurobindo: I understand perfectly and all you have written is absolutely true. It is the right yogic vision of things, of the universality of beauty

This beauty and rhythm give me a basis of equality—to see all things with equal eye—with multitudinous difference among them

This helps me to understand artistic work very easily

I want to hear something from you about what I have written I have not been able to express the thing I feel, you will kindly tell me the truth behind all these, arranging things properly

Sri Aurobindo: There is no need to rearrange It is correct in every point.

15th May 1933

Ma!

I forgot to write another experience which I got at the same place just before the vision of beauty. It is this —I felt that joy of one heart could awaken the joy in any other person; such is the case with all other things such as sorrow, enthusiasm, love, hatred, anger, etc., all the human qualities I can awaken with appeal from the corresponding parts in me I felt that every man or I may say the whole humanity is very near to me—I found a relation with them all and that relation is inalienable What does this mean, Mother?

Sri Aurobindo There is one cosmic Force working in all and a vibration of that Force or any one of its movements can awake (it does not always) the same vibration in another

This noon in the DR I felt that the whole existence around me is in motion. All the trees, plants, everything is on a journey for a destination. I felt that the whole world not excepting a single thing is going forward for some destined aim but in spite of the turmoil, noise, all these—they are going silently—and steadily—without ceasing for a moment all are moving forward driven by the same Vast Force. What does this mean, Mother?

Sri Aurobindo There is a constant movement (*Prakriti*) in a constant silence (*Purusha*)

That day while I was coming back from the seaside in the morning the following thoughts came into my mind in clear beautiful sentences. The sense is this. Ananda is the essence of this creation, it is ananda that is presenting itself to our mind through the senses as beauty objectively and rasa subjectively. Now it is this contact of ananda with ananda in its purity that is the ultimate aim of this creation—the fulfilment—by this the mystery of the creation is unveiled. This interchange of ananda—to oneself back through this creation is the alpha and omega of this creation. Every thing or being is seeking that ananda through its multitudinous activities. When it is got—all is hushed—it is fulfilled. Had there not been this element in the creation this world would have been quite unfit for habitation—one would have liked to run away to some distant land for a better life. This ananda is the life of this creation which has kept the creation from its ultimate ruin. What does all this mean, Mother?

Sri Aurobindo It is the statement of the Upanishad that there is an ether of Ananda in which all breathe and live; if it were not there, none could breathe or live

16th May 1933

My sweetest mother kindly accept my humble ~~prana~~
pranam and be pleased to carry the same to my kin-
most Father.

ma! this morning after finishing my phosco
while I was sitting ^{in the} Filter room. suddenly I found
a picture of all-pervading beauty ~~all~~ around me;
everything, not excepting a single thing-object - not
the wall, not the drain, the mosses in it; not even
a ~~small~~ small particle of sand on the ground.
All ~~these~~ ^{these} individual objects have constituted -
an undivided whole picture of beauty - but
each individual itself is beautiful - the whole
is the aggregation of all these individuals - and
again - each individual is the aggregation
of numberless particles or I may say atoms; for
I find, that the beauty I see in each
individual object is already there in each
~~particle~~ particle which have aggregated the ~~form~~ ~~and~~
giving a whole view of beauty ~~before us~~.
Now, ~~the~~ though the same beauty pervades
everywhere ~~yet~~ we find different things giving
different ~~or~~ aspects of beauty - it seems to
it is because of the arrangement of the

materials that have constituted the form and that ~~diffuse~~ arrangement ~~but~~ chiefly concerns the Consciousness: that it expresses itself through each individual ~~leaf~~. When I look to a dry leaf to compare with a green leaf to ~~know~~ see which is more beautiful I cannot compare it - because I see both are beautiful - every part of each leaf manifests beauty again each leaf as a whole given an undivided view - no comparison can be made between the two + each has its own beauty - ~~only~~ ~~kind~~ comparison can only be drawn between two things if they belong to the same category - with same constitution - ~~same origin~~ and also from point of view of Consciousness. Even the ugliest thing strikes off its ugliness to this sight.

It is this beauty, ^{that} ~~the~~ presents its -- another aspect in movement - what call rhythm. In each movement there is a rhythm - which regulates the movement very carefully - ~~it is~~ ~~that~~ when a person walks - speaks or makes a movement of any kind - I find there is something

behind his action which rhythmically limits his movement, controls his it - and regulates it - then the mind automatically is drawn to a conception of an intelligence behind all these - and behind it ^{is a consciousness and thing the} ~~is~~ Divine of artist.

This beauty comes to me through every sound of whatever kind may it be. - there is nothing that disturbs the ear - each giving a different touch

This beauty comes as rasa through every other sense. I have seen the prangent or better thing though sitting and listening to me to our tongue yet there is a rasa in it which can be enjoyed peacefully. For some days I have been experimenting curd or milk with sugar, or half sugar or no-sugar - each gives a different taste yet each is enjoyable - curd or milk without sugar - gives a very nice flavour which cannot be found in sugar-sweetened one - It seems to me the taste without sugar is more superior in quality.

This is not the first time that I see these things - for some time past - I have

Have been experiencing these things but I could not manage to write to you - because of the heaviness of the task. Whenever I have tried to put it before you it has threatened me with its shape of a long essay for which I had no material from the side of language. Today I have been able to tell you nothing of my conception - I do not know whether you will understand a least of what I wanted to say.

This beauty and rhythm give me a basis of equality - ~~and~~ to see all things with equal eye - ~~and~~ with multitudinous difference among them.

This helps me to understand artistic work very easily.

I want to hear something from you about what I have written. I have not been able to express the thing I feel; - you will kindly tell me the truth behind all these arranging thing properly.

1: 2 May 1933

ma 1

I forgot to write another experience which I got in the same place just before the vision of beauty. It is this - I felt that the joy of heart could awaken the ~~is~~ ^{of} forgotten person - such was the case in the case with all other things - as - sorrow, enthusiasm, hatred, love, hatred, anger, etc all the human qualities I can awaken with appeal from the corresponding qualities in me. I felt that every man or I may say the whole humanity is very near to me - I found a relation with them all and that relation is indissoluble. What does this mean mother?

There is no force which all and a whole other
 me or anyone else can ever (I cannot
 say) be same without in another

This noon in the dining room I felt that the whole existence around me is in motion. All the trees and plants everything are on a journey for a destination. I felt that the whole world was excepting a single thing is going forward for some destined air. but.

in spite of this turmoil, noise, all these -
 they are going silently - and steadily - without
 ceasing for a moment - all are moving
 forward driven by the same vast force.

What does it mean mother?

^{is} There is a constant movement (Orbit) and a
 constant silence (Presence)

That day while I was coming
 back from the sea side in the morning -
 The following thoughts came into my mind
 with clear beautiful sentences. Now I don't
 remember the sentences - This sense is this -
 Ananda is the essence of this creation - it is
 this ananda is presenting itself to our mind
 through the senses as beauty or ~~or~~ ^{or} ~~or~~ ^{or} objectively
 and rasa as subjectively. Now it is this
 contact ~~is~~ of ananda with ananda ~~is~~
 in its purity is the ~~is~~ ultimate aim of this
 creation - the fulfilment - by this the mystery of
 the creation is unveiled. This interchange
 of ananda - to get oneself back ~~in that~~
 through this creation is the alpha and
 omega of this creation. ~~Had this been~~

every thing or being is seeing that
 around through its multitudinous activities
 when it is got - all is hushed - it is fulfilled.
 Had there been not this element in the
 creation - this world would have been quite
 unfit for habitation - one would have liked
 to run away to some distant land for a
 better life. This around is the life of
 this creation which has kept the creation from
 its untimely ruin. What does all
 this mean mother?

It is the statement of the Upanishad
 that there is an ether of space in which all things
 live, - if it were not there, one could not live.

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

I am writing now about my vital-mental interest in outside news. The recrudescence of the political movement and my interest in it grew a little deep I began to calculate the possibilities, my mind grew unnecessarily active and I felt a sort of rajasic heat which was certainly not pleasant It seems that any externalisation brings with it impurities such as egoism of opinion and belief I have tried to give up all centrifugal interests, even occasional thoughts about friends, relatives and past incidents To a certain extent I have been successful, though the subconscious still shows some interest Is it possible to make the subconscious give a still greater response?

YES—by keeping this attitude and insisting steadily and inflexibly on the whole nature taking it also The subconscious is a thing of habits and memories and repeats persistently or whenever it can old suppressed reactions, reflexes, mental, vital or physical responses. It must be trained by a still more persistent insistence of the higher parts of the being to give up its old responses and take on the new and true ones

In meditation after your last letter, I observed that the obstructive pressure at the navel and throat has diminished and there is more or less an immediate feeling of rising to the top of the head and a vibrating feeling of joy During this time I keep concentrated on the Spirit or remain passive Then there comes a sense of hanging in an ether of calm slightly above the head, outside the body as it were The mind is quite inactive during this period Sometimes from there I put a will at the vital centre to be ready for transformation, this results in a jerky trembling of the body and breath, with heat in the upper half of the body Is the hanging-in-ether feeling merely a sensation or does some portion of the being actually go above and out?

It is not merely a sensation, it is an actual happening and a most important one. The consciousness is usually imprisoned in the body, centralised in the brain and heart and navel centres (mental, emotional, sensational), when you feel it or something of it go up and take its station above the head, that is the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness from the body-formula It is the mental in you that goes up there, gets into touch with something higher than the ordinary mind and from there puts the higher mental will on the rest for transformation The trembling and the heat come from a resistance, an absence of habituation in the body and the vital to this demand and to this liberation. When the mental consciousness can take its stand permanently or at will above like this, then this first liberation becomes accomplished (*siddha*).

From there the mental being can open freely to the higher planes or to the cosmic existence and its forces and can also act with greater liberty and power on the lower nature

Sometimes even a slight concentration at the heart results in such an acute feeling of joy that it requires effort to prevent the body from contortion. Sometimes there is a sort of tender joy at curious places, such as the throat or wrist or sternum. Sometimes I have to keep well within in order to prevent it from being perverted into the sex-impulse, either then or afterwards. But with this movement there is calm and a sense of purity, so I think it may not be mere vital excitement. Is it a heightened nerve sensation or some type of delight of the psychic?

It is not mere vital excitement or heightened nerve sensation, it is an attempt of the psychic to emerge from behind the veil and what you feel is the psychic joy (The psychic is seated behind the heart, behind the emotional centre.) But when this psychic joy comes, it communicates itself to the mind, the vital and the body. You have then to be careful that no mixture comes in from the vital and the physical—such as the sex impulse. The mind, the vital and the physical must receive the psychic Ananda and make it their own, but not bring in their own deviations of any degraded mixture into it.

The main desire at present is to know the Spirit and live as the Spirit, and for this I try to go inward, reject the identification with the instruments and keep the mind quiet. But the mind seems to be the chief obstruction, it at once externalises itself and establishes some chain of thought (thoughts of sadhana or work). Is there any point at which concentration may bring about a cessation of mental activity? Does realisation of the Spirit ever come before the development of the Overmind or Supermind?

Certainly, the realisation of the Spirit comes long before the development of overmind or supermind, hundreds of sadhaks in all times have had the realisation of the Atman on the higher mental plane, *buddheh paratah*, but the supramental realisation was not theirs. One can get *partial* realisations of the self or spirit or the Divine on any plane, mental, vital, physical even, and when one rises above the ordinary mental plane of man into a higher and larger mind, the Self begins to appear in all its conscious wideness. It is by full entry into this wideness of the Self that cessation of mental activity becomes possible, one gets the inner Silence. After that this inner silence can remain even when there is activity of any kind, the being remains silent within, the action goes on in the instruments and one receives all the necessary initiations and execution of action whether mental, vital or physical from a higher source without the fundamental peace and calm of the spirit being troubled. The

Overmind and Supermind states are something yet higher than this, but before one can understand them, one must first have the self-realisation, the full action of the spiritualised mind and heart, the psychic awakening, the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness, the purification and entire opening of the *adhara*. Do not think now of those ultimate things (Overmind, Supermind), but get first these foundations in the liberated nature

6 February 1932

The accompanying letter is from X, who came here last August and stayed for a few days. He writes from Yerawada Jail and wishes to have a copy of the Mother's "Conversations".

The "Conversations" cannot be sent to Yerawada jail. It is only for private circulation among sadhaks

30 May 1932

The accompanying letter is from my wife. Till now I have been guilty of writing to her without trying to know your opinion. I was keeping up the communication partly in order not to shock or pain her too much and partly with a desire to see that she may take up the spiritual path some day. Behind both these motives there was some affection for her, which I discovered only when I found myself occasionally getting anxious about her or expecting a letter from her. What attitude should I keep with respect to her? (The letter may be sent back to me only if you think it necessary to send a reply.)

I return the letter, but I leave the necessity of reply or otherwise to your discretion. To keep any attachment is obviously inconsistent with the yogic attitude, as also any desire of the kind you express, if she is to enter the spiritual life some day it should be as her own independent destiny and her being your wife is not relevant to it. Detachment is the main thing, if you have that, to write or not to write is a secondary thing

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO APROPOS OF INDIA

[In the present series we bring out extracts of conversations Sri Aurobindo had with his attendant-disciples after the accident in 1938. Informal remarks usually have another flavour than views expressed in books and periodicals meant for publication. Nirodbaran and a few others had the extraordinary privilege of conversing with Sri Aurobindo. Thanks to Nirodbaran we are in a position to have glimpses of the remarkable insights of the Master in various subjects. Here we begin with talks concerning India. Though these conversations took place in the late thirties the Master's observations have a certain relevance to matters bearing on us even today. —R.Y.D.]

NIRODBARAN: What about India's independence? Is it developing along your lines?

SRI AUROBINDO: Surely not. India is now going towards European Socialism, which is dangerous for her, whereas we were trying to evolve the genius of the race along Indian lines and all working for independence. Take the Bengal Movement. The whole country was awakened within a short time. People who were such cowards and trembled at the sight of a revolver were in a short period so much changed that the police officials used to say, "That insolent Barisal look!" It was the soul of the race that awoke, throwing up very fine personalities. The leaders of the Movement were either yogis or disciples of yogis—men like Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, the disciple of B. Goswamy.

NIRODBARAN: Was he a Nationalist?

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! He was my fellow-worker and also took part in the Secret Society. Then there were others, like Brahma B. Upadhyay. The influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda worked from behind. The Movement and the Secret Society became so formidable that in any other country with a political past they would have led to something like the French Revolution. The sympathy of the whole nation was on our side. Even shopkeepers were reading *Jugantar*. I'll tell you an instance. While a young man was fleeing after killing a police officer in Shyam Bazar, he forgot to throw away his revolver. It remained in his hand. One shopkeeper cried out, "Hide your revolver, hide your revolver!" And, of course, you have heard of Jatin Mukherjee?

MANILAL: Yes, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: A wonderful man. He was a man who would belong to the front rank of humanity anywhere. Such beauty and strength together I haven't seen, and his stature was like a warrior's. Then there was Pulin Das.

NIRODBARAN: Pulin Das, I hear, turned out a spy.

SRI AUROBINDO: A spy? I don't believe it. He may have become a Moderate but not a spy. Such were the leaders at that time, and look at Bengal now!

NIRODBARAN: What about Gandhi's Movement?

SRI AUROBINDO. Gandhi has taken India a great step forward towards freedom, but his Movement has touched only the upper middle classes while ours comprised even the lower middle classes.

NIRODBARAN. Has it diminished the spirit of revolution?

SRI AUROBINDO Yes

NIRODBARAN Was it Anderson, the Governor of Bengal, who killed the Revolutionary movement?

SRI AUROBINDO Certainly not It was the Force behind that receded and people became corrupted No such leaders as before were forthcoming

NIRODBARAN Is the last Terrorist Movement a part of the one of 1905?

SRI AUROBINDO Yes, it is the remnant of that

NIRODBARAN During the War of 1914-1918 the revolutionaries were perhaps deceived by British promises

SRI AUROBINDO Oh no, the revolutionaries are not people to be deceived by promises.

NIRODBARAN Gandhi seems to have given much courage and strength to the people. In Bengal we were so afraid of the police I think it was Gandhi who imparted strength there

SRI AUROBINDO Did Bengal need it?

NIRODBARAN What do you think of C R. Das?

SRI AUROBINDO He was the last of the old group He came here and wanted to be a disciple I said he wouldn't be able to go through in Yoga as long as he was in the political movement Besides, his health was shattered I restored it to a certain extent but there was a relapse when he went back You know he became Anukul Thakur's disciple

4 December 1938

(To be continued)

(Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol I, pp 34-36)

EVENFALL

THE cloudless sky has burnished all the hours
Across the hours the figured Afternoon
Has passed, and in her wake the sultry flowers
Of nenuphars have drowsed on the lagoon.

Day's clamorous tide has ebbed far out along
The golden shining sands of western sky,
Moments of quiet are threaded on a song—
Softer than thustledown the sylphs go by.

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment. Very beautiful—both in expression and suggestion.

SRI AUROBINDO'S RENDERINGS OF SOME OF THE VEDIC RIKS

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

स जातेभिर्वृत्रहा सेदु हव्यैरुदुस्रिया असृजदिन्द्रो अर्केः ।
उरुच्यस्मै घृतवद् भरन्ती मधु स्वाद्य दुदुहे जेन्या गौः ॥

(Rigveda, 3 31 11)

Indra, the Vritra-slayer, by those who were born (the sons of the sacrifice), by the offerings, by the hymns of illumination released upward the shining ones; the wide and delightful Cow (the cow Aditi, the vast and blissful higher consciousness) bringing for him the sweet food, the honey mixed with the *ghrta*, yielded it as her milk. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p 209)

पित्रे चिच्छक्रुः सदनं समस्मै महि त्विषीमत् सुकृतो वि हि ख्यन् ।
विष्कम्भन्तः स्कम्भनेना जनित्री आसीना ऊर्ध्वं रभसं वि मिवन् ॥

(Rigveda, 3 31 12)

For this Father also (for Heaven) they fashioned the vast and shining abode, doers of perfect works, they had the entire vision of it Wide-upholding by their support the Parents (Heaven and Earth) they sat in that high world and embraced all its ecstasy. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 209)

मही यदि धिषणा शिश्रथे धात् सद्योवृधं विभ्व रोदस्यो ।
गिरो यस्मिन्ननवद्याः समीचीर्विश्वा इन्द्राय तविषीरनुत्ताः ॥

(Rigveda, 3. 31.13)

When for the cleaving away (of evil and falsehood) the vast Thought holds him immediately increasing in his pervasion of earth and heaven,—then for Indra in whom are the equal and faultless words, there are all irresistible energies (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 209)

महि क्षेत्रं पुरुश्चन्द्रं विविद्वानादित् सखिभ्यश्चरथं समैरत् ।
इन्द्रो नृभिरजनद् दीद्यान् साक सूर्यमुषस गातुमग्निम् ॥

(Rigveda, 3 31 15)

He has found the great, manifold and blissful Field (the wide field of the cows, Swar), and he has sent forth together all the moving herd for his friends Indra shining out by the human souls (the Angirases) has brought into being, together, the Sun, the Dawn, the Path and the Flame. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p 209)

मिहः पावकाः प्रतता अभूवन् त्वस्ति नः पिपृहि पारमासाम् ।
इन्द्र त्व रथिरः पाहि नो रिषो मक्ष्मक्षू कृणुहि गोजितो न ॥

(Rigveda, 3 31 20)

The purifying rains are extended before us (in the shape of the waters), take us over to the state of bliss that is the other shore of them Warring in thy chariot protect us from the foe, soon, soon make us conquerors of the Cows (SABCL, Vol 10, p 209)

अदेदिष्ट वृत्रहा गोपतिर्गा अन्तः कृष्णो अरुषैर्धामभिर्गात् ।
प्र सूनता दिशमान ऋतेन दुरश्च विश्वा अवृणोदप स्वा ॥

(Rigveda, 3 31.21)

The Vritra-slayer, the Master of the Cows, showed (to men) the cows, he has entered with his shining laws (or lustres) within those who are black (void of light, like the Panis), showing the truths (the cows of truth) by the Truth he has opened all his own doors (SABCL, Vol 10, p 209)

अपो यदद्रि पुरुहूत दर्दराविर्भुवत् सरमा पूर्व्य ते ।
स नो नेता वाजमा दर्षि भूरि गोत्रा रुजन्नङ्गिरोभिर्गृणान ॥

(Rigveda, 4. 16 8)

When thou didst tear the waters out of the hill, Sarama became manifest before thee, so do thou as our leader tear out much wealth for us, breaking the pens, hymned by the Angirasas (SABCL, Vol 10, p 210)

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Sampadananda Mishra)

A SAPPHIRE TALE

ONCE upon a time, far away in the East, there was a small country that lived in order and harmony, where each one in his own place played the part for which he was made, for the greatest good of all

Farmers, craftsmen, workmen and merchants—all had but one ambition, one concern to do their work as best they could. This was in their own interest, firstly because, since each one had freely chosen his occupation, it suited his nature and gave him pleasure, and also because they knew that all good work was fairly rewarded, so that they, their wives and their children could lead a quiet and peaceful life, without useless luxury, but with a generous provision for their needs, which was enough to satisfy them

The artists and scientists, few in number but each devoted to his science or art—his purpose in life—were supported by the grateful nation, which was the first to benefit from their useful discoveries and to enjoy their ennobling works. Thus sheltered from the cares of the struggle for life, these scientists had a single aim that their experimental research, their sincere and earnest studies should serve to allay the sufferings of humanity, to increase its strength and well-being by making superstition and fear draw back as far as possible before the knowledge that brings solace and enlightenment. The artists, whose whole will was free to concentrate upon their art had only one desire, to manifest beauty, each according to his own highest conception

Among them, as friends and guides, were four philosophers, whose entire life was spent in profound study and luminous contemplations, to widen constantly the field of human knowledge and one by one to lift the veils from what is still a mystery

All were content, for they knew no bitter rivalries and could each devote himself to the occupation or the study that pleased him. Since they were happy they had no need for many laws, and their Code was only this—a very simple counsel to all, ‘‘Be yourself’’, and for all a single law to be strictly observed, the law of Charity, whose highest part is Justice, the charity which will permit no wastage and which will hinder no one in his free evolution. In this way, very naturally, everyone works at once for himself and for the collectivity.

This orderly and harmonious country was ruled by a king who was king simply because he was the most intelligent and wise, because he alone was capable of fulfilling the needs of all, he alone was both enlightened enough to follow and even to guide the philosophers in their loftiest speculations, and practical enough to watch over the organisation and well-being of his people, whose needs were well known to him

At the time when our narrative begins, this remarkable ruler had reached a great age—he was more than two hundred years old—and although he still retained all his lucidity and was still full of energy and vigour, he was beginning to think of retirement, a little weary of the heavy responsibilities which he had borne for so many

years. He called his young son Meotha to him. The prince was a young man of many and varied accomplishments. He was more handsome than men usually are, his charity was of such perfect equity that it achieved justice, his intelligence shone like a sun and his wisdom was beyond compare; for he had spent part of his youth among workmen and craftsmen to learn by personal experience the needs and requirements of their life and he had spent the rest of his time alone, or with one of the philosophers as his tutor, in seclusion in the square tower of the palace, in study or contemplative repose.

Meotha bowed respectfully before his father, who seated him at his side and spoke to him in these words:

“My son, I have ruled this country for more than a hundred and seventy years and although, to this day, all men of goodwill have seemed content with my guidance, I fear that my great age will soon no longer allow me to bear so lightly the heavy responsibility of maintaining order and watching over the well-being of all. My son, you are my hope and my joy. Nature has been very generous to you; she has showered you with her gifts and by a wise and model education you have developed them most satisfactorily. The whole nation, from the humblest peasant to our great philosophers, has a complete and affectionate trust in you; you have been able to win their affection by your kindness and their respect by your justice. It is therefore quite natural that their choice should fall on you when I ask for leave to enjoy a well-earned repose. But as you know, according to age-old custom, no one may ascend the throne who is not brune, that is, unless he is united by the bonds of integral affinity with the one who can bring him the peace of equilibrium by a perfect match of tastes and abilities. It was to remind you of this custom that I called you here, and to ask you whether you have met the young woman who is both worthy and willing to unite her life with yours, according to our wish.”

“It would be a joy to me, my father, to be able to tell you, ‘I have found the one whom my whole being awaits’, but, alas, this is yet to be. The most refined maidens in the kingdom are all known to me, and for several of them I feel a sincere liking and a genuine admiration, but not one of them has awakened in me the love which can be the only rightful bond, and I think I can say without being mistaken that in return, none of them has conceived a love for me. Since you are so kind as to value my judgment, I will tell you what is in my mind. It seems to me that I should be better fitted to rule our little nation if I were acquainted with the laws and customs of other countries; I wish therefore to travel the world for a year, to observe and to learn. I ask you, my father, to allow me to make this journey, and who knows?—I may return with my life’s companion, the one for whom I can be all happiness and all protection.”

“Your wish is wise, my son. Go—and your father’s blessing be with you.”

Amid the western ocean lies a little island valued for its forests

One radiant summer's day, a young girl is walking slowly in the shade of the wonderful trees. Her name is Liane and she is fair among women, her lithe body sways gracefully beneath light garments, her face, whose delicate skin seems paler for her carmine lips, is crowned with a heavy coil of hair so golden that it shines, and her eyes, like two deep doors opening on limitless blue, light up her features with their intellectual radiance.

Liane is an orphan, alone in life, but her great beauty and rare intelligence have attracted much passionate desire and sincere love. But in a dream she has seen a man, a man who seems, from his garments, to come from a distant land, and the sweet and serious gaze of the stranger has won the heart of the girl—now she can love no other. Since then she has been waiting and hoping, it is to be free to dream of the handsome face seen in the night that she is walking amid the solitude of the lofty woods.

The dazzling sunlight cannot pierce the thick foliage; the silence is hardly broken by the light rustle of the moss beneath the footsteps of the walking girl, all sleeps in the heavy drowse of the noonday heat, and yet she feels a vague unease, as if invisible beings were hiding in the thickets, watchful eyes peeping from behind trees.

Suddenly a bird's song rings out clear and joyful, all uneasiness vanishes. Liane knows that the forest is friendly—if there are beings in the trees, they cannot wish her harm. She is seized by an emotion of great sweetness, all appears beautiful and good to her, and tears come to her eyes. Never has her hope been so ardent at the thought of the beloved stranger, it seems to her that the trees quivering in the breeze, the moss rustling beneath her feet, the bird renewing its melody—all speak to her of the One whom she awaits. At the idea that perhaps she is going to meet him she stops short, trembling, pressing her hands against her beating heart, her eyes closed to savour to the full the exquisite emotion; and now the sensation grows more and more intense until it is so precise that Liane opens her eyes, sure of a presence. Oh, wonder of wonders! He is there, he, he in truth as she has seen him in her dream more handsome than men usually are.—It was Meotha.

With a look they have recognised each other, with a look they have told each other of the long waiting and the supreme joy of rediscovery; for they have known each other in a distant past, now they are sure of it.

She places her hand in the hand he offers her, and together, silent in a silence filled with thoughts exchanged, they wend their way through the forest. Before them appears the sea, calm and green beneath a happy sun. A great ship sways gently near the shore.

Meekly, trustingly, Liane follows Meotha into the boat which awaits them, drawn up on the sand. Two strong oarsmen put it to sea and soon bring them alongside the vessel.

Only as she sees the little island disappearing below the horizon does the girl say to her companion.

“I was waiting for you, and now that you have come, I have followed you

without question. We are made for each other I feel it, I know it, and I know also that now and forever you will be my happiness and my protection But I loved my island birthplace with its beautiful forests, and I would like to know to what shore you are taking me ”

“I have sought you throughout the world, and now that I have found you, I have taken your hand without asking you anything, for in your eyes I saw that you expected me From this moment and forever, my beloved shall be all to me, and if I have made her leave her little wooded isle, it is to lead her as a queen to her kingdom, the only land on earth that is in harmony, the only nation that is worthy of Her ”

October 1906

THE MOTHER

(Words of Long Ago, CWM, Vol 2, pp 7-11)

TWO LETTERS

OVER the years a lasting link has been established between your heart and mine Whenever I think of you I feel soft music passing from one to the other And it is a music which reminds me of Browning's Abt Volger extemporizing on an instrument of his own invention and feeling "the finger of God" making it possible for man

That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star

Yes, there is a star dancing upon our harmony, for there is the constant sense of the Divine Mother shining through the obscurity of our lives

While I am about Browning I am tempted to quote some other lines One passage is very appropriate to my octogenarian situation, though its tone of invitation to you may sound odd since a woman on every birthday of hers is said to celebrate only a certain anniversary of her 25th birthday! Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra" begins.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made
Our times are in His hand
Who saith 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God, see all, nor be afraid'

Another bit from Browning which strikes me as relevant is a reference to the spell which poetry can cast, for this octogenarian letter-writer is also not quite inapt at versification A poem of Browning's revolves round the historical fact that when the Athenians sacked Syracuse they offered to spare whoever could recite lines from the poet-dramatist Euripides,

For Greeks are Greeks and hearts are hearts
And poetry is power

The power of poetry on a small scale came home to me once in the lifetime of my mamma The words "came home" are literally true because the power was felt at my own place Mamma used to be very fond of the stories in the *Shahnama*, especially those concerning the hero Rustam and his family Now at one time mamma became rather anaemic and our doctor prescribed the tonic HORMOHEMINA Somehow mamma took a dislike to its taste and avoided taking it Then I had a brain-wave I told her, "Surely you respect our great poet Firdausi, don't you?" "Of course," she replied. I then said. "Mamma, do you know what he has said in the *Shahnama* about your hero and his wife Tehmina? I'll translate the Persian for you Listen

It was the custom
Of Rustom

To give Tehmina
Hormohemina

Mamma was so charmed that she at once accepted the tonic
With my love to all of you,

Yours affectionately and gratefully

15 2 90

*

My eyes were twinkling at the sight of your card and letter—with both surprise and gladness I have never forgotten you, but I did not imagine you would remember me enough to send Christmas and New Year greetings Thank you for the warmth conveyed

I am so sorry you had a difficult time last year with your right kidney I believe kidney operations are rather painful afterwards But it's good that you have got rid of the obstruction which had caused a breakdown I hope there won't be a repetition of the trouble with the left kidney.

My work is going on Luckily it does not call for much physical movement Otherwise there would be a lot of difficulty For my legs have become weaker and weaker during the last ten years and I can't move at home without a "Walker" and when I go out I have to depend on my "Canadian Canes" as the smart form of the good old crutches is labelled

It is quite different from the days when I used to be in "Eden" (short for "Editor's Den") where I first met you and even from the time you used to come to my first-floor flat. But the mental activity is no whit less and the inner life is progressing harmoniously. But I am a little impatient I am now 85 years old and I want to pack into whatever time remains as much as possible of discovering the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in luminous depths and radiant heights—and even more importantly to have the feel of their Presence in the run of the down-to-earth moments of daily outward life. It is indeed these moments that are of paramount significance in the integral Yoga of Divine Manifestation How much we remember Sri Aurobindo in these moments and how much we offer them to the Mother so that she may weave them into her grand design of a new world of inspired action and revelatory creation through her humbly dedicated children—this seems to me the central motif of their mission and work

Wilfried and I have frequent exchanges He has been a very fine and helpful friend

With best wishes for your health which is necessary to render possible to the full your consecrated soul's self-expression,

I remain, with a lot of love,

21 1.90

AMAL KIRAN (K D SETHNA)

THE BALLAD OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

SAVITRI'S first care was to tell
Her mother all her feelings new,
The queen her own fears to dispel
To the king's private chamber flew.
"Now what is it, my gentle queen,
That makes thee hurry in this wise?"
She told him, smiles and tears between,
All she had heard, the king with sighs
Sadly replied — "I fear me much!
Whence is his race and what his creed?
Not knowing aught, can we in such
A matter delicate, proceed?"

As if the king's doubts to allay,
Came Narad Muni to the place
A few days after Old and gray,
All loved to see the gossip's face,
Great Brahma's son,—adored of men,
Long absent, doubly welcome he
Unto the monarch, hoping then
By his assistance, clear to see
No god in heaven, nor king on earth,
But Narad knew his history,—
The sun's, the moon's, the planet's birth
Was not to him a mystery

"Now welcome, welcome, dear old friend,
All hail, and welcome once again!"
The greeting had not reached its end,
When glided like a music-strain
Savitri's presence through the room —
"And who is this bright creature, say,
Whose radiance lights the chamber's gloom—
Is she an Apsara or fay?"
"No son thy servant hath, alas!
This is my one,—my only child,"—
"And married?"—"No"—"The seasons pass,
Make haste, O king,"—he said, and smiled

"That is the very theme, O sage,
 In which thy wisdom ripe I need,
 Seen hath she at the hermitage
 A youth to whom in very deed
 Her heart inclines"—"And who is he?"
 "My daughter, tell his name and race,
 Speak as to men who best love thee"
 She turned to them her modest face,
 And answered quietly and clear—
 "Ah, no! ah, no!—It cannot be—
 Choose out another husband, dear,"—
 The Muni cried,—"or woe is me!"

"And why should I? When I have given
 My heart away, though but in thought,
 Can I take back? Forbid it, Heaven!
 It were a deadly sin, I wot
 And why should I? I know no crime
 In him or his"—"Believe me, child,
 My reasons shall be clear in time,
 I speak not like a madman wild,
 Trust me in this"—"I cannot break
 A plighted faith,—I cannot bear
 A wounded conscience."—"Oh, forsake
 This fancy, hence may spring despair."—

"It may not be."—The father heard
 By turns the speakers, and in doubt
 Thus interposed a gentle word,—
 "Friend should to friend his mind speak out,
 Is he not worthy? tell us"—"Nay,
 All worthiness is in Satyavan,
 And no one can my praise gainsay
 Of solar race—more god than man!
 Great Soorasen, his ancestor,
 And Dyoumatsen his father blind
 Are known to fame I can aver
 No kings have been so good and kind"

"Then where, O Muni, is the bar?
 If wealth be gone, and kingdom lost,

His merit still remains a star,
 Nor melts his lineage like the frost
 For riches, worldly power, or rank
 I care not,—I would have my son
 Pure, wise, and brave—the Fates I thank,
 I see no hindrance, no, not one ”
 “Since thou insistest, King, to hear
 The fatal truth,—I tell you,—I,
 Upon this day as rounds the year
 The young Prince Satyavan shall die.”

This was enough The monarch knew
 The future was no sealèd book
 To Brahma’s son A clammy dew
 Spread on his brow,—he gently took
 Savitri’s palm in his, and said.
 “No child can give away her hand,
 A pledge is nought unsanctionèd;
 And here, if right I understand,
 There was no pledge at all,—a thought,
 A shadow,—barely crossed the mind—
 Unblamed, it may be clean forgot,
 Before the gods it cannot bind.

“And think upon the dreadful curse
 Of widowhood, the vigils, fasts,
 And penances, no life is worse
 Than hopeless life,—the while it lasts.
 Day follows day in one long round,
 Monotonous and blank and drear,
 Less painful were it to be bound
 On some bleak rock, for aye to hear—
 Without one chance of getting free—
 The ocean’s melancholy voice!
 Mine be the sin,—if sin there be,
 But thou must make a different choice.”

In the meek grace of virginhood
 Unblanched her cheek, undimmed her eye,
 Savitri, like a statue, stood,
 Somewhat austere was her reply

"Once, and once only, all submit
 To Destiny,—'tis God's command;
 Once, and once only, so 'tis writ,
 Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
 Once, and once only, can a sire
 Unto his well-loved daughter say,
 In presence of the witness fire,
 I give thee to this man away.

Once, and once only, have I given
 My heart and faith—'tis past recall,
 With conscience none have ever striven,
 And none may strive, without a fall
 Not the less solemn was my vow
 Because unheard, and oh! the sin
 Will not be less, if I should now
 Deny the feeling felt within.
 Unwedded to my dying day
 I must, my father dear, remain,
 'Tis well, if so thou will'st, but say
 Can man balk Fate, or break its chain?

If Fate so rules, that I should feel
 The miseries of a widow's life,
 Can man's device the doom repeal?
 Unequal seems to be a strife,
 Between Humanity and Fate,
 None have on earth what they desire;
 Death comes to all or soon or late,
 And peace is but a wandering fire;
 Expediency leads wild astray,
 The Right must be our guiding star,
 Duty our watchword, come what may,
 Judge for me, friends,—as wiser far."

She said, and meekly looked to both
 The father, though he patient heard,
 To give the sanction still seemed loth,
 But Narad Muni took the word
 "Bless thee, my child! 'Tis not for us
 To question the Almighty will,
 Though cloud on cloud loom ominous,

In gentle rain they may distil.”
 At this, the monarch—“Be it so!
 I sanction what my friend approves,
 All praise to Him, whom praise we owe,
 My child shall wed the youth she loves ”

(To be continued)

TORU DUTT

THE HIDDEN SPRINGS OF POETRY

DEEP within the soul there lie
 The hidden springs of poetry
 Whose source abides in realms unseen
 And planes infallible and free

With a silent mind we wait
 The word that shall regenerate,
 The song scarce heard yet inly known
 The force that in us shall create

The perfect hymn, the peerless line,
 The mantra that is Godhead's sign
 To gain this Grace no time is long
 For to its light our days incline,

Our aspiration's fires burn
 To briefly in that air sojourn.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

The Vision and the Boon

7

AMONG the various symbols of the Inconscient in *Savitri*, each representing a particular mode of resistance to the workings of a divine Force in the material world, the one that recurs constantly and seems to correspond to the most fundamental aspect of the “great Negation”¹ is Night

This is one of the symbols connecting *Savitri* with the ancient Vedic mysticism. Sri Aurobindo distinguished at least two senses of Night in the Veda, both relevant to *Savitri*. One is “the night of our human ignorance”,² whose alternation with illumined states in the unfolding of spiritual experience made the Rishis speak of Night as the sister of Dawn. But they also recognised a deeper, more primeval darkness. As Sri Aurobindo explained, alluding to the Hymn of Creation (Rig Veda X 129):

Utter Night out of which the worlds arise is the symbol of the Inconscient. That is the inconscient Ocean, that the darkness concealed within darkness out of which the One is born by the greatness of His energy.³

This inconscient Night, whose persistence as a substratum of our existence can be perceived as the major obstacle to a spiritual transformation, came to occupy an increasingly prominent place in *Savitri* as the poem grew and encompassed heights and depths beyond its original scope.

Darkness is the absence of light, and light is the natural symbol of consciousness. So, from a psychological or spiritual point of view, night should represent unconsciousness of some kind. But we have seen that other symbols of the Inconscient also occur in *Savitri*. If the Dragon guards the law of the Inconscient and the Sphinx represents its power to obscure the Truth, what is the related but distinct significance of Night?

The *Record of Yoga* gives a clue. We have already noted the close connection of the entry of 27 January 1927 with the sentence in Book Three, Canto Four of *Savitri* where the Dragon, Sphinx, Night and somnambulist Force are mentioned. One of these “Four Matter Powers”, as Sri Aurobindo calls them in another *Record* entry,⁴ is described as “the Night of the eternal negation”.⁵ In a sentence where the four obstacles are listed without the symbolism, another phrase adds more precision to the definition of what Night represented to Sri Aurobindo in the experience recorded in his diary and in *Savitri*. The phrase is “obstruction and conservatism of the material negation”.⁶ This will help us arrive at a more exact conception of what Sri Aurobindo

meant by the lines in *Savitri* that speak of Night as stretched across the path of the movement towards a divine fulfilment in this world

The expression “Night of the eternal negation” brings to mind “Non-Being’s night”, which is said in *Savitri* to have arisen in the beginning of things,

In the enigma of the darkened Vasts,
In the passion and self-loss of the Infinite
When all was plunged in the negating Void ⁷

Philosophically, Sri Aurobindo explains in *The Life Divine* that this apparent “self-loss” was possible because of “the Infinite’s power of plunging the consciousness into a trance of self-involution”

In the heights of Spirit this state of cosmic or infinite trance-sleep appears to our cognition as a luminous uttermost Superconscience at the other end of being it offers itself to cognition as the Spirit’s potency of presenting to itself the opposites of its own truths of being,—an abyss of non-existence, a profound Night of inconscience, a fathomless swoon of insensibility from which yet all forms of being, consciousness and delight of existence can manifest themselves ⁸

Here the “Night of inconscience” is the negation of Chit, the middle term of Sachchidananda. But the entire self-involution of the Infinite is essentially a phenomenon of consciousness. Therefore it is natural to speak of its total result at the lower end of being as “Inconscience” or “the Inconscient”, the opposite of Superconscience, and to symbolise this by Night. Night would then include the negations of all the aspects of the Spirit.

Since non-existence is the primary negation from which the rest follow, Night becomes in effect the symbol of Non-Being or the Void, sometimes called the Abyss, and is often associated or even identified with Death. This interpretation of Night is put forward in a passage in *The Secret of the Veda*.

This non-existence of the truth of things, *asat*, is the first aspect of them that emerges from the inconscient ocean, and its great darkness is the Vedic Night, *rātrīm jagato nivesānīm* (I.35 1), which holds the world and all its unrevealed potentialities in her obscure bosom ⁹

In *Savitri*, the negating Night is presented as a fact of experience. Unlike the Dragon and the Sphinx, this symbol was there from the beginning and was implied in the very structure of the poem. Though all its significance did not emerge at once, the depiction of Night as the realm of Death was one of the most vivid features of the early versions. When Sri Aurobindo divided the poem into six cantos after his first

few drafts, "Night" was the title of the fourth canto. Even before this, in the first draft itself, Death appeared to Savitri's eyes as a visible form of night

Then her eyes rose. A mighty figure dim
 Before her stood, majestic, sombre, grand,
 Robed in tremendous deity. The Form
 Bore the deep pity of destroying gods
 In its appalling eyes. Abysmal night
 Seemed realised compelling all that lives
 Into its fathomless heart, and round its brows
 Reign'd silence and below its feet lay life

After passing through the "twilit vestibules of a tenebrous world", Savitri had the sense of being swallowed up by night. This was graphically evoked even in the earliest manuscript

Then growing night
 Cavernous, hollow, dense, and yet in substance
 Unreal, devoured them like a lion's throat,—
 The spiritual agony of a dream

A little further on in the same version, Death speaks

"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"

These lines in the first draft, all written on 17-18 October 1916, formed the starting-point of the treatment of Night in its more radical sense in *Savitri*. They point towards the vision of a "negative infinity"¹⁰ which, as the poem evolved, was to be presented in terms revealing a more and more profound experience as Sri Aurobindo probed deeper and deeper layers of the "darkness concealed within darkness" that lies below our normal awareness.

Sri Aurobindo's descent into these nether regions would perhaps be still more difficult to map and chronicle than his ascent through the planes between mind and supermind. His early descriptions of them in *Savitri* relate to Savitri's passage into the realm of Death. These remind us, not so much of anything else Sri Aurobindo himself has written, as of a talk by the Mother in which she spoke of consciously entering the domain of death and returning. The "living night", which Savitri was said to be the first to have passed through without losing the ability to come back to the body, may be compared with what the Mother has said about this "domain of death".

The Mother dwelt on the extreme difficulty of the occult processes involved in such an excursion into fields normally forbidden to human experience. Yet apart from the important gain of overcoming all fear of death, this rare achievement does not seem, by itself, to lead very far from the point of view of the Yoga of transformation.

Asked to define the "domain of death", the Mother replied that generally it "is the name given to a certain region of the most material vital into which one is projected at the moment one leaves one's body"¹¹ This may be what Sri Aurobindo was depicting in his early accounts of Savitri's entry into the other world. But if the meaning of Night had been confined to this, the most gripping narration of occult experiences might have left the poem somewhat limited in significance.

Even in the first draft, however, lines such as those on Death as a visible form of "abysmal night" resonate with a sense of something deeper. Within a year or two the passage on Night, which by then had become "Canto IV", contained a number of lines that referred to the void, bringing out the idea of a cosmic night of primeval nothingness. The word "night" itself was replaced by "void" in the second and third passages from the first draft quoted above. The lines on the lion's throat became in this version:

Then gathering its strength
And hunger all the huge and pitiless void
Surrounding slowly with its soundless depths,
Cavernous, monstrous, in a strangling mass,
Devoured her like a shadowy lion's throat,
The fierce spiritual agony of a dream.

When Sri Aurobindo revised this sentence by dictation around 1946, he added a line at the beginning and replaced the image of the lion by the word "shapeless". The final version reads

A mystery of terror's boundlessness,
Gathering its hungry strength the huge pitiless void
Surrounded slowly with its soundless depths,
And monstrous, cavernous, a shapeless throat
Devoured her into its shadowy strangling mass,
The fierce spiritual agony of a dream.¹²

Sri Aurobindo's revision accentuated the nightmarish character of this experience, but did not essentially alter it from the way he had first described it. In the early 1940s, he introduced a strikingly similar passage into Aswapati's descent into Night. There Aswapati finds himself gripped and strangled by a "dense and nameless Nothing", as if "in a shapeless beast's intangible jaws". His being disappears from its own vision into a "swallowing throat and a huge belly of doom"¹³

In the case of Aswapati as well as Savitri, it is only after passing through this

agonising ordeal that “the hidden heart of Night”¹⁴ is seen. In Book Nine, the passages that reveal most clearly Sri Aurobindo’s vision of “the Night of the eternal negation” are, not surprisingly, those he dictated in the 1940s. But the version of “Canto IV. Night” taken as the starting-point for the final revision already contained lines conveying the sense of a beginningless and endless void that existed before mind, life or even matter emerged, a nothingness from which all came and into which all tends to collapse.

The speech of Death that has been quoted above from the first draft was expanded in the next few versions until it filled most of two pages in the manuscript of “Canto IV” which Sri Aurobindo revised by dictation almost thirty years later. At this stage, the first four lines of the speech needed no further revision. The “living night” of the earliest draft had become the “unborn void”, portrayed by Death as resentful of all life and thought:

“Although thou hast survived the unborn void
Which never shall forgive, while Time endures,
The primal violence that fashioned thought
Forcing the immobile vast to suffer and live

Before these lines a short speech had been inserted, to which Savitri made no reply. This contains Death’s first words after their entry into his realm. In the manuscript of “Canto IV”, it consisted of only three lines:

“Hast thou beheld thy source, O transient heart?
Knowing from what the dream thou art was made,
Still dost thou always hope to last and love?”

In the 1940s, Sri Aurobindo added at the beginning of this speech a sentence in which Death welcomes Savitri to his home of eternal Night and Nothingness:

“This is my silent dark immensity,
This is the home of everlasting Night,
This is the secrecy of Nothingness
Entombing the vanity of life’s desires

A line was also inserted before the end of the speech. Here Death, the advocate of non-being, contrasts the “sincerity” of the void with the pretensions and frivolous agitation of the living:

Hast thou beheld thy source, O transient heart,
And known from what the dream thou art was made?
In this stark sincerity of nude emptiness
Honest thou still always to last and love?”¹⁵

Some of the lines in *Savitri* that express most forcefully the occult Night's power of negation were dictated in the 1940s when Sri Aurobindo revised what are now the first few pages of Book Nine, Canto Two, preceding the dialogue. To begin with, at the point where Savitri advances her foot towards the darkness, the early version had the following line

The woman first towards the shadow moved

In other words, of the three figures present in the scene (Savitri, Death and Satyavan), it was Savitri who initiated the movement, although she was behind the others. This was no doubt symbolic. But Sri Aurobindo revised the line and expanded it into a far more significant statement suggesting the unique, unprecedented mission of the incarnation of the Divine Shakti represented by Savitri.

The Woman first affronted the Abyss
Daring to journey through the eternal Night ¹⁶

On the next page, Sri Aurobindo dictated two new sentences after the "shapeless throat". The first of these identifies Night with Nought and invests it with an overwhelmingly tangible unreality

In the smothering stress of this stupendous Nought
Mind could not think, breath could not breathe, the soul
Could not remember or feel itself, it seemed
A hollow gulf of sterile emptiness,
A zero oblivious of the sum it closed,
An abnegation of the Maker's joy
Saved by no wide repose, no depth of peace ¹⁷

The absence of any saving "depth of peace" is one difference between this smothering Nought and the liberating Nought at the opposite end of being. We read of the latter in "Nirvana and the Discovery of the All-Negating Absolute" (Book Seven, Canto Six, not yet written when Sri Aurobindo dictated most of his revision of Book Nine)

The One only real shut itself from Space
And stood aloof from the idea of Time .
It faced her as some vast Nought's immensity,
An endless No to all that seems to be,
An endless Yes to things ever unconceived
And all that is unimagined and unthought,
An eternal zero or untotaled Aught ..¹⁸

The dictated insertion in Book Nine continues, summing up the negating aspect of Night in a “No” not compensated by any “Yes”.

On all that claims here to be Truth and God
 And conscious self and the revealing Word
 And the creative rapture of the Mind
 And Love and Knowledge and heart's delight, there fell
 The immense refusal of the eternal No ¹⁹

The response of Night to a living being's intrusion into her domain, described in lines likewise dictated by Sri Aurobindo around 1946, suggests that the source of her power is a mighty original negation, a Non-Existence that seems absolute because it is the shadow of the absolute Existence.

Night felt assailed her heavy sombre reign,
 The splendour of some bright eternity
 Threatened with this faint beam of wandering Truth
 Her empire of the everlasting Nought.. .
 Aware of an all-negating immensity
 She reared her giant head of Nothingness,
 Her mouth of darkness swallowing all that is,
 She saw in herself the tenebrous Absolute ²⁰

(To be continued)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

- 1 *Savitri* (1993), p 600
- 2 *The Secret of the Veda* (1998), p 481 The phrase occurs in “The Divine Dawn”, a chapter of “The Guardians of the Light” which was first published in the *Arya* in September 1916 Some features of the Vedic imagery of Night and Dawn to which Sri Aurobindo alludes in this chapter are found in the first draft of the opening of *Savitri*, written in the previous month
- 3 *Ibid*
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, December 1994, p 151
- 5 *Ibid*, p 150 6 *Ibid*, p 149 7 *Savitri*, p 140
- 8 *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol 18, pp 318-19
- 9 *The Secret of the Veda*, p 233
- 10 *Savitri*, p 454
- 11 *Questions and Answers 1954*, CWM, Vol 6, p 55
- 12 *Savitri*, p 583 13 *Ibid*, pp 217-18
- 14 *Ibid*, p 220 15 *Ibid*, p 586
- 16 *Ibid*, p 582 17 *Ibid*, p 583
- 18 *Ibid*, p 547 19 *Ibid*, p 583
- 20 *Ibid*, p 585

OVERMAN—THE TRANSITIONAL BEING BETWEEN MAN AND SUPERMAN

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

Acceleration

“THE movement has much accelerated; the march forward, the stages succeed each other much more rapidly Things change quickly”,⁸⁸ said the Mother on 15 August 1956, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday anniversary The transformative presence of the mighty Supermind made itself felt

On 13 February 1957, the Mother talked about illness and its relation to the physical body The issues that came up in these “questions and answers”, twice a week at night, were always something happening in her own Yoga or in the inner life of the people around her—for all was interconnected, it was one and the same process. The spiritual range of the *Entretiens* went beyond the apparently day-to-day topics commented upon in that Playground not far from the sea It was after all the place where the Mother was physically present when she performed the cosmic act of opening the gates for the Supramental Consciousness so that it could pervade the earth

“There is no illness, there is no [physical] disorder that is able to resist the discovery of this secret [the power of getting rid of the ego] and the putting of it into practice, not only in the higher parts of the being but also in the cells of the body If one knows how to teach the cells the splendour that is within them, if one knows how to make them understand the reality that causes them to exist, that gives them being, then they too enter the total harmony, and the physical disorder causing the illness vanishes, as do all other disorders of the being

“But for that you must be neither cowardly nor fearful When the physical disorder takes hold of you, you must not be afraid You must not run away from it, you must face it with courage, tranquillity, confidence, with the certitude that the illness is a *falsehood* and that if you turn yourself entirely, in full confidence, with a complete tranquillity towards the divine Grace, It will establish itself in the cells as It is established in the depths of the being, and the cells themselves will share in the eternal Truth and Joy.”⁸⁹ Apart from the light this quotation throws on the ever-increasing role of the cells in the Yoga, it also is an indication that the Mother, from that time onwards, began being confronted with the health problems which inevitably accompany the physical transformation and which, to the ordinary eye, are common illnesses or ‘physical disorders’

It certainly was no coincidence that, on 10 April 1957, she began to read to the Playground audience her own French translation of *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. (For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother there was no such thing as a coincidence in the unity of Brahman, all is connected with all) In the following

entretiens, she returns time and again to the capacities of the body and the attitude required for its transformation

On 29 May 1957 the Mother says: "[One] can open oneself to the supramental Force which is now active on earth and enter a zone of transition where the two influences meet and interpenetrate where the consciousness is still mental and intellectual in its way of functioning, but sufficiently permeated by the supramental Power and Force to be able to be the instrument of a higher truth" What she refers to here is unmistakably the Mind of Light

Then she continues, and this sounds like a victory bulletin: "*At present this state can be realised on earth* by those who have prepared themselves to receive the supramental Force that is manifesting. And in this state—in this state of consciousness—the body can benefit from a condition that is much superior to the condition it was in before. It can be put into direct contact with the essential truth of its being to the extent that, *spontaneously*, at every moment, it knows instinctively or intuitively what is to be done and that it can do it. As I say, *this state can now be realised* by all those who take the trouble of preparing themselves to receive the supramental Force, to assimilate it and to obey it.

"Of course, there is a higher state than this, namely the state Sri Aurobindo speaks of as the ideal to be fulfilled: the divine life in a divine body. But he himself tells us that this will take time, it is an integral transformation that cannot be achieved in a moment. It will even take quite a long time. However, it is no longer only a possibility, it is no longer even only a promise for a far-off future. It is something that is being executed. Already one can not only foresee but feel the moment when the body will be able to repeat integrally the experience of the most spiritual part of the being, as the inner spirit has already done, and will itself be able to stand in its bodily consciousness before the supreme Reality, turn towards it integrally and say in all sincerity, in a total self-giving of all its cells: 'To be what Thou art, exclusively, perfectly what Thou art, infinitely, eternally—and very simply.'"⁹⁰

A fortnight later, after having read from Sri Aurobindo's second article from *The Supramental Manifestation* in which he writes about the effects of fasting, she says (and it is remarkable how her tone grows ever more forceful and affirmative): "*The only thing* that is really effective is the change of consciousness, the inner liberation through an intimate, constant union, absolute, inevitable, with the vibration of the supramental forces. The concern of every second, the will of all the elements of the being, the aspiration of the entire being, also of all the cells of the body, is this union with the supramental forces, the divine forces. And there is no longer any need at all to worry about what the consequences will be. What has to be, in the play of the universal forces and their manifestation, will be, quite naturally, spontaneously, automatically, there is no need to worry about that. The only thing that matters is the constant, total, complete contact—constant, yes, constant—with the Force, the Light, the Truth, the Power, and that ineffable joy of the Supramental Consciousness."⁹¹

The Mother's talk of 10 July 1957 stands out among her many talks (six

volumes of *Questions and Answers*) Here she speaks without interruption in an almost hymnal tone about the new world that is born This is not literature in her words vibrate the triumphal accomplishment of the essential aim of the Yoga in which she had been involved since the beginning of the century, and the joyful confirmation of the birth of a new world In the first chapters of this book we have tried to make the importance of the coming and the work of the Avatar clear We have stressed that his/her intervention in the evolution means a decisive, unprecedented turn towards a new, practically indescribable mode of being far beyond the one we are accustomed to into a divine mode. On 29 February 1956, the realisation of this new world was assured because the Consciousness that from that day onwards has been giving it shape touched the earth and did not withdraw In this talk the Mother confirms that event and its effects The talk is worth quoting in full, but we have to restrict ourselves to some extracts

Having read part of the second chapter of *The Supramental Manifestation upon the Earth*, the Mother says: "It is rather difficult to free oneself from the old habits of being in order to be able to conceive freely of a new life, of a new world And, naturally, the liberation begins on the highest planes of consciousness it is easier for the mind or the higher intelligence to conceive of new things than for the vital, for instance, to feel the things in a new way. And it is still more difficult for the body to have a purely material conception of what a new world will be. Yet this perception must *precede* the material transformation, first one must *feel* very concretely the strangeness of the old things, their lack of actuality, if I may say so One must have the feeling, even materially, that they are obsolete, that they belong to a past that has no longer a reason to exist."² Mother repeats here what she wrote in the passage from *Some Experiences of the Body Cells* quoted above: "A remarkable thing about the body consciousness is that it is unable to know a thing with precision and in full detail except when it is on the point of accomplishing it" Besides, if ever there was a time when one felt "very concretely the strangeness of the old things" and "their lack of relevance", if ever one had "the feeling, even a material impression, that they are outdated, that they belong to a past which no longer has any purpose", it is now

In the process of the creation of a new world, the elements of the old world and of the new one exist simultaneously The old world continues to survive up to a certain point and mixes with the first elements of the new world The new world, at the present moment, "is necessarily a *totally* new experience One would have to go back to the time when there was a transition from the animal to the human creation to find a similar period, and at that time the consciousness was not sufficiently mentalised to be able to observe, to understand, to feel intelligently—the transition must have taken place in a wholly obscure way Consequently, what I am speaking about is absolutely new, *unique* in the terrestrial creation, it is something that never had a precedent and that really is a perception, or a sensation, or an impression that is quite strange and new [There is now] a discrepancy [between] something that is over-staying its time and has nothing but quite a subordinate force of existence, and

something totally new, but still so young, so imperceptible, almost weak, one might say it has not yet the power to impose itself, to assert itself, to take the upper hand, to take the place of the other''⁹³

Films were regularly shown in the Ashram Playground. On most occasions the Mother watched them together with the the students and the adult Ashramites. One evening she was watching a Bengali film, *Rani Rasmani*, about the rich widow who built the Kali temple in Dakshineswar for Ramakrishna Paramhansa. This film, unexpectedly, became the occasion of a powerful experience (''For people who believe that some things are important and other things are not, that there are activities which are helpful to the yoga and others which are not, well, this is one more opportunity to prove that they are wrong. I have always noticed that it is the unexpected things that give you the most interesting experiences''⁹⁴)

During the film she suddenly had ''in a *concrete, material* way the impression that it [i.e., the traditional world dominated by the gods] was another world, a world that had ceased to be real, alive, an outdated world that had lost its reality, its truth, that had been exceeded, surpassed by something that had taken birth [the supramental world] and was only beginning to take shape, but whose *life* was *so intense*, so true, so sublime that all this [the old world of the gods] became false, unreal, worthless. Then I understood truly—for I understood not with the head, not with the intellect, but with the body (you understand what I mean?), I understood in the cells of the body—that a new world *is born* and is beginning to grow.''⁹⁵

''...I have announced to you all [after the descent of the Supermind] that this new world was born. But it has been so engulfed, as it were, in the old world that so far the difference has not been very perceptible to many people. Still, the action of the new forces has continued very regularly, very persistently, very steadily, and to a certain extent very effectively. And one of the manifestations of this action was my experience—truly so very new—of yesterday evening. And the result of all this I have noticed step by step in almost daily experiences.

''Firstly, it [the ideal of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother] is more than a 'new concept' of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This concept was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself many a time, and it could be formulated more or less as follows: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world where it was and as it was, our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, it is indeed the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation of the old world as it was with [little more than] an improvement, a widening of it—and so long as it remains only a concept up there, in the realm of thought, it actually is hardly more than that. However, what has happened, what is really new, is that a new world *is born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world that is *born*. And we are now right in the middle of the period of transition in which the two are intermingling—in which the old world still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the

ordinary consciousness, but the new one is slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed—unnoticed in so far that outwardly it does not disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it will be strong enough to assert itself visibly....

“In the supramental creation *there will no longer be any religions*. The whole of life will be the expression, the outflowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call gods

These great divine beings will themselves be able to participate in the new creation; but to do so, they will have to embody in what one could call ‘the supramental substance’ on earth. And if some of them choose to remain in their world as they are, if they decide not to manifest physically, their relation with the beings of a supramental world on earth will be a relation of friends, of collaborators, of equals, for the highest divine essence will be manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on earth

“When the physical substance is supramentalised, to incarnate on earth will no longer be a cause of inferiority, quite the contrary It will give a plenitude which cannot be obtained in any other way

“But all this is in the future It is a future that has *begun*, but that will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without any precedent ever We are now witnessing the birth of a new world that is still very young, very weak—not in its essence, but in its outer manifestation—not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority But it is there. It is there, making an effort to grow, absolutely *sure* of the result But the road towards it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out: nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, *a universal beginning* It is therefore an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.”⁹⁶

Then, she addressed the following unforgettable call to all people whose soul is alive: “There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them: ‘I invite you to the great adventure.’ It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, risks and hazards it entails—a *real adventure* whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced step by step in the unexplored [It is] something that has never been in this present universe and that will *never* be again in the same way. If this interests you. come, embark What will happen to you tomorrow, I have no idea You must leave behind all that has been foreseen, all that has been planned, all that has been built, and set out into the unknown—come what may! There!”⁹⁷

(*To be continued*)

References

- 88 The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1956*, p 263
 89 The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, p 42
 90 *Ibid*, pp 110-111 (first and third emphases added)
 91 *Ibid*, pp 118-19 (emphasis in the text)
 92 *Ibid*, p 145 (emphases in the text)
 93 *Ibid*, p 146 (emphases in the text)
 94 *Ibid*
 95 *Ibid*, p 147
 96 *Ibid*, pp 148-50 (emphases in the text)
 97 *Ibid*, pp 150-51 (emphases in the text)

BE PLEASED

You have heard the voice of my heart
 And are aware of its longings and desires.
 The things it cherishes and the way it aspires.
 And its languishing for long in the past.

Sitting still within in a poise You have seen
 My mind's flight on the wings of thought,
 The joys and sorrows that have been its lot
 And the role of a doer in ignorance played by me

O, You have at times touched the strings
 Of the harp of my heart's throbs
 Producing a melody of superb sort
 And abundant grace as if from several springs

Now, be pleased to reveal Yourself again, Dear,
 Once for all to open the orifice of my heart,
 To dissolve this individuality in Your Love, O grant
 I may break the knot that keeps me bound here

M P JAIN

THE ASCENT OF SIGHT IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

Part Two

1. Failure of Thought:

Although the intellectuals are rightly proud of their faculty of rational thinking, "thought" fails miserably as an instrument for the acquisition of true Knowledge and Wisdom, also for the discovery of the deeper truths of existence and life. Hence the call of Sri Aurobindo: "Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight" (276)

Here are a few representative verses from *Savitri* touching the same theme.

(1) "I groped for the Mystery with the lantern, Thought
Its glimmerings lighted with the abstract word
A half-visible ground and travelling yard by yard
It mapped a system of the Self and God
I could not live the truth it spoke and thought." (407)

(2) "But thought nor word can seize eternal Truth.
The whole world lives in a lonely ray of her sun.
In our thinking's close and narrow lamp-lit house
The vanity of our shut mortal mind
Dreams that the chains of thought have made her ours,
But only we play with our own brilliant bonds,
Tying her down, it is ourselves we tie
In our hypnosis by one luminous point
We see not what small figure of her we hold,
We feel not her inspiring boundlessness,
We share not her immortal liberty
Thus is it even with the seer and sage,
For still the human limits the divine
Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight" (276)

2. Failure of Ordinary Human Sight:

Sight is no doubt a far better instrument than the thinker's intellectual thought. But this sight surely cannot be equated with the normal sight of man whether physical or vital or even mental. Our habitual vision suffers from many serious disabilities. For example, it sees the part and misses the whole, its perception is limited to a short interval of time and cannot span the perspective of eternity, it hovers on the surface

and cannot penetrate into the depths of a thing; it is easily satisfied with the form and does not hunt after the essence, etc

Because of all these and similar deficiencies, Sri Aurobindo has used in *Savitri* many not-so-laudatory expressions to designate our customary human sight. Here are some of them: “erring sight”, “fallible gaze”; “scanty fringe of sight”, “ephemeral sight”, “single window’s clipped outlook”, “immediate sight”; “external sight”, “surface sight”, “time-born eyes”; “transient eyes”; “look of surface mind”, “ignorant eyes”, etc.

Here are some verses from *Savitri* pointedly bringing out the inherent penury of ordinary human sight:

- (1) “And the inconstant blink of mortal sight” (343)
- (2) “The future’s road is hid from mortal sight” (425)
- (3) “Absorbed and cabined in external sight” (245)
- (4) “Our eyes are fixed on an external scene ” (52)
- (5) “.. eyes that see a part and miss the whole” (657)
- (6) “ waking mind’s small moment look” (49)
- (7) “He cannot look on the face of the Unknown” (690)
- (8) “Earth’s eyes half-see” (109)
- (9) “Insentient to our eyes that only see
The form, the act and not the imprisoned God” (157)
- (10) “ the shadowy script
In which our sight transcribes the ideal Ray” (265)
- (11) “That look at images and not at Truth” (370)
- (12) “Our mortal vision peers with ignorant eyes,
It has no gaze on the deep heart of things ” (626)
- (13) “But few can look beyond the present state” (52)
- (14) “We cannot free our gaze to reach wisdom’s sun.” (53)
- (15) “Unmarked by the eye that sees effect and cause” (54)
- (16) “... vanishes from the chase of finite eyes” (272)

3. Inner Vision: Its Necessity and Value:

The faculty of subtle sight is a great aid to the aspirant who has the necessary intelligence and clarity of mind and a power of intuitive discrimination. Visions are one key to unlock the doors of the other worlds of cosmic manifestation that lie beyond and behind the physical. Visions can offer the Sadhaka a first contact with the Divine in his forms and powers. Vision is often a first door of entrance into the inner planes of one’s own being and consciousness. Visions can be full of meaningful indications that may help one to acquire greater self-knowledge and knowledge of things or people or events. There are veridical visions that may lead to authentic prophecies and premonitions.

Such being the multiple benefits that supraphysical visions may offer us, Sri Aurobindo recommends us to "look into the depths" and "stare upward measuring the Unknown", to develop our "spiritual gaze" and "plunge our gaze into the siege of mist". Indeed, we should not stop with only one level of visionary sight; we should see to it that our vision "grow within" and we acquire the privilege of "visions of higher realms" and of "supernal Powers"

We give below some illustrative verses from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* indicating the progressive march of the power of vision and the happy results that may come out of it:

- (1) "A progress leap from sight to greater sight" (177)
- (2) "On our road from Matter to eternal Self" (166)
- (3) "Ever his consciousness and vision grew" (31)
- (4) "A sight opened upon the invisible
And sensed the shapes that mortal eyes see not" (540)
- (5) "And called to its mounting vision peaks divine" (87)
- (6) "And vision climbs beyond the reach of Time" (299)
- (7) "His sight surpassed creation's head and base" (300)
- (8) "An eye has opened upon timelessness" (311)
- (9) "A wide power of vision whence all could be seen" (514)
- (10) "A sight opened upon the invisible" (540)
- (11) "He opens that thurd mysterious eye in man,
The Unseen's eye that looks at the unseen" (665)
- (12) "Realm upon realm received her soaring view" (676)
- (13) "The inconscient's seal is lifted from our eyes" (108)
- (14) "Man's eyes could look into the inner realms" (361)

4. Sight: Its Determinative Power:

It is a noteworthy fact that an immediate intuitive consciousness of things often leads to an immediate intuitive control of things. Also, a constantly held vision of what one would like to happen helps the thing to grow into a reality. There is a significant passage on p. 302 of Mother's *Questions and Answers 1953* as regards the action of the Supermind in the world. The Mother says *inter alia*:

" . it is conscious of the difference between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. Every moment it sees the gulf between what is and what should be, between the truth and the falsehood that is expressed. And constantly it keeps this vision of the Truth which broods over the world, so that as soon as there is a little opening, it may descend and manifest itself "

About the controlling and mastering power of sight it is worth quoting here a passage from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* (p. 535).

“All the movements of the surface being can be seen with a direct sight in the consciousness by which the self-delusions and mistakes of self of the outer consciousness can be dispelled, there is a keener mental vision . of our subjective becoming, a vision which at once knows, commands and controls the whole nature ”

Sri Aurobindo has referred in many ways to this controlling and creative power of sight in his Epic *Savitri*. Here are a few illustrative examples: “growing by his gaze”; “determining mandate of their eyes”, “his gaze had power”, “mild gaze ununsistent ruled”; “eyes that rule”, “mastering gaze”, ‘drew from sight spiritual power’; “its gaze controls”, etc Now a few illustrative verses from *Savitri*

- (1) “He regards the icon growing by his gaze ” (23)
- (2) “He mastered the tides of Nature with a look” (219)
- (3) “Infallibly by Truth’s directing gaze
All creatures here their secret self disclose” (272)
- (4) “Its gaze controls the turbulent whirl of things” (571)
- (5) “That mightier spirit turned its mastering gaze” (573)
- (6) “He who now stares at the world with ignorant eyes
Hardly from the Inconscient’s night aroused,
That look at images and not at Truth
Can fill those orbs with an immortal’s sight ” (370)
- (7) “It drew from sight and sound spiritual power” (236)

5. “Originating Sight”: Its Greatness:

According to the Old Testament theology, at the beginning of creation God said, “Let there be Light” and “there was light ” Thus the “original Sound”, *parā vāk*, became the primal agency behind the process of cosmic manifestation The Upanishadic Rishis looked at the issue from a somewhat different angle In their vision, at the very beginning everything remained unmanifest and dormant in the bosom of the absolute immobility of the passive Brahman When the Supreme opened his “closed eyes” (*unmīlana*) and “he saw” (*sa aiksata*), then only the creation or the manifestation began its stupendous journey

And what about the evolutionary movement that is taking place upon our globe? That too has been initiated because of the pressure of the Supreme’s Sight acting upon the deep sleep of the Inconscient base so that it might wake and ‘look around’.

And this was not confined to the commencement alone In fact, the whole course of this evolutionary manifestation is being sustained and guided in its long itinerary by the wisely controlling gaze of Sachchidananda

The following verses from *Savitri* bring out this secret truth behind the processes of creation, manifestation and evolution

(1) Before the manifestation.

“In God’s supreme withdrawn and timeless hush
A seeing Self and potent Energy met” (284)

(2) God’s self-vision.

“The images of its ever-living Truth
Look out from a chamber of its self-wrapt soul.
As if to its own inner witness gaze” (111)

(3) Joint creation by the Ishwara and the Shakti.

“The Master and the Mother of all lives
Watching the worlds their twin regard had made” (525)

Thus the manifestation arose “Imagined by some creative Eye” (547), by “the creative Eye of Eternity” (41)

Now about the evolutionary movement at its different stages

(1) “God’s summits look back on the mute Abyss” (541)

(2) “Because eternal eyes turned on earth’s gulfs
The lucent clarity of a pure regard” (101)

(3) “Attracted by the unfathomable regard
The unsolved slow cycles to their fount returned” (307)

(4) “A Seer within who knows the ordered plan
Inspires our ascent to viewless heights” (101)

(5) “Compelled the forward stride, the upward look” (539)

(6) “A mind began to see and look at forms” (101)

6. Consciousness: Its Quadrirectional Movement:

There are four different types of “looks” possible for the normal waking consciousness of man: a “downlook”, an “inlook”, an “outlook” and an “uplook”. To understand well the real significances of these rather odd terms, we have to remember that what we habitually know ourselves to be is not all we are – it is no more than “a bubble on the ocean of our total field of existence”. At first glance this may come as an assertion altogether unbelievable but still it remains a fact that apart from the very insignificant and restricted part of our waking individual consciousness, we are normally perfectly ignorant of the whole of the rest of our being, “the immense more”, that lies hidden in apparently inaccessible “reaches of being which descend into the profoundest depths of the *subconscious* and rise to highest peaks of *superconscience*, or which surround the little field of our *waking self* with a wide *circumconscient* existence of which our mind and sense catch only a few indications.” (Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp 498-99) (italics author’s)

Now, through the process of the *widening* of our consciousness by yogic sadhana it is possible for us to extend our vision into our *circumconscient* part; by the *deepening* or inwardisation of our consciousness we may very well look into our

intraconscious subliminal range of being, and by the *heightening* of the consciousness we can project our sight into the *superconscious* region. We may also cast our gaze downward to plunge it into the obscure recesses of our *subconscious* part. There is a still more submerged region, the *Inconscious*, which is the dark basis of all earthly manifestation.

The following verses from *Savitri* refer in brief to the surface, the height, the depth and the wideness of our consciousness.

“But knowledge ends not in these surface powers
That live upon a ledge in the Ignorance
And dare not look into the dangerous depths
Or to stare upward measuring the Unknown
There is a deeper seeing from within
And, when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the Spirit’s gaze ” (168)

(*To be continued*)

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

CENSURE

THE doodling idols sit listening
to the grubby words I utter,
they neither winch nor belch,
their eyelids never flutter

They sit partly to be there,
partly to censure wordlessly,
but the blood that never flows
can’t teach them really to be

So they sit there doodling on
in the waiting-room of my brain
listening to my grubby words
for a censurable line

RANAJIT SARKAR

CAN THERE BE AN INDIAN SCIENCE?

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

Profiles of Some Indian Scientists

G VENKATARAMAN in *Saha and his Formula* writes “The period 1920-1930 may truly be hailed as the golden era of physics in India, for during that decade were made four important discoveries namely, the Saha ionisation formula, Bose statistics, the Raman effect and the Chandrashekhar limit” That was physics in its trueness Yet the Indian gold appears to be less bright than the gold that was mainly coming out from Western Europe of the time. Quantum mechanics was discovered, its relativistic formulation brought to our laboratory the world of anti-matter, the wave-particle duality deepened into microscopic domain of matter, causality started getting challenged if not replaced, the universe began to expand and our origins in the Big Bang made their hesitant appearance In this rush of epoch-making contributions India participated if at all only in a distant way and could hardly give any sense of new direction to the developments Yet in the socio-political backdrop of the time whatever was done had its own significance The spirit of renaissance could be discerned in several walks of life. We may look at it by acquainting ourselves, in howsoever a cursory manner it be, with some of the pioneers of science The intuitive mind of Bengal and the solid classical mind of the South were the main contributors initiating a new activity in the country Let us present some of them here.

Meghnad Saha was born on 6 October 1893 not in a very rich family and his early education was not without financial difficulties. In 1911 he joined the Presidency College in Calcutta to do his B Sc in physics Satyendranath Bose was his classmate and, if Mahalanobis was one year senior to him, Netaji Bose was junior by a year While in college Saha came in contact with Bhaga Jatin, but he did not get much involved with the revolutionary activities He had family responsibilities to fulfil. With the encouragement received from Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, Saha and also Satyendranath Bose, became lecturers in Calcutta University. Here they “both began to pick up problems, solve them and publish papers. While they published independently, they also collaborated on one paper And in the year 1920, that is roughly four years after he started his career, Saha published a paper that became a turning point in life.” Saha himself writes about the genesis of the formula that now bears his name: “It was while pondering over the problems of astrophysics and teaching thermodynamics and spectroscopy to the M Sc classes that the theory of thermal ionisation took a definite shape in my mind in 1919 I was a regular reader of German journals and in the course of these studies I came across a paper explaining the high ionisation in stars due to high temperatures I saw at once the importance of introducing the value of the ionisation potential in the formula.” (G Venkataraman, op cit., p. 47) By any measure this must be considered as a competent professional

achievement that turned a new leaf in stellar observations. One may not be using the Saha formula much these days, and things have gone far beyond 1920, but the fact that it provided a new manner of looking at the stellar spectra has its own deeper significance. The derivation of the formula by using the principle first obtained by Fowler in 1923 added an extra term that took care of multiple ionisations. This was essentially in the theoretical field.

But later Saha did also carry out some experimental work in physics, when the climate of work was practically absent in the India of those days. Paucity of funds and the lack of the kind of atmosphere that is needed to do practical things contributed their great share. He could have perhaps gone abroad and devoted himself to research with all the facilities that were available there. But those were also the days when another spirit inspired the people of the country.

Apart from teaching physics Saha was also connected with several other aspects of importance for the country's growth in science. Two of these may be briefly mentioned here, these were rationalisation of calendars based on a scientific approach and the study of rivers.

In highbrow science the study of shifts of the rivers across lands and plains may not get much recognition but it constitutes greatly in the geo-economic factors that govern societies and civilisations. Saha was aware of it and he took keen interest in looking into these problems. Large-scale drifts in rivers do take place over a period of time and, in the case of Punjab, there is as if constant fight between the desert and river valleys. This can have far-reaching consequences. Thus about Harappa and Mohenjodaro he says: "a large number of cities have been found buried under the sands of Sind and Rajaputana. These could not have existed unless there was more plentiful supply of water in these regions 5000 years ago than is to be found now. The lower course of Saraswati ran dry during Vedic times and its course is marked by a dry channel. The other rivers have moved away generally to the West" (Op. cit., p.144). The disappearance of Pataliputra, the seat of the Magadhan Empire, has similar causes. The Damodar Valley Project proved a mess by not understanding the Physics of Rivers. Similarly, the plethora of calendars that were present in India needed a rationalised basis, their reformation had become imperative. But Saha's calendar remained unaccepted because religious feelings entered into the picture. His plea was to follow the Chinese maxim "Religions are many but Reason is one." He also added that world harmony can be promoted only by sweet reasonableness. Some chance!

But what we admire in Saha is his sense of social responsibility and the commitment to physics in its service. He wrote well-studied articles and maintained that the only means available to the country to come out of its backwardness was by promoting science. He despised Gandhian ideas that would be anachronistic to the society that was shaping in a different way. He was one of the persons quick to suggest the creation of a department devoted to the atomic activities under the auspices of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. This was much before

the country became free on 15 August 1947. But later, when the initiative slipped into the hands of Bhabha, Saha opposed the move to carry it out in an independent department, his argument was that such a programme would need a strong industrial setup which was then absent in the country. Bhabha had other ideas and he had another kind of rapport with Nehru which proved to be extremely fruitful in this respect. It is unfortunate that Saha did not have much of an opinion,—he was an “uncompromising critic”,—about the later atomic energy activities initiated by Bhabha who gave to the Indian capability another thrust.

About the discovery of nuclear fission Saha gave a lecture at the Indian Physical Society in March 1941 and said the following: “a process may be discovered which would render the reactions to proceed with explosive violence. A tablet of U^{235} , no more than a homeopathic globule in size, may blow off a mighty Super Dreadnought [a large battleship of those days]—a feat which can at the present time be performed only by a torpedo carrying several tons of explosives...” But unlike the American scientists who in 1939 had heard the fission report from Bohr, none in India set up an experiment to verify the findings. Saha’s socialistic ideas about industrial developments found concurrence in Netaji Subhash Bose’s when as a President of the Indian National Congress in 1938 he told the scientists “We can at best determine whether this revolution, that is industrial, will be a comparatively gradual one, as in Great Britain, or a forced march as in Soviet Russia. I am afraid that it has to be a forced march in this country.” This may be true to some extent in the case of established industrial activities, but in matters of scientific and technological developments “forced march” has always frustration laid in it. The commerce-driven project has different parameters of operation than a creative-innovative enterprise where exceptional and highly individualistic minds are concerned. Saha looked at India from a scientist’s point of view which has its own limitations.

Bhabha, in contrast to Saha, was made in another way. Born on 30 October 1909 into a rich aristocratic Parsee family, he grew up in a typical Westernised atmosphere. His formative years were spent in England where he lived for 13 years. His parents wanted him to get an engineering degree which, back home, would be helpful to build his career in the Tata industries. But always his love was for physics. He wrote to his father: “My success will be what I make of my work. Besides, India is not a land where science cannot be carried on.” The letter continues: “I am burning with a desire to do physics. I will and must do it some time. It is my only ambition. I have no desire to be ‘successful’ man or the head of a big firm. There are intelligent people who like that and let them do it. I hear you saying ‘but you are not Socrates or Einstein’ No—and that is what Berlioz’s father said to Berlioz. He called him a useless musician when he was young—Hector Berlioz who is now accepted as one of the world’s greatest geniuses and France’s greatest musician. How can anybody else know at what time what one will do, if there is nothing to show? It is no use saying to Beethoven ‘you must be a scientist for it is a great thing’ when he did not care two hoots for science, or to Socrates ‘be an engineer, it is the work of an intelligent man’

It is not in the nature of things I therefore earnestly implore you to let me do physics'' (G. Venkataraman, *Bhabha and his Magnificent Obsession*, p 4)

We see here a fine sensitive soul, many-cultured and pretty sure of what he wants to do in life His father agreed to the plea, with the condition that he should also do engineering In the bargain Bhabha received two degrees, one in mechanical engineering and the other in physics His stay in England and travels in Europe proved later very useful He had established intimate personal contacts practically with all the well-known scientists of the time in Europe Later in his capacity as an initiator and organiser of scientific activities in India these proved of immense help to him in several respects.

Bhabha's early research work was in the field of particle physics in which he saw an opportunity to test Dirac's quantum electrodynamics In his theoretical studies in the early stage he was considering the creation of electron-positron pairs when fast charged particles collided with each other The situation is visualised as follows The electromagnetic field of the two colliding charged particles causes perturbation in the negative energy sea postulated by Dirac while formulating the relativistic quantum mechanical equation. This perturbation can give rise to the production of particle-antiparticle pair. The scattering formula derived by Bhabha is a "crowning achievement" in the field of positron physics, an insight that brings other insights Venkataraman summarises the diverse accomplishments of Bhabha at Cambridge as follows. The explanation of relativistic exchange (Bhabha scattering); the theory of electron and positron showers in cosmic rays (Bhabha-Heitler theory), speculation about the Yukawa particle, prediction of relativistic time dilation effects in the theory of mesons. (Op. cit, p 66)

At the beginning of World War II Bhabha came to India on a short vacation but got stuck He then decided to join the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore By this time C.V Raman had built an active school of physics in the Institute which proved conducive to Bhabha's talents It was during these Bangalore days that Bhabha, at the recommendation of Raman, became a Fellow of the Royal Society Although there was a vast difference between the working conditions at Cambridge and Bangalore, Bhabha took everything in his stride In fact soon he set up his own strides. He even thought it his duty to serve the country by carrying out the calls of his profession, accepting the conditions as they were If a good education does not serve that purpose then that education cannot be called a good education Mostly career seekers move to greener pastures elsewhere But Bhabha had the confidence in himself, that he could create those pastures even here Soon were to follow the creation of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Atomic Energy in Bombay But this also meant a change in the life of Bhabha His own scientific career had practically stopped by 1953 and he became a builder of scientific organisations This he did, and he did it in a great enthusiastic way, in the fields of both fundamental research and applied sciences He understood the significance of both and promoted the activities with his exceptional managerial capabilities

Bhabha cherished visions to build in India a school of physics comparable to the finest in the advanced Western countries. But equally was he concerned with the desirable aspect of sophisticated technology and instrumentation development. This was something new to the country but also something that was very desirable. His twin degrees in mechanical engineering and physics had already put the indelible stamp on his work. Besides fundamental research he gave a concrete practical shape to the complementary aspect also. His conviction that things can be done in India is so meritorious that he stands apart from all the other Indians who received professional laurels abroad.

But this conviction could not have been implemented in a fruitful measure had he not enjoyed the full confidence of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was Bhabha's belief that the Delhi approach of organising science was too bureaucratic and hence not conducive for healthy growth of the creative spirit. One cannot build a laboratory first and then pack it with people. Instead one should spot out a capable person from wherever it be and build things around him, build the necessary infrastructure for him to carry out the work. Indeed, the early work in Tata Institute and Atomic Energy literally started in abandoned naval barracks and none complained about the lack of facilities. Buildings also came later and what a new marvellous world one sees in these creations! A Mogul king of the modern age established these in the busy heart of the commercial city that Bombay always is! If the grandeur of these is aesthetically pleasing and elevating, they are also functionally well laid. 1200 acres of land with a hull on one side and the bay on the other was metamorphosed into a paradise to bear the rich fruits of atomic sciences.

More important, however, was the freedom that one enjoyed to do work in the area of one's liking, it more than compensated for all the other trifles of life. Perhaps this was one of the finest gifts to science that was given by Bhabha. There was no 'planning' as such but that did not imply haphazard growth. Recognition of certain foundational principles in the pursuit of excellence was all that mattered and fortunately these principles became the guidelines for those who came after him. Bhabha introduced a new culture altogether. This we witness in the enduring contributions made by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. Research has grown, technology has grown, industries have sprung up from these efforts. A combination of the scholastic-academic atmosphere and the development of laboratory tools was a novel feature and the results speak volumes about the soundness of the approach. Today's Space activities are also an offshoot of the same culture.

One key element in this approach was the administration of a scientific programme that has to be altogether different from administering, say, a revenue department. Bhabha had recognised that "the general absence of the proper administrative setup for science is a bigger obstacle to the rapid growth of science and technology than the paucity of scientists and technologists because a majority of scientists and technologists are made less effective through the lack of the right type

of administrative support. The administration of scientific research and development is an even more subtle matter than the administration of industrial enterprises” (Op cit, p 175) This was a great innovative feature and it brought a new vigour to science and technology.

Speaking about Bhabha, C V Raman once said: “Bhabha is a great lover of music, a gifted artist, a brilliant engineer and an outstanding scientist. He is the modern equivalent of Leonardo da Vinci” The exaggeration apart, there is a great truth here. Bhabha himself maintained that, while science is one aspect of one’s personality, there are many other aspects which are equally important. He upheld that the arts make life worth living. But perhaps Bhabha was none of what C V Raman mentioned. He was simply a genius and a genius who had the immense capacity to apply himself to work. He was a scientific epitome of the renascent soul of India that needed in a great measure the discipline of the Westerner to organise oneself in the values of life.

The contributions of leaders of science like Homi Bhabha, Meghnad Saha, Shanti Sarup Bhatnagar, Satyendra Bose were undoubtedly seminal in nature, yet at times one wonders whether they were actually doing or promoting at all Indian science. They were doing science in India no doubt, but it was essentially the European science they were doing. The problems they were engaged with, and they were professionally high-class problems, were right on the front-line, yet they were set neither in the over-all Indian context nor in the Indian perspective. Maybe here and there we have the Indian touch but perhaps in its totality there is very little which is radically different from the Western approach towards science. Nor do the celebrated achievements of Har Gobind Khorana or Abdus Salam or S Chandrasekhar in foreign lands possess that truer stamp of the sub-continental authenticity, the sub-continental genius. When we think of Jagadish Chandra Bose or Chandrasekhar Venkata Raman or Srinivasa Ramanujam we at once get another feeling and it is that which we have to discern and promote. But we shall talk about it in another context.

Saha once quoted Confucius: “The essence of knowledge is that having it one must use it.” He was also keen to see the “use”-side of knowledge. According to him none else than a scientist can show how the knowledge generated by him can be put to use. This “use”-aspect he was seeing in the context of the 1935-India with its poverty, ignorance and disease, which could only be classed with China and Abyssinia, countries still steeped in them in mediaevalism. But today, after two generations, China is one of the leading world powers while India, though not very far behind, has yet to acquire that position of strength. But Saha, in spite of his good contacts with Nehru in the beginning, could not do much to promote the “use”-side. He became more and more a confrontationist.

In this context we may see what G Venkataraman has to say: “The contrasts between Bhabha and Raman, Saha and Bose on the one hand and with Chandrasekhar on the other are quite striking. Raman, Saha and Bose were all products of the Indian ‘backwaters’. They were essentially self-taught and lacked the discipline of a formal

training such as one gets in a place like Cambridge. And they were all products of a prevalent feeling of national revival. While they could not always keep pace with the times and produce papers of uniformly high quality and significance, they made up with brilliant flashes of intense creativity which won for each one of them a special niche in science. Bhabha with his Cambridge exposure was very different. He maintained throughout an extremely high standard in his papers and while he did perhaps foresee many a later development, none of his discoveries has the same eternal quality as Bose Statistics, for example. The contrasts between Bhabha and Chandrasekhar are equally interesting. Homi Bhabha received his basic training in the West and later showed that he could be quite successful staying and working in the so-called 'backwaters'. Chandra went the other way—college education in India, followed by rounding off in Cambridge after which came a most successful career, carved out entirely in the West. Would Chandra have sparkled equally if he had returned to India? Nobody can say; he himself thinks not—at least that is what he once said to his father. What about Bhabha? Would he have done better as a scientist if he had gone back to the West after the war? Judging by the experience of Chandrasekhar and Abdus Salam, Bhabha might well have attained even greater heights in pure science. In that sense, Bhabha did make a *tremendous sacrifice* by deciding to stay on in India. At the same time, by skilfully turning to institution-building he made sure that his Indian experience did not become a sour one'' (Op cit, p. 201)

But what we generally notice in them is the fact that they all essentially did the Western science, be it in India or abroad. But what stands out distinctly in the case of Bhabha is his contribution to India in another way. He was the one who brought to the country big science in a big organised way. India has come on the map of the world precisely because of this remarkable contribution of his. Perhaps there is no going back from it now.

It may be appropriate to remember here what, about three decades ago, Satyendra Bose wondered at. "It is a perpetual challenge to the Indian genius as to how, even though the country is endowed with such natural resources, even though the country has had such a brilliant history, it continues to remain third rate in spite of so many resources and so much manpower." The answer perhaps lies in the lack of organised disciplined effort. It is true in all the fields of activity and not necessarily in science alone where it is generally complained that we do not have adequate funds to carry out research work. Even in a game of cards such as Bridge we do not seem to have enough talent. If the U.S., France and Italy occupy the top positions in the world, India stands nowhere. Perhaps we have not really discovered our own identity. We have not discovered ourselves. In that respect pioneers like Bhabha contributed greatly to the country,—perhaps because he had a typical Western approach in seeing and doing things. He certainly brought big science to India.

(To be continued)

THE OPENING CANTO OF SAVITRI AS THE KEYNOTE OF THE COMPOSITION

EMINENT scholars have discussed the opening canto of *Savitri* from different angles of vision. Perhaps one could see it also as striking the keynote of the whole composition, as one sees the opening scene of a play of Shakespeare as striking the keynote of the work.

The keynote in a piece of Western music (also called the tonic) is the starting note of a scale or a stepwise arrangement of notes that gives us a foretaste of the whole composition. It is not impossible that one well-versed in Western music can make a detailed comparison between *Savitri* and a musical composition.

Speaking of the symbolic quality of the opening Canto Sri Aurobindo himself uses the words a *key beginning* and *announcement* in a letter to a disciple:

...here [in the opening canto] it is a relapse into inconscience broken by a slow and difficult return of consciousness followed by a brief but splendid and prophetic outbreak of spiritual light leaving behind it the “day” of ordinary human consciousness in which the prophecy has to be worked out. The whole of *Savitri* is, according to the title of the poem, a legend that is a symbol and this opening canto is, it may be said, a key beginning and announcement.¹

Even as the dawn with which the poem opens may be considered as both the dawn of the day Satyavan must die and the birth of spiritual light, as Sri Aurobindo calls it, the whole epic brings before us the legend as well as the symbol, the legend which is the symbol. That way, Sri Aurobindo says, the opening Canto is a key beginning and an announcement. Also, the birth of the spiritual light points to the “Birth of the Flame” which has to struggle with the Inconscience and the Night and bring in a dawn that would not fade into “the light of common day,”—(to use the words of Wordsworth) The Flame not only blazes out against Death and defeats the dark god but ultimately supramentalises the earth and makes Death die.

There are lines and passages in the opening Canto which prefigure what we are going to see in the subsequent portions of the work. Though what we see both in the opening Canto and in the rest of the epic a “flash-back” to events and experiences of the past since *Savitri* plunges *in medias res*, in a sense what is presented in the opening Canto a “flash-forward” to what we are to see in the Books and Cantos that are to follow.

There are not only whole passages which anticipate for us what we are to see later, there are individual lines that illumine the rest of the epic. For example, when there is the common light of earthly day and when *Savitri* awakes with beast, bird and the thousand peoples of soil and trees, and Man, she takes no delight in the small happiness of the ordinary day. She is

A mighty stranger in the human field²

The embodied Guest within makes no response. Throughout the poem,—whether she calls herself a mortal and a Madran to Satyavan, or does not immediately heed the higher Voice to remember who she is, or whether she rises to her highest stature,—Savitri is always a stranger, a Guest from Eternity in a human body, a mighty stranger at that. Her divinity may be veiled but is never eclipsed. She is the Avatar come to succour and save man from Death.

She is presented as a Christ-figure in the opening Canto, as in a later one

Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch
 It fears the pure divine intolerance
 Of that assault of ether and of fire,
 Almost with hate repels the light it brings,
 It trembles at its naked power of Truth
 And the might and sweetness of its absolute Voice
 Inflicting on the heights the abysm's law
 It sullies with its mire heaven's messengers
 It meets the sons of God with death and pain...
 The cross their payment for the crown they gave .³

The same picture is brought before us in a slightly different term in Book VI, Canto 2, when Narad tells Aswapati's Queen that Savitri has a mission to execute and that she cannot go on a quest seeking another partner than the one she has chosen

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task,
 The world itself becomes his adversary
 Those he would save are his antagonists.
 This world is in love with its own ignorance,
 Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,
 It gives the cross in payment for the crown⁴

Earlier in the same speech of Narad we hear,

The great who came to save this suffering world
 And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,
 Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain⁵

The words are followed by the Saviour bearing the cross

It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice⁶

The opening Canto also anticipates for us how

A dark foreknowledge separated her
From all of whom she was the star and stay⁷

when

The long fore-known and fatal morn was here
Bringing a noon that seemed like every noon⁸

This was the day when Satyavan must die⁹

At the destined moment Death appears before her to take Satyavan away. What Savitri does then happens to be the very pivot of the epic.

That fateful morning Savitri wants to be with Satyavan when he goes to the forest. But she does not want his mother (and father) even to have a hint of what is to happen. When she goes to the mother seeking her permission to accompany Satyavan she speaks

. with guarded lips and tranquil face
Lest some stray word or some betraying look
Should let pass into the mother's unknowing breast,
Slaying all happiness and need to live,
A dire foreknowledge of the grief to come.¹⁰

Even months before the fateful day, though she undergoes the ordeal of foreknowledge, she hides the truth in her own bosom

She was still to them the child they knew and loved,
The sorrowing woman they saw not within,
No change was in her beautiful motions seen¹¹

There are occasions when she thinks of dying with Satyavan. But she desists from doing so.

For those sad parents still would need her here
To help the empty remnant of their day¹²

Two more instances in the opening Canto of what anticipates the future may be considered before we close

Even before her being face to face with Death and striving with him to win back Satyavan

All came back to her: Earth and Love and Doom,
 The ancient disputants, encircled her
 Like giant figures wrestling in the night ¹³

We have referred to what Savitri does from the moment she meets the god of Death. The three lines before the last in the opening Canto give us a foretaste of how Savitri rises with all her force to meet the dire god.

Amid the trivial sounds, the unchanging scene
 Her soul arose confronting Time and Fate,
 Immobile in herself, she gathered force ¹⁴

From the time she is roused from agony and despair and is called upon to find her soul, Savitri undergoes a series of experiences culminating in her becoming one with Infinity

She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,
 She was the red heart of the passion-flower,
 The dream-white of the lotus in its pool
 The cosmos flowered in her, she was its bed.
 She was Time and the dreams of God in Time,
 She was Space and the wideness of his days
 From this she rose where Time and Space were not.
 Infinity was her movement's natural space,
 Eternity looked out from her on Time ¹⁵

Just before Death was to make his appearance to claim the soul of Satyavan

All grief and fear were dead within her now
 And a great calm had fallen .¹⁶

At the actual moment of Death's appearance,

She rose not yet to face the dreadful god.
 Over the body she loved her soul leaned out ¹⁷

Then suddenly there came on her the change ¹⁸

A force descended trailing endless lights . ¹⁹

All in her mated with that mighty hour ²⁰

The three lines before the last prepare us for the mighty hour

The opening Canto, therefore is a key beginning and an announcement of not only the simultaneous presentation of the legend and the symbol but of the significant situations of the supreme composition.

K B SITARAMAYYA & SWARNA GOURI

References

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 <i>Savitri</i> , pp 792-93 | 2 <i>Ibid</i> , p 6 |
| 3 <i>Ibid</i> , p 7 | 4 <i>Ibid</i> , p 448 |
| 5. <i>Ibid</i> , p 445 | 6 <i>Ibid</i> |
| 7 <i>Ibid</i> , p 8 | 8 <i>Ibid</i> |
| 9 <i>Ibid</i> , p 10 | 10 <i>Ibid</i> , p 561 |
| 11 <i>Ibid</i> , p 470 | 12 <i>Ibid</i> , p 472 |
| 13 <i>Ibid</i> , p 9 | 14 <i>Ibid</i> , p 10 |
| 15 <i>Ibid</i> , p 557 | 16 <i>Ibid</i> , p 564 |
| 17 <i>Ibid</i> , p 571 | 18 <i>Ibid</i> |
| 19 <i>Ibid</i> , p 572 | 20 <i>Ibid</i> , p 573 |

THE SARASWATI SAMMAN 2000

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY THE RECIPIENT

[*Saraswati Samman, the nation's most prestigious award for creative writing, was bestowed on Manoj Das for the year 2000 at a function in New Delhi on the 4th of May 2001*]

A FUNCTION to confer an award on a writer is indeed an extraordinary occasion for the writer concerned. He who expresses himself from the privacy of his study is required to face an audience—an assembly of people deeply interested in literature that may include the recipient's compatriots in the vocation.

This of course is the foremost of all the functions of this genre where I have been required to speak a few words, but I have always felt uncertain about the theme of my talk on such occasions. I cannot speak about the vast past with any certainty, but so far as the remote past is concerned, I wonder if the founding fathers of Indian literature, Valmiki and Vyasa, had ever known a situation comparable to this.

Times have changed in a million ways. And one of the significant changes is reflected in the principles and methods governing the process of selecting awardees or award-worthy works which speak of a closer link between the society and the writer. Those involved in the process—critics, connoisseurs as well as creative writers—may constitute only a fraction of the society, but that fraction no doubt is the most vibrant constituency of the milieu. They are expected to be guided in their judgment by such values and such subtle sense of discretion that go to make the conscience of our collective life, on which depends the health of our culture, today and tomorrow.

This naturally leads us to a vital question. Does the changed situation oblige the writer to be more conscious of his milieu? Does it entail his having to be more committed to the society?

Looking squarely at the reality, we have to admit that the writer became much more involved in the society, its problems and predicaments, during the 20th century than ever before. Not only because more and more writers became professional, depending on the society for their very existence as writers, but also because the external tides of time, such as the World Wars, the holocaust perpetrated on races and similar large-scale brutalities, collapse of empires, colonies and kingdoms, revolutions and counter-revolutions, ecological catastrophes as well as technological miracles, were too formidable as global events to let the writer remain closeted in his internal world keeping aloof from them or to be absolutely free in his choice of subjects.

I must hasten to add that no writer worth his salt had ever been an island by himself. It was the events outside him, the happenings around him, the episodes concerning Rama and Sita for Valmiki and the Kuru-Pandava confrontation for Vyasa, that created for us our two great epics, as much as the Trojan War made Homer come out with *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The big difference between then and now,

however, is Valmiki, Vyasa and Homer could hardly have been anxious about the society's immediate response to their creativity, they were not likely to have been bothered about the contemporary evaluation, reviews, royalties and accolades, whereas we cannot but be influenced by so many such considerations.

Who was in a more fortunate position—the writer then or the writer now—in regard to his freedom, is yet another debatable issue, for freedom in its true sense cannot be measured only in a political perspective, but it embraces the complex questions of psychological inhibitions and tyranny of one's own ego and prejudices over one's own capacity for comprehending issues, apart from the social environment

No doubt, the creative talent, inherent in the would-be writer, awaits a moment when some external incident stimulates or provokes its articulation. If for Valmiki it was the mercilessness of a hunter, for the poet Gabriela Mistral it was the sudden revelation of the helplessness engulfing a would-be mother. But once the genius had been activated, it is not the creative inspiration alone which guides its course; there are interventions of several other factors and motivations.

Since time immemorial literary creativity has run along a few major streams. First, literature born of a sublime inspiration, a natural phenomenon—or we may even see it as supernatural—like the flowers blooming or a rainbow spanning the sky. The Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata belonged to this category. Second, there has been literature with a lofty purpose, didactic or pragmatic. If the *Jataka* stories were compiled for imparting didactic lessons, the Panchatantra came into being for educating some princes in pragmatic lore. A work of literature with a conscious social cause, say a novel like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, would fall into this stream.

The third stream combined knowledge, entertainment and an exposition of the promises and vicissitudes of life, moral or amoral—and it covered the largest domain in the realm of gold—inclusive of works ranging from the classic Kathasaritsagara to the bulk of fiction of all times, enriching and expanding our understanding of the complexities of life.

Needless to say, I venture upon such a classification keeping in view only the main traits of the works concerned, but the traits inevitably overlap.

Then there is a minor stream consisting of literature at the service of utility. A political manifesto, even an advertisement can sometimes be more than mere language, it can have some literary quality and there may not be anything very much wrong in it.

But with the passage of time new—rather unfortunate—motivations have made this overlapping a deliberate technique to proclaim as literature what is really an exercise in commerce or sensationalism, often a clever concoction of right values with wrong intents. Thus common titillation and raw eroticism can be made to wear an attractive garb of social realism and steal the limelight. Such tricks thrive well in an atmosphere when Art is sought to be reduced to entertainment and entertainment is

reduced to a bizarre theatre of hedonism. The distinction between the gold and the glitter is blurred.

Sometimes we hear a pathetic cry against such trends of our time, but it meets the fate of any other cry in the wilderness. During the past two decades I have observed psychologists, educationists and thinkers, even politicians in the West, decrying in no uncertain terms the pollution of the social environment by the unbridled telecast of violence and sex, to a very sad detriment of the normal growth of children in particular. But precious little had been done to cry a halt to such nonsense. The reason is not far to seek. Politicians and other varieties of lawmakers draw their vitality from the same source—I mean the moneybag—which also controls the electronic media.

Who can then change the situation? None, unless the average man changes his preference. And there is no possibility of the average man changing his preference unless his consciousness has changed.

It is a truism to say that we are living in an extraordinary age—marked by paradoxes of many sorts. We have built up gigantic structures of civilisation as well as the means to demolish them in the twinkle of an eye. We have theoretically accepted the fact that all men are equal, yet today we suffer from the biggest ever explosion of ego—of collective ego in particular. The list will be long. But the greatest paradox is, while our age is remarkable for the fastest change in lifestyle, our life itself, our consciousness, proves itself too stubborn to welcome any change. Hence every secret of Nature discovered is immediately reduced to a means for satisfying our ego, to appease our hunger for pleasure, to encourage hedonism, as if pleasure-hunting was the sole aim of life. Literature too shows signs of falling prey to this dangerous development.

But I trust in the inevitability of the change of consciousness, because I believe that the evolutionary misus, the force beneath our life, will not rest content with what we are at present. In fact, we are passing through an evolutionary crisis—says Sri Aurobindo. While presenting this diagnosis he also holds before us the prospect of man transcending his predicament or transforming his present state of consciousness. The subject is profound, but that alone, of all the philosophies and futuristic visions of our time, can convincingly open a new horizon before us and justify our optimism—the source of all creativity.

I am grateful to the Chayan Parishad of the Foundation for having found my novel *Amruta Phala* in my mother tongue, Oriya, worthy of the lofty Saraswati Samman. The human aspiration to delve deep into the meaning of life that has grown strong since the time of Bhartrihari to the present day is the theme of the novel. It is a work born of what I feel to be a genuine inspiration, though weakened by my incapacity to fully capture it in my work, trying to examine some of the indefatigable questions of life, love and death. The recognition the Samman accords its author—indeed the sublime word Saraswati instantly humbles and overwhelms me. It conjures up in my vision the incredible range of Indian literature—from Valmiki and Vyasa to

Kalidasa, from Bhartrihari to Rabindranath, Premchand and Subramaniam Bharati Nothing is dead in Indian literature A legend, like that of Savitri, found in the Mahabharata and traced to a still more remote past, springs to a new life, assumes a new symbolism in our time when recreated by Sri Aurobindo in his epic *Savitri*

This dignified assembly reinforces my faith that despite all signs to the contrary 'the glory and good of Art'—to use a phrase from Browning—has not lost its import I am beholden to the Foundation, to those people of goodwill who run it and to you who make this event meaningful and memorable

MANOJ DAS

ABOUT ASTROLOGY

THE attitude to astrology and astrolatry on the part of Indian leaders of thought during the period 500 B C to 100 A D was undoubtedly a correct one, and would be welcomed by rationalists of all ages and countries But such ideas had apparently a very deterrent effect on the study of astronomy in India Pursuit of astronomical knowledge was confused with astrology, and its cultivation was definitely forbidden in the thousands of monasteries which sprang up all over the country within a few hundred years of the Nirvana (544-483 B C) Yet monasteries were exactly the places where astronomical studies could be quietly pursued and monks were, on account of their leisure and temperament, eminently fitted for taking up such studies as happened later in Europe, where some of the most eminent astronomers came from the monkish ranks, e.g. Copernicus and Fabricius

Neither did Hindu leaders opposed to Buddhism encourage astrology and astrolatry The practical politician thought that the practice of astrology was not conducive to the exercise of personal initiative and condemned it in no uncertain terms In the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, the following passage is found

The objective eludes the foolish man who enquires too much from the stars

*

The *Tithi* current for a locality on any day may not be current for another locality In other words, calculations of the auspicious days which may be correct for one locality may be incorrect for another If the Sastras are to be literally interpreted, every place must have its local calendar

MEGHNAD SAHA

A TREASURY OF THOUGHTS

WHEN the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.

—*Arabian Saying*

Suffering is a broom that sweeps away all our negative karma

—*Tibetan Saying*

And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.

—*St. John*

And though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, and have not love, I am nothing!

—*St. Paul*

The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord

—*Book of Job*

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses the glory of his soul?
Or what can a man give in exchange for it?

—*Jesus*

Hatred does not cease by hatred, but by love alone. This is the law eternal.

—*The Buddha*

The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man.

—*The Old Testament*

The body is the camel on which the soul must ride in order to cross the desert of life.

—*Kazantzakis*

(Presented by Fali Choksi)

THREE REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIA

WE all know the term “twice-born” But one can be born not only two but three, four, seven times during a life It depends on one’s capacity to progress, one’s speed of growth, one’s frequency of *kalpas* If we take Russia as a collective soul throughout the last century, we will see that she was born at least three times Her first birth was the Revolution in 1917 It was in fact the beginning of some new country, the Soviet Union, instead of the last Russian Empire The second birth was the reconstruction of the country after the Second World War, death of Stalin in 1953 and of the XX Congress of the Communist Party in 1956 gave this birth, to what we call with the Russian word “Ottepel”, a thaw Then Russia became a new if not a different country And our third birth was Gorbachev’s Perestroika, the rebuilding started in 1986 All these three periods in the history of the country were indeed *kalpas* with their *Satya*—times of hope and commencement—and *Kali*—times of disappointment, decline and death,—and also with the intermediate periods

But it may also be said that from the spiritual point of view these three periods are Sri Aurobindo’s three types of revolution The first, the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917, was a physical revolution, an upheaval that had physical aims that wanted to change the country and the world as a whole by physical means, as if from without; it ended with the total domination of some new physical religion based on the exclusive reality of Matter

The Khrushchev thaw was a moral and intellectual revolution The extremely ideological society produced a generation of idealised men The old ideas that were or became for their embodiments (for that small minority of them which was still alive) only a means for their absolute authority, a cloak for their endless crimes and murders, were true for young people who sincerely believed in them The name of the country remained the same, but it was filled with some new creative power of sincere faith This faith in idea created a luminous Pleiad of romantics, poets, men of art, scientists who rebuilt Russia after the great war This generation was named “men of sixties”, they kept the halo of idealism and romance But this faith was only a sincere utopia and there was created by it an enormous gap between the ideal and actual reality in which this generation fell afterwards

Perestroika is our spiritual revolution After a long time the wind of change brought on our earth seeds of the coming spiritual age Many of them were from India Politicians were only instruments of this Divine sowing and political and other external changes, however great, were only a visible part of greater and more important changes in the consciousness

Fifteen years ago it was almost impossible to find on Russia’s urban streets a man who would answer “Yes” to your question, “Do you believe in God?” and would not look upon you as a crazy fellow Our society was a society of atheists, on the other hand, it was a society of intolerant believers in Communist dogma or in nothing Now, on the contrary, it is difficult to find a man who answers to the same

question "No" and does not also look upon you as if you were crazy. Such is the growth of the national spiritual consciousness in the space of just fifteen years. But many people now are seeking God in traditional religions and it is quite understandable; the first association of the word "god" is always with the word "religion". But Russians in general are people educated enough to see all the limitations and shortcomings of religion. The field of our experience was cleared from age-long dogmas of the past by our first revolution and this is its great achievement. Our soil was also fertilised by the education and faith of the second revolution, and that is a great advantage. That is why such an outburst of spiritual seeking as we see in Russia of the last decade and a half was at all possible after the strongest suppression.

It is difficult to overestimate the role of India and her spirituality in this movement. Indian influence on Russia is so great that even the Russian mind, in an attempt at spiritual self-assertion, created such phenomena like Russian Yoga and Russian Veda. One may now find in Russia followers of almost all great Indian spiritual schools, disciples of almost all great Indian spiritual Masters. Our girls and boys learn with pleasure Indian dancing. Special shops trade in Indian spiritual goods which are very popular. Plenty of Indian spiritual books and books inspired by Indian spirituality are now available in Russia.

Russia is awakening in spite of everything. We see that all our attempts to imitate others are funny. After our rushing about from one extreme to the other we want to find our own path, our own national idea, to open our enigmatic Russian soul. Who if not India may help us in our seeking?

GLEB NESTEROV

THOU WAST NOT BORN FOR DEATH, IMMORTAL BIRD!

A Tribute to R. K. Narayan

R K NARAYAN was no holy man. He sported no beard. He performed no miracles. Yet he kept his audience spellbound. His admirers swelled day after day. They continue to do so. And they range from schoolgoing kids to toothless grandpas.

Ask any foreigner you could buttonhole: "Have you read any Indian writer?" The only answer would be 'R. K. Narayan'. Translated into almost all the major languages of the world, he is a citizen of the world.

Seven decades of writing career didn't bring on him a writer's block, neither did he suffer from a writer's cramp. It is heartening to note that during his last hours in a hospital, he requested a diary to write his sixteenth novel.

He visited this planet earth only to write. He wrote about himself and about the people he was familiar with. He chose an alien tongue, English, to express himself. This he did to show the world that the human consciousness in India was in no way different from elsewhere. He made the English language dance to his tune, and thereby succeeded in telling the Englishspeaking world the distinct features of Indian life. He evolved a style—simple, effective and sensuous—that won the admiration of a broad spectrum of readers round the world.

Recognition, as is the case with all popular Indian writers in English, came from the West. Graham Greene, W. Somerset Maugham, E. M. Forster, and John Updike were a few in the long list of famous authors who were admirers of Narayan. Several awards and honours queued up before the hook-nosed author, who was all eyes and all ears.

Narayan's novel *The Guide* apart from establishing its author's position as one of the foremost writers of the Indian English tradition, also won for him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1961. It was the first work of fiction in English to receive the award. In 1964, Narayan received the Padma Bhushan award. The Royal Society of Literature bestowed its Arthur Christopher Benson Award on him in 1980. In recognition of his distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life, he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1985 where he was MP for six years. Various universities began conferring their honorary doctorates on him. In 1981, he became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the second Indian after Pandit Ravi Shankar to be honoured thus. The Soviet Land Nehru award followed in 1987. And in 2000, he received the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award. Nominated twice and proposed many times for the Nobel Prize, the honour eluded him. Though applauses and pats came from the West, he is equally read and known at home.

Behind such a great success, was no woman but a failure. He was a failure in school and in no way better in college. A university degree proved a mirage to him.

even at the advanced age of 24. Who would ever believe that this great Indian writer in English had failed in the English language paper? Records don't lie. But true to the adage, 'If one door closes, another opens,' he became a voracious reader and rambled at will. He was a very keen observer. It was only during these idle years he made up his mind to become a writer. He resigned his teaching job on the fourth day itself only to become a full time writer.

When Narayan decided to take up writing, he found the going "terribly, absolutely uphill". It was all frustration and struggle. But he didn't want to change professions midway. And success didn't come easily to him, as he confesses in his autobiography, *My Days*.

Narayan made a big breakthrough in October 1935 with the publication of his first novel *Swami and Friends*, by Hamish Hamilton, London. Thanks to the broad-minded English novelist, Graham Greene, without whose help the young author's works would have had a tough time in seeing the light of day. "Narayan is the novelist I most admire in the English language," Greene remarked once. In spite of Greene's recommendation, the novel sold poorly and failed to bag rave reviews. Yet Greene, the patron saint of Narayan, helped the novelist to find publishers for his next two novels *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The Dark Room*. Even after the third novel, he had to struggle for a number of years before making a dent in the world of literature.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born in Chennai on 10 October, 1906 in a South Indian middle class Brahmin family rooted in ancient religion and culture. The family was not conservative enough to close its doors on the new Western ways which came to India with the British. He had his early schooling in Chennai. But when his father was appointed headmaster of the Maharajah's High School, Mysore, he became a student of that school. After graduating from the University of Mysore, he worked for sometime as the Mysore correspondent of *Justice*, a Chennai based newspaper sponsored by the anti-Brahmin Justice party. That was the beginning of his writing career.

Fifteen novels, several collections of short stories and essays, a travelogue and autobiographical writings were all that he had left when his sojourn on Planet Earth came to an end on 13 May, 2001.

What is so special about Narayan that readers the world over mourned his passing away? Why do they unanimously say that no writer would be able to fill the void he had left?

For several such questions, the only answer would be 'Malgudi', an eternal small town. Any attempt to locate it on the map of India or for that matter the world map would end in a fiasco.

Where then is Malgudi? It exists in the fictional writings of Narayan. It was for his creation of Malgudi, a fictitious small town in South India, that its creator had won international acclaim. The West took Narayan's voice as an authentic voice of India. No wonder the University of California showed it as a small town in its map of India. So well known has this town become. It is the magic web which catches

everything that happens in the world and telecasts it in a plethora of colours to its readers. It is only here the 'comedies of sadness', as Professor William Walsh paradoxically described Narayan's novels, take place. Fourteen of his fifteen novels are set in Malgudi. The last in the list *The Grandmother's Tale* was the only exception. Several of his finest short stories take place in Malgudi, a small world which is certainly a metaphor of India.

Narayan's heroes are the common people of Malgudi. Not only his themes but also his characters are typically middle class. Ordinary people in ordinary situations are brought into the limelight through gentle and unforced humour. Who can ever forget the trials of the ten-year-old Swami, the schoolboy of *Swami and Friends*? Who can ever forget the travails of Chandran, an adolescent growing into early manhood in *The Bachelor of Arts*? Or Krishna of *The English Teacher*, who undergoes a distressing trauma after the untimely death of his wife? Or Nagaraj of *The World of Nagaraj* who fancies himself a man with a mission? Or Raju of *The Guide*, the usurper of another man's wife? Or Savithri of *The Dark Room* who makes an attempt to break away from her husband but returns home realizing her helplessness? Or Daisy of *The Painter of Signs*, a fully liberated woman who makes an independent living?

Narayan could present in a comic vein the intensely serious story of a tourist guide turning into a holy man. He could laugh gently at people's passion for making money through his *Financial Expert*. He could handle with ease the absurdities of the tinsel world in *Mr Sampath*. He could also turn profoundly philosophical as in *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

Talking about the proliferation of sex in contemporary writing, Narayan remarked: "The constant and increasing use of sex by contemporary novelists is both a fad as well as commercialism. It's an American obsession. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but I don't think that all this coarseness serves any artistic purpose. It's a pity that even good writers seem to exploit pornographic opportunities in their writing. It is really not necessary at all." Perhaps that is the reason why there is no explicit display of sex in his books. But his *Painter of Signs* is an exception because the subject warranted it.

Narayan's novels and short stories are mostly character studies. Therein lies the genius of modern India's first successful professional writer. Scholars compare his short stories to the Japanese Haiku for their uncluttered economy of words. Highly comical and therefore satirical his short stories, more than 200 in number, gathered in several volumes like *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* and *Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories*, expose human foibles or pretentiousness. The structural simplicity of his short stories and the matching simplicity with which they are told beguile the readers towards reading meanings into them which were probably never intended.

A casual reading of Narayan's essays collected between covers under several headings including *A Writer's Nightmare (Selected Essays 1958-1988)* would be

enough to tell us what a wealth of material becomes accessible to a writer. All is grist to the writer's mill. They are an evocation of mood and personality and no doubt it is a genre that Narayan enjoyed writing. They are entirely his personal views, though many of us would happily approve of them. Taking into consideration the entire gamut of his essays, what really takes the cake is his "personal essays." "I have always been drawn to the personal essay in which you see something of the author himself," observed Narayan. "The scope for such a compilation is unlimited—the mood may be sombre, hilarious or satirical and the theme may range from what the author notices from his window to what he sees in his waste-paper basket to a world cataclysm."

Creative writing apart, Narayan retold the legends of India in *Gods, Demons and Others*, *The Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* with his characteristic delicacy and irony.

Narayan believed that "readability" was the hallmark of any true writing. He achieved this "readability" through a language that is "amazingly simple, candid, sparkling and exceptionally transparent." Here is a sip, his delineation of groundnut, from his *Talkative Man*. "Full of protein, you know, packed and sealed by nature, not a minutest microbe can sneak in. You may pick the nut off the road, crack it open hitting it on the floor and eat it without fear of infection."

Writing in simple and readable English is not everybody's forte. That was Narayan's biggest plus point. He once remarked, "Few people realise that the hardest thing is to write in the 'direct' style." With such a great contribution to the world of letters, R. K. Narayan, the doyen of Indian writing in English, will continue to live in the hearts of millions.

P RAJA

(Courtesy. All India Radio, Pondicherry)

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SOUL

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

THE truly blessed human being is always dynamic and forward-looking, with a sense of certitude and “progressive harmony”, such a man does not run after ordinary happiness and worldly success (with rewards, recognition, etc) because the ultimate aim of the evolving human race is integral “perfection” According to the Divine Mother’s advice given to the spiritual aspirants, the first step is to become conscious of oneself, of the different parts of one’s being and their respective activities “You must learn to distinguish these different parts one from another, so that you may become clearly aware of the origin of the movements that occur in you, the many impulses, reactions and conflicting wills that drive you to action ”¹

In this background, we may appreciate that it is not enough (while practising *Dhyana*) to sit with closed eyes, after making sure that there is no external disturbance or noise. Once the movement of the higher or deeper consciousness has started, it is essential to be vigilant and keep oneself attuned with the current of the higher Force “without meandering with the mind” It is universally accepted that though Music falls within the category of Fine Arts, yet the Art (and science) of Music excels all other arts as a mode of man’s direct response to the call of the All-Beautiful Here the words of Swami Prajnanananda are quite significant

“Music is a fine art, because it awakens aesthetic consciousness in the depth of man’s mind and bestows on him unbounded joy and happiness which enable him to enjoy the intrinsic beauty of Nature and the transcendental calmness of the Soul as well ”² With this sublime aim and objective in view, it has been the story of the perennial quest of supernal Delight and Beauty by great sages and saints through the wonderful pursuit of eternal Sound (*Nadanusandhana*)

It is very well established in the minds of Yogis, in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s writings, that Supreme and Eternal Harmony (not disharmony and discord, mixed with some occasional doses of harmony) should be the “key-note” of all true living, whether individual or collective Every individual has a “note” peculiar to himself and every element has a “sound” peculiar to itself. The genuine seekers and practitioners of true *Dhyana*, with the avowed objective to fill the earthly consciousness with purity, bhakti, eternal joy and beauty, may recollect here the holy words of wisdom, revealed by some Sufi saints Mother Earth has various aspects of beauty, as well as an immense variety in its sound-patterns Particularly, the soil, rocks and other material crusts of the earth have a “pitch” on the surface, its form is crescent-like, and its colour is yellow Hazrat Inayat Khan, the famous Sufi musician, says that the sound of earth is somewhat “dim and dull”, and it produces a thrill, activity and movement in the body. All instruments of wire and gut, as well as instruments of percussion, such as drums, cymbals, etc , represent the sound of the earth It is not a mere coincidence that Lord Shiva-Shankar, who is venerated by the musicians as

Nadatanu (and *Nataraj*) is often depicted with His dear percussion instrument, *Damaru* (or *Dambaru*), while performing His Cosmic (*Tandava*) Dance, for arousing the earthly creatures from their torpor and *Tamas*, by overcoming their dimness and dullness

The Sufi mystics believe that all things derived from and formed of the primordial vibrations have sound hidden within them, as fire is hidden in flint, and each atom of the universe confesses by its tone, "My sole origin is sound". If any solid or hollow sonorous body, or any such material substance, is struck, it will answer back, "I am sound". That volume of sound which is in the abstract sphere of the concrete earth, is the origin and basis of all sound. Both sound and colour make their effect on the human Soul according to the universal "law of harmony"; to a fine soul colour appeals, and to a still finer and sensitive soul, sound (particularly musical sound) appeals most. Tone has either a warm or a cold effect, according to the element, since all elements are made of different degrees of vibrations. "Therefore sound can produce an agreeable or a disagreeable effect upon man's mind and body, and has its healing effect in the absence of herbs and drugs which also have their origin in vibrations."³

(To be continued)

SURESH DEY

References

- 1 *On Education*, CWM, Vol 12, p 3
- 2 Swami Prajnanananda, *Music of the Nations*, p 1
- 3 Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Music Sound and Word* (Vol II), p 14

COULD DEATH BE MORE BEAUTIFUL?

Journey from Dera Ghazi Khan (West Pakistan) to Pondicherry

24 APRIL 2001, Darshan Day was a unique day this year for our family. An ardent and old devotee of the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo left his body in the Ashram precincts soon after the morning meditation. Could there be a more beautiful way of leaving this world and merging in the divine consciousness? It was amazing for us as much as it was a sheer joy for others to know.

Born in a remote small township of Dera Ghazi Khan on 28 July 1931 Bhushan Dhinra first visited the Ashram with his parents Moti Ram Dhinra and Savitri Devi. I also accompanied them when I was nine years old. This was in 1949 when we had the ecstatic experience of having the August Darshan of the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo. In 1970 the Divine Mother accepted our parents as inmates of the Ashram. Bhushan Bhैया's visits to Pondicherry became more frequent thereafter and also increased his inner and psychic closeness to the Divine Mother. Mother and Sri Aurobindo's writings or writings about them would easily bring tears of joy and delight from his eyes. His touching and illumining psychic experiences are now coming to light.

Destiny (as directed by the Divine Mother) brought Bhushan Bhैया to Pondicherry on a different mission this time. On Saturday, the 14 April (Baisakhi/New Year), our father left his body in the Ashram Nursing Home. Bhushan Bhैया, being the elder son, came here to perform our father's last rites. On the 22 April while exchanging experiences of life and sadhana with me he made a significant remark. He said that whenever he would leave his body he would do so in the holy city of Pondicherry, as our father had done.

Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother always grant the true prayers of the bhaktas. Does one need any more proof of it? Come 24 April 2001. Bhaktas from far and near have gathered in the Ashram near the Samadhi for the morning meditation, from 6.00 to 6.30. Prayers of the seekers, devotees, sadhaks are making the inner and outer atmosphere intense and vibrant. All around there is an intense and deep touch of devotion, ananda and silence. At 6.30 a.m.—marking the close of the meditation—is the usual resonant sound (4 times) of that *ghantā-nād*. The destined moment has arrived. Sitting on the southern corner of the cement bench below the Reading Room window Bhushan Bhैया takes the *urdhva shvās* (long breath) as in *prānāyām* and his consciousness goes and merges in the eternal consciousness of the Divine Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What a beautiful departure! How much sadhana and bhakti for such a death! Or, was it a death at all? That Bhैया was doing something like *prānāyām* was noticed and narrated to me by Montu-da.

Our revered Dyuman-bhai had written to Bhushan Dhinra on 7.9.87, after one of his visits to Pondicherry:

7 9 87

Well, dear Dhingra,
 you left me
 I follow you,
 together we shall go on the
 Sun lit path -
 Those who like to be with us
 we are companions to reach the summit
 Sudha, Karuna, Anil, Vandana,
 Dyuman.

Here mama - papa, Ved Meera
 are secured in the protection of the
 Mother in their path to the Ascent
 to the Truth.

(Well, dear Dhingra,
 you left me
 I follow you,
 together we shall go on the
 Sunlit path
 Those who like to be with us
 we are companions to reach the summit
 Sudha, Karuna, Anil, Vandana

Dyuman

(Here mama, papa, Ved, Meera are secure in the protection of the Mother
 on their path to the Ascent to the Truth)

What wonderful companions on the sunlit path! And how complete the Divine's
 protection for the bhaktas!

VED DHINGRA

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of August 2001)

MANY months before the Siddhi Day dated 24th November 1926, the disciples of the Ashram were experiencing an unusual intensity and pressure in the atmosphere as well as in their sadhana. They were led to an intuitive anticipation of an imminent descent. The names of those disciples who were present on 24th November 1926.

“(1) Bijoy Kumar Nag, (2) Nolini Kanta Gupta, (3) K. Amrita, (4) Moni (Suresh Chakravarty), (5) Pavitra (Phillippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire), (6) Barindra Kumar Ghose, (7) Datta (Miss Hodgson), (8) K. Rajangam, (9) Satyen, (10) A. B. Purani, (11) Lilavati (Purani’s wife), (12) Punamchand, (13) Champa Ben (Punamchand’s wife), (14) Rajani Kanta Palit, (15) Dr. Upendra Nath Banerjee, (16) Champaklal, (17) Kanailal Gangulee, (18) Khitish Chandra Dutta, (19) V. Chandra Shekharam, (20) Pujalal, (21) Purushottam Patel, (22) Rati Palit, (23) Rambhai Patel, (24) Nani Bala”¹

A. B. Purani describes the great day as follows:

“A feeling that the descent of the Higher Consciousness was about to take place grew in the minds of the many disciples either as a result of some indicative personal experience or owing to the general atmosphere. Many felt that great changes in the outer structure of the Ashram were about to occur. Instead of coming to the evening sitting at half-past four, the usual time, Sri Aurobindo came at six or seven, or eight o’clock. One day the record was two o’clock in the morning! It was evident that all his great energies were entirely taken up by the mighty task of bringing about the descent of the Higher Consciousness and that he did not want to lose or divert even a second of his time to anything else. Even though the work of maintaining an outer contact with the disciples was found useful, it was becoming more and more difficult in view of the growing demand upon his time for the inner work. Those who do not know anything about his great mission can hardly understand how concentrated and sincere was his application for attaining perfection in his divine task. In fact, people outside had already begun to be sceptical about any ‘practical’ result of his vast efforts. Even those who had built high hopes upon his spiritual effort and were his genuine admirers began to be disappointed. Some even cherished, in their ignorance, the foolish belief that Sri Aurobindo had lost his way in the barren regions of the Absolute, the Para Brahman, or that he was entangled somewhere in the inscrutable coils of the Infinite! They believed that Sri Aurobindo had lost his hold on the earth, and that he had become either indifferent or deaf to the pressing and burning problems of suffering humanity. If it was not so, why did he not rush to the help of humanity that was suffering so much with the saving balm of his divine help? When was such divine help more needed than now?”

“But, in spite of the apparent contradictions, those who were fortunate enough to live in his vicinity knew very well that the Higher Power that he was bringing

down was not only capable of but was actually producing practical results. His contact and identification with the Higher Power were so complete that he was able to put other people, whether near to him or far, in contact with it. There were almost daily instances of people being cured of physical illness by his help. Far from losing his way in the Absolute he was seeing his way more and more clearly every day and was feeling more and more the inevitability of the descent as a natural crown of the movement of evolution on earth. His disciples knew that there was no one on earth who had a deeper sympathy and feeling for humanity than the Master. The silent and solid help that was going out from him to humanity was glimpsed by them at times. They felt later, reading the line he wrote in *Savitri* about Aswapathy, 'His spirit's stillness helped the toiling world', that it was so true of his own life. What after all is that 'practicality' of which people speak so much? Claiming to solve problems, does it not really leave them either unsolved or half-solved while giving to the doer a false sense of satisfaction and self-complacency? In fact, the Supreme Master had such a firm grip over the earth that such illusionary satisfaction could never deceive him. For him *karmasu kauśalam* (skill in action) consisted in acting from a higher Truth-Consciousness. He did not want to begin outer action so long as the Higher Consciousness did not descend into the physical and even into the gross material consciousness. Only so could a new life, a life that manifests integrally the Divine, be embodied. In the fulfilment of the spiritual work that he had begun lies the ultimate solution of all human problems.

"Days, months and years passed; but Sri Aurobindo did not seem at all in a hurry to begin his work. He was all along preparing the possibility of the descent of the Higher Power. The resistance of the powers of Ignorance against any such attempt is naturally immense. In one evening talk he said that he was engaged in the tremendous task of opening up the physical cells to the Divine Light and the resistance of the Inconscient was formidable. When one knows that all this Herculean labour was undertaken not for himself but for humanity, for making a new departure for man in the course of his evolution then one feels that the words he later used of Savitri, "The world unknowing, for the world she stood", are so very apposite in his own case. It was therefore natural that when, by the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the disciples also felt the nearness of the descent, their hearts should be full of expectant and concentrated enthusiasm.

"From the beginning of November 1926 the pressure of the Higher Power began to be unbearable. Then at last the great day, the day for which the Mother had been waiting for so many long years, arrived on 24 November. The sun had almost set, and everyone was occupied with his own activity—some had gone out to the seaside for a walk—when the Mother sent round word to all the disciples to assemble as soon as possible in the verandah where the usual meditation was held. It did not take long for the message to go round to all. By six o'clock most of the disciples had gathered. It was becoming dark. In the verandah on the wall near Sri Aurobindo's door, just behind his chair, a black silk curtain with gold lace work representing three Chinese

dragons was hung. The three dragons were so represented that the tail of one reached up to the mouth of another and the three of them covered the curtain from end to end. We came to know afterwards that there is a prophecy in China that the Truth will manifest itself on earth when the three dragons (the dragons of the earth, of the mind region and of the sky) meet. Today on 24 November the Truth was descending and the hanging of the curtain was significant.

“There was a deep silence in the atmosphere after the disciples had gathered there. Many saw an oceanic flood of Light rushing down from above. Everyone present felt a kind of pressure above his head. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with some electrical energy. In that silence, in that atmosphere full of concentrated expectation and aspiration, in the electrically charged atmosphere, the usual, yet on this day quite unusual, tick was heard behind the door of the entrance. Expectation rose in a flood. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could be seen through the half-opened door. The Mother with a gesture of her eyes requested Sri Aurobindo to step out first. Sri Aurobindo with a similar gesture suggested to her to do the same. With a slow dignified step the Mother came out first, followed by Sri Aurobindo with his majestic gait. The small table that used to be in front of Sri Aurobindo’s chair was removed this day. The Mother sat on a small stool to his right.

“Silence absolute, living silence—not merely living but overflowing with divinity. The meditation lasted about forty-five minutes. After that one by one the disciples bowed to the Mother.

“She and Sri Aurobindo gave blessings to them. Whenever a disciple bowed to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo’s right hand came forward behind the Mother’s as if blessing him through the Mother. After the blessings, in the same silence there was a short meditation.

“In the interval of silent meditation and blessings many had distinct experiences. When all was over they felt as if they had awakened from a divine dream. Then they felt the grandeur, the poetry and the absolute beauty of the occasion. It was not as if a handful of disciples were receiving blessings from their Supreme Master and the Mother in one little corner of the earth. The significance of the occasion was far greater than that. It was certain that a Higher Consciousness had descended on earth. In that deep silence had burgeoned forth, like the sprout of a banyan tree, the beginning of a mighty spiritual work. This momentous occasion carried its significance to all in the divine dynamism of the silence, in its unearthly dignity and grandeur and in the utter beauty of its every little act. The deep impress of divinity which everyone got was for him a priceless treasure.

“Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went inside. Immediately Datta was inspired. In that silence she spoke: ‘The Lord has descended into the physical today.’

“That 24 November should be given an importance equal to that of the birthdays of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is quite proper because on that day the descent of the Higher Power symbolic of the victory of their mission took place. The Delight consciousness in the Overmind which Sri Krishna incarnated—as Avatar—descended

on this day into the physical, rendering possible the descent of the Supermind in Matter.’’²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, A B Purani, p 213
- 2 *Ibid*, pp 214-16

SOCRATES'S PRISON

AN American archaeologist believes that he has identified the prison where Socrates spent the last month of his life and was executed on charges of corrupting the youth of Athens in 399 B C

‘‘The evidence falls short of formal proof,’’ said Eugene Vanderpool, Professor of Archaeology emeritus at the American School of Classical Studies ‘‘But it seems to take account of all we know It’s a good guess’’

The prison is one of the most famous buildings of classical Athens, the scene of two major Socratic dialogues, the *Crito* and the *Phaedo* It was here that Socrates met with his loyal friends and refused their offer to help him escape

He made a covenant with the State to uphold the law, Socrates told them, and even if the law had been applied unfairly, ‘we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him.’’

Vanderpool, 69, first came to Greece in 1932 and has worked here almost continuously ever since According to the *Phaedo*, he noted in an interview, ‘‘the prison was near the law courts of Athens, but the precise site has always eluded scholars. Tourists are usually told that it was located in a nearby place

The building identified by Vanderpool lies in the southwest corner of the ancient Agora, or market, at the end of the Acropolis It was first discovered in 1949 and was dated to the 5th century B.C. by pottery found on the floor Archaeologists could never determine its function, however, and it was vaguely described as a public building and then forgotten Today it is little more than a pile of gray limestone blocks overgrown with weeds

One morning last winter, Vanderpool picked up a copy of the *Phaedo*, which

describes the death of Socrates. A classics scholar at Princeton, Class of 1929, the professor likes to read some ancient Greek everyday, just to keep in practice.

He came to the passage where Socrates takes a bath before drinking the hemlock. The words stirred his memory. That building near the Agora, he recalled, had bathing facilities in one room—a small basin in the corner and a large storage jar sunk into the floor.

Perhaps Socrates had the “royal suite, so to speak, a room with a bath,” joked Vanderpool. After all, he noted, the philosopher was a special prisoner with wealthy friends. Crito describes how he did the jailer a favour to gain admittance to Socrates’s cell.

The professor consulted the original field reports of the 1949 season compiled by the late Margaret Croshy. One entry described 13 small jars found at the bottom of a cistern, and the picture “jumped out at me,” he said.

The vessels are usually described as medicine jars, but few of them were found elsewhere in the Agora. Such a large number could have been kept in the prison for the express purpose of administering poison, Vanderpool reasoned.

The photograph of another discovery caught his eye, a small statue of a bearded man. The figure was very similar, the professor realized, to a well-known statue of Socrates in the British Museum.

“After they executed Socrates the Athenians immediately had qualms,” noted Vanderpool. “We also know they liked to have images of philosophers around, like icons. We can speculate that’s why they had this statue in the building.”

(Courtesy: New York Times News Service)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

The Mother: The Story of Her Life by *Georges Van Vrekhem*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2000, pp 545, Hard Cover, price Rs 495 00

‘IN 1998, it was twenty-five years since the Mother had left her body, and I found not a single one-volume biography of her that was handy, unbiased and up to date. As I had just finished translating *Beyond Man* from the original Dutch into English, I decided to write this kind of biography in homage of the Mother. I thought I had sufficient material to finish the job in something like six months, but it took me more than two years’, says Georges Van Vrekhem, who joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1970 and Auroville in 1978, on the eve of the Mother’s Centenary.

This biography, simply called ‘The Mother: The Story of Her Life’, and beautifully published by HarperCollins Publishers India, is now before us. It comprises 545 pages and is divided into three parts: ‘Convergent Roads’, ‘The Road together’, ‘The Road alone’. It must have been a challenge to write a biography that, compared with the biographical materials in ‘Beyond Man’, would stand on its own. Now having read both books, we may say that Van Vrekhem has been fully successful in his enterprise. Far from reading like a rehash, it reads like a novel—an extremely interesting and eventful one at that—and keeps one spellbound from beginning to end.

Typical of this biography is that the author has taken great care to put the events in the Mother’s life against their historical background. The Paris of the Mother’s youth with its circuses and artists, the two visits to the Théons in Tlemcen, the world around Sri Aurobindo during his first years in Pondicherry, the Mother’s friendship with Alexandra David-Néel, the years with Paul Richard in Japan, life in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram: it all comes alive, sketched with a sense of detail and enlivened, where suitable, with a pinch of humour. A second point is that Van Vrekhem clearly considers the people and the disciples in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s life as an integral part of their Work. Most of the more prominent ones are given their due and some, like Barindra, Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother, become unforgettable.

There is a lot of new material which proves to be extremely interesting. We read here for the first time about the actual meaning of the church murals in Pau, about the activities of Max and Alma Théon before they moved to Algeria, about the writings of Richard in Japan, about the problems some disciples had in accepting a French lady as their guru, et cetera. Revealing is the section ‘Pathways for the dead’ in the chapter ‘Explorations of the Occult’, where Van Vrekhem writes that it was Mirra Alfassa who, around the beginning of the 20th century, established the ‘pathways’ for the dead now well known from the near-death experiences, this being one of the tasks for which she had incarnated.

A very special chapter is the one on ‘The Mother’s Reincarnations’, a subject never worked out in the other biographies of her. Van Vrekhem has taken the

incarnations explicitly confirmed by the Mother herself and studied them historically in great detail. The summary he makes at the end of the chapter, comparing the reincarnations and placing them in the context of the Mother's avataric mission, is very impressive indeed and even moving. No doubt, the story of the lives of Queen Tiy, "King" Hatchepsut, the Maid of Orleans, Mona Lisa, the Virgin Queen, and Catherine II of Russia, will keep the reader spellbound and make him see history with different eyes.

"When writing this biography," the author says, "I often had India in mind, this special country where most of the Mother's life was lived and that still knows so little about her. I dreamt of the day that the book would be in bookshops in India, with as its simple title in big characters THE MOTHER, and a photo of her as she looked when I had the privilege to meet her in the last years of her life." This dream has now been realised. One should however not forget the subtitle of the book "A Story of Her Life." That Van Vrekhem is a great storyteller is well-known among the many Aurovilian children, now grown-ups, who have been his students. We find this confirmed again in the book under review. The language reads smoothly and the story keeps flowing, so much so that one wants to go on reading. But on every page there are also the insights and pointers to the deeper reality of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's life, the one Avatar in two bodies, something Georges Van Vrekhem never loses sight of.

ANONYMOUS

Splitting the Difference-Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India by Wendy Doniger, University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 376, paperback with notes, bibliography, index. Price \$ 20.00

With the European colonization of India, western scholars noticed a commonality between the Hellenic and the Indian mythologies and sought to establish that this was a consequence of Greek traditions filtering through to India with Alexander's invasion. A British army officer even wrote a study showing that the Ramayana story had been borrowed from Homer (after all, Alexander is supposed to have slept with a copy of the Iliad under his pillow).

The similarities between Helen and Sita are not a new discovery. Aware of this, Doniger begins with Helen but quickly switches to what is her new contribution to Indological studies: the Rig Vedic myth of Martanda, the "dead egg", named Vivasvant the Sun, and his wife Saranyu-Samjna. She suggests that both Helen, the adulteress, and Sita, the chaste wife, have their model in Saranyu who is sexually ambivalent. Doniger brings in the modern comparison with Bram Stoker's Lucy who is prim during the day and a lascivious vampire by night. It is by night that Helen tries to trap the Greeks hidden within the wooden horse, Svaha-like with Agni (a com-

parison Doniger misses) assuming the persona of their wives. Doniger does not notice that when the disguised Ravana approaches Sita, he begins with an elaborate description of her physical charms. Sita does not sense something wrong in a sage using such language, but proceeds to engage in dialogue, like Ahalya revelling in Indra's praise, climaxing in the rape. In her hidden sexuality she resembles Helen who is, of course, much more open about it. Both are *ayonija*, not of woman born. If Sita is immured in the earth, Ahalya is petrified. Doniger fails to study the myth of Sita's transformation into Shakti for slaying the thousand-headed Ravana who knocks Rama unconscious, which offers further insights into the complicated mystique of the feminine. Rama, terrified as Arjuna of Krishna's Vishvarupa, prays to her to resume her familiar form. Saranyu is also linked to Demeter who changes into a mare to avoid Poseidon but is raped by him in stallion form. Like Helen, she is linked to semi-immortal twin brothers/sons [the Dioscuri and the Ashvins]. Doniger provides a valuable hint of why the Ashvins are called Nasatyas, possibly akin to the Greek verb *nes* connoting returning to life and light. That is why Nasatyas are "retrievers" and recover the daughter of the Sun, Surya. Doniger's analysis takes us back to mankind's origins. Immortal Saranyu, wedded to the Sun that dies daily, gave birth to Manu, the first man, and to Yama, lord of the dead. Saranyu's aversion to her ill-shaped or ill-favoured spouse leads to the creation of the shadow self Savarna [like herself] and her own transformation into equine form. This is where Doniger brings back Helen and introduces Sita, throwing around them the common myth of the shadow-self whereby Helen approaches the chastity characterising Sita. In one version, Paris is supposed to have assumed the form of Menelaus [like Indra assuming Gautama's form before Ahalya] leaving Helen blameless in the seduction. This absorbing presentation is enriched by comparisons with little known Japanese and Indonesian myths and analysing how the Saranyu myth is presented to modern Indian children in comic book format.

Next, she proceeds to study the myths of Indra-Ahalya and Zeus-Alcmena. The theme of doubling and the dilemma of which is the real self recurs along with the male myth-maker's predilection to condemn the woman, wondering whether she was at all truly deceived, suspecting that innately she is the dark one who manoeuvres to satisfy her sexual desires [Pandora and *la belle dame sans merci*]. There is an interesting parallel to Zeus disguised as Amphitryon and Indra as Gautama in the tale of Agni who becomes the Brahmin Suvarcha to woo Bhasvati. The mortal maid rejects the god, as in the other Greek and Indian myths, preferring his mortal disguise. The Indra-Ahalya story has a very interesting parallel in that of Ruchi, wife of the sage Devasharma, who longs to be seduced by the eager Indra, but is saved by the faithful disciple Vipula who occultly enters her body and prevents her from responding. In both cases, the ascetic's wife is curious about sexual intimacy with a celestial. But there is an interesting aftermath. Vipula sees two symbols and realises that during the act of possession his genitals had touched his guru's wife's. Subodh Ghose used this hint in his retelling of this story (*Bharat Prem Katha*), as Candra

Rajan does in her poem on Ahalya, to provide a brilliant psychological reinterpretation of ancient myth. The opposite of this is found in the myth of Shrutavati who mortifies herself through incessant austerities to win Indra as her spouse, like Vedavati for Vishnu. Indra tests her by disguising himself as Vashishtha and setting her to cook magical berries. Running out of kindling, Shrutavati uses her own body as fuel. This is the original of the folk tale Doniger cites of the ghost-wife using her own legs as cooking fuel. Failing to acquire their celestial beloveds, both Vedavati and Shrutavati immolate themselves. Similarly, the *femme fatale* theme is paralleled in the tale of Sushobhana, the *mundaka* princess, who makes a career out of seducing men and leaving them forlorn by disappearing in frog form, till she meets her match in Parikshit who launches a holocaust of frogs, forcing them to give her up to him. Here, like Pandora, Sushobhana turns out to be the nemesis not only of men, but also of her own race.

Changing tack, Doniger studies Penelope and Odysseus side-by-side Nala and Damayanti. Here is a different type of woman, intelligent and faithful, who uses strategy to recognise her disguised husband and win him back. Part of this is the fascinating conundrum of how to distinguish a human from a god, for which she seeks clues in the story of Cyavana and Sukanya, in the film *Total Recall*, and the even more fascinating question: why prefer a human to a god? She could have added here how the disguise of the Pandavas is seen through by Krishna, although he has never met them. Krishna's is a Sherlock Holmesian deduction, which forms a fitting complement to the hints by which Sukanya and Damayanti make out their spouses. Doniger points out that the male rejects the immortal female [Arjuna/Urvashi, Odysseus/Calypso, Enkidu/Ishtar, Cephalus/Aurora], while the female at times chooses the immortal mistaking him for mortal owing to the disguise [Ahalya/Indra, Alcmena/Zeus]. Most of the Indian myths she studies have been retold with superb psychological insight by the eminent Bengali novelist, Subodh Ghose, in *Bharat Prem Katha* whose study would have benefited Doniger. Her impeccable scholarship takes a tumble when she refers to Urvashi instead of Shakuntala as "the mother of Bharata." In preferring the mortal, woman shows her inability to withstand the inhumanity it takes to become immortal, unchanging, barren. Doniger provides an extremely refreshing and telling symbol in *The Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy prefers her real home to the magical world of fantasy. The point is that goddesses bring death to mortal men, while women prefer death to immortality—it is the female who is responsible for death. However, she does not take the discussion farther to include Saranyu's twin sons fathering twins on Madri (mortal woman choosing the immortal equine twins—the exact opposite of Sukanya—going on to become the immediate cause of her husband's death and then immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre). Analogous is the case of Kunti, a mortal who can *compel* any immortal to her bidding, a unique character in Indo-European myth. Both are examples that stand outside the paradigm Doniger seeks to build, of the mortal woman unwilling to succumb to the immortal's desire. Nor does she explore the similarity between Ganga

and Kunti, immortal female and mortal woman, who consign their firstborns to the river Kunti consigns her sun-born son to sure death in the river and is responsible for his death by concealing his true birth Similarly, Thetis is responsible for the death of her son Achilles who, Karna-like, blazes like the sun in his divinely forged armour, by leaving that vulnerable spot on his heel while immersing him headfirst (drowning him?) into the river It is surprising that Doniger omits the pertinent tale of Tulsī and the demon Shankhachuda invincible because of his wife's chastity Vishnu took the shape of Shankhachuda and bedded Tulsī, leading to the demon's decapitation The consequence is significant Tulsī, like Daphne, turns into a plant after she transforms Vishnu, by her curse, into stone (Saligram)—a reversal of the Ahalya situation, with the deceiving god being petrified, while the woman escapes from her raped self by assuming a different form But as Daphne—laurel is inevitably linked with Apollo, so is Tulsī an indispensable part of worshipping Saligram—Vishnu

The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the intriguing theme of beheaded women and men, and the transposing of heads on different bodies The myth of Renuka is compared with that of Scylla and the symbol of Chinnamasta who carries her severed head in one hand, with the core issue of schizophrenia analysed through Bram Stoker's *Lucy* The medieval legend of the Lamia would have provided valuable insights had Doniger analysed it The myths of Chinnamasta and Renuka need to be studied alongside the Bacchic maenads who, in Dionysian frenzy, rip off their husbands'/sons' heads, for this Greek myth is exactly the opposite of the Indian She provides a fascinating comparison of the male instance from the *Vetalapancavimsati* with the fictional Dorian Gray, Jekyll and Hyde While discussing the phenomenon of split personalities and of sex change, Doniger does not take up the myth of Ardhanarishvar, the hermaphrodite, so akin to Greek myth This form, half male-half female, appeared when Shiva embraced Vishnu-Mohini passionately Doniger provides a long extract from Vilas Sarang's amazing tale, "The Bottom Half of a Woman" but misses one of the most apt modern renderings of this concept: Edgar Rice Burroughs in his *Chessmen of Mars* creates heads with spider like chelae that choose a body according to their need, while the bodies, like the torso-less entities of Vilas Sarang, lead a mute animal existence These heads literally possess the bodies, like Sindbad's Old Man, and remind us of the tales of possession that figure in world mythology, including male spirits possessing women's bodies How often does one hear these days, "I am a woman trapped in a man's body!"

In the split personality/transposed heads/doubles discussion, Doniger spans the gamut from Stevenson and Oscar Wilde to Hollywood [*Face Off*, *Dark Mirror*, *A Stolen Life*, *Dead Ringer*, *Double Impact*, *3 Faces of Eve*, *Shattered*, *Total Recall*] She even includes *Superman-I*, the modern version of a god involved with a mortal woman, and quotes a hilarious piece by Larry Niven describing the danger if the Kryptonian bedded Lois Lane. She could have added that as Saranyu/Alcmene found the radiance of Vivasvant/Zeus unbearable, so did Ganga who had to cast Shiva's seed out on the reeds, finding it literally "too hot to handle" as Larry Niven forecasts

Kryptonian semen would be for Lois Lane. And why does she forget Semele who was burnt to ashes by Zeus' radiance? Doniger misses out *Superman-III*, where the hero gets split into an evil double who is typically unshaven, dissipated and keeps company with the vamp, providing a 1980s version of Jekyll and Hyde. She also overlooks the very powerful portrayal of Batman in films that conflate the darkness and terror of Dracula with a moral purpose—man donning evil's garb to fight evil. The comic books have taken this a step further by turning the vampire figure itself into a friend of law and justice. The entire genre of comic book heroes, starting with the masked Phantom [significantly 'the Ghost who cannot die'] and The Lone Ranger, down to the legion of super heroes, depicts the apotheosis of the alter-ego concept in the American imagination.

The final chapter deals with bisexual transformation in India and Europe. One of the most engrossing insights Doniger provides is how Kali reincarnates as Krishna while Shiva takes birth as Radha to savour the delights of a different sexual existence. Doniger's conclusion is that women in Hindu myths are more akin to Greek women than to their own men. Penelope testing Odysseus is much more like Damayanti confronting Nala than another Greek like Menelaus when he faces Helen. Thus, gender is seen to transcend culture, in that women across different civilizations resemble each other more than men in their own cultures. In a way, Culture is seen as the shadow of Gender.

Engrossing and impressive as the book is, there are a few points that Doniger seems to have missed. One is surprised to find the only instance in mythology of a woman split five ways—Draupadi—missing from the discussions. Besides this, Draupadi has to split herself into three contradictory roles with five brothers' wife, mother (as spouse of elder brother) and daughter (as spouse of younger brother), changing the roles every year. The brothers themselves have to ring changes in their roles as spouse, father-like and son-like, matching her shifting persona. There is a treasury of prohibited relationships here deserving analysis. Draupadi is not only *ayonija* like Ahalya, Sita and Athene, springing full grown from the sacrificial altar, but also has a twin in the warrior Dhrishtadyumna, who compensates Drupada for his offspring Shikhandi, woman-turned man. Moreover, Doniger ought to have noticed that Draupadi is the reincarnation of Vedavati who became the shadow-Sita.

Professor Doniger's latest work is an astonishingly gripping book. Into an intensely erudite examination of comparative mythology that could have become turgid reading, she infuses a style that sparkles with wit, revelations that startle, unexpected comparisons that surprise with joy. Her stated purpose is to show that "myth responds to the complexities of the human condition by splitting its characters into two unequal halves—centring on two primal topics—sex and death." The splitting is not only of oneself, but also of others to get what they want or to avoid some eventuality. The myths investigated brilliantly and presented so engrossingly are shown to serve another purpose—to enable men and women to express their creativity in envisaging possible futures that transcend the traditional norms and expectations by constructing

other selves to live in. Thus, stories have been used, Doniger writes, "to storm the oppressive barricades of gender and culture"

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

(*Courtesy: Biblio*, March-April 2001)

Leadership and the New Science by Margaret J. Wheatley, Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers, pages 197, price US\$ 24.95

[About the author: Margaret J. Wheatley is president of the Berkana Institute, a non-profit educational and scientific research foundation supporting the discovery of new organizational forms. She is also principal in Kellner-Rogers & Wheatley Inc, an international education and consulting firm applying principles of living systems to human organizations. They believe that organizations that have a coherent identity and seek out the intelligence and commitment of all people are capable of adapting and thriving in these chaotic times. Their clients encompass an unusually wide variety of organizations, from Fortune 500 corporations, to healthcare, public education, universities, religious organizations, government and non-profits, both in the U.S. and globally. She is also co-author (with Myron Kellner-Rogers) of the bestselling *Simpler Way*.]

Introduction

The purpose of this thought-piece is twofold. First, to draw out some of the key ideas in Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science*. Second, to create a more sound foundation for the material she has referred to and put in place, by supplementing it with other ways to look at it. These objectives are not necessarily addressed in that order, but may be intermingled, so as to be presented in an organic fashion.

Overview

Leadership and the New Science proposes that the running of organizations should be based on some methods other than they currently are. These methods are those derived from the New Science, which reflects a model of the Universe radically different from that which we may commonly conceive of. The power of this book is in the explanation of some of the findings of the New Science, and more importantly in the suggestion of applying these findings to more effectively run today's organizations.

To begin with, this book is based on the supposition that the world-view we work from is strongly anchored in the Natural Sciences. The book states that "each of us lives and works in organizations designed from Newtonian images of the universe." Specifically, "we manage by separating things into parts, we believe that

influence occurs as a direct result of force exerted from one person to another, we engage in complex planning for a world that we keep expecting to be predictable, and we search continually for better methods of objectively measuring and perceiving the world'' Whilst this forms the basis of our current corporate design and action, yet it is rooted in 17th century Science which itself was a vastly different figure than it is today

Wheatley has made the argument that Science is the cause of our world view, and implies that because Science itself has now created a radically different model of Existence, it is necessary for organizations to follow suit and also begin to rethink their model of reality This cause-effect analysis needs to be further examined The truth is that reality is infinite possibility Of the ever-evolving range of possibilities, the Newtonian rendering in terms of both Science and Organization pressed upon practical manifestation simultaneously One did not occur before the other, nor was one the 'cause' of the other It is just that scientists, working more with the mind than businessmen or government, opened to the possibility of mechanistic thinking first Businessmen followed after that with the rendering of that reality into the designs of their organizations Similarly today, it is not because scientists have defined a different view of reality that businessmen and organizational designers need to follow suit, but because it is an inevitable play from the infinite that is pressing forth onto practical manifestation that it needs to be fulfilled

Co-evolution

A very important point she brings out is that in the realm of New Science "there is a new kind of freedom, where it is more rewarding to explore than to reach conclusions, more satisfying to wonder than to know, and more exciting to search than to stay put". There are no recipes or formulas, no checklists or expert advice that describe reality. Everything is always new and different and unique to each of us, and ideas and information are just half of what is required to evoke reality More importantly, creative possibility depends on one's engagement with ideas Therefore, the world co-evolves as we interact with it.

This idea of co-evolution is very powerful Depending on the choices we make, on the thoughts we think, and on the way we act, a different reality begins to precipitate From the range of possibilities that exist, that are ever present in that matrix of infinity, a certain possibility or set of possibilities will begin to manifest depending on the character of the interaction between us and it She posits that the idea that a certain defined and complete reality exists, and if tapped into will solve all our issues, is invalid. The idea that there is one right answer that can be applied universally is invalid Instead, our own vision and commitment will create reality, because we are part of a Systemic Whole that itself creates in response to every element that is a part of it

This idea is already a powerful step in releasing us from the restrictive bonds that limit our thought and actions, and in moving us beyond the current frames of

reference that keeps many of us captive. Yet, it represents part of the actuality. For, the reality is that Life already had a certain implicit direction even before the arrival of the Human, evident in the systematic progression from inanimate matter, through single-celled organisms, through plants, animals, to the forms of life before humans. There is Intelligence in the system, which, in fact, has been responsible for pushing to the surface even the construct of the human, and has further given it the qualities that allow it to have a special place in the process of evolution. The truer statement therefore, is that there is a certain intention present in the play of possibilities, which will take a shorter or longer time to manifest, depending on the quality and wholeness of the interactions that humans have with it. Through opening to this Systemic Whole, and interacting with it in that state of openness, the most powerful and fulfilling reality can manifest, because then it is the Intelligence that pervades the Whole that is at the helm of movement.

Chaos & Order

This idea of Intent in the Whole is in fact consistent with an idea that Wheatley introduces later on in the book about Chaos Theory. It has been found that free systems are in fact held within boundaries that are well ordered and predictable. Therefore, nothing is ever 'chaotic', in the sense that we have come to think of chaos. A chaotic system plotted over time will in fact reveal an order in its chaos. This plot is known as the Strange Attractor. This indicates, empirically, that there is almost an implicit design and intention in the running of systems.

Further, drawing on the work of Ilya Prigogine, 1977 recipient of the Nobel Prize for chemistry, Wheatley points out that chemical systems reorganize themselves into greater order when confronted with changes in the environment. Prigogine demonstrated that any open system has the capacity to respond to change and disorder by reorganizing itself at a higher level of organization. Threat, danger, stimulus help the system recreate itself. Prigogine coined the term "dissipative structures" to describe the contradictory nature of these newly discovered systems. Prigogine discovered that dissipative activity of loss was necessary to create new order. Dissipation was part of the process by which the system let go of its present form so that it could reorganize into a new form better suited to its changing environment. If anything disturbed the system, it would bring it inside its network. Once inside it may continue to become a larger disturbance until it crosses a certain threshold and disturbs the system to such an extent that the system dissolves. However, because the system has an innate sense of identity, it leverages the situation caused by the disturbance to evolve a more complex form of itself that is better able to deal with similar disturbances in the future. So in fact, in living systems disorder is a source of new order.

This is a far cry from the current response of organizations to any threat internal or external. Instead of becoming a more complex entity, an organization will, under the pressure of short-term commitments, often cutback on its work force in order to respond to a perceived threat. If it were to follow the cue of open systems, it would

instead reorganize itself without cutting off any of itself, and overcome the perceived threat. In a certain sense Nature rewards a system that is able to assimilate and become greater. Companies that lay-off and cut back, often themselves become extinct. So do civilizations that try to become too uniform. Japanese companies that have spun off rather than laid off 'undesirable' segments, have in fact been immensely rewarded through the unanticipated future success of these supposedly 'useless' segments.

Related to order is the idea of process structures—things that sustain their identity over time yet are not locked into any one rigid form. In Nature there are myriad examples of this kind of adaptability—for example in the case of "streams, which have more than one response to rocks." Yet, in organizations there is a rigid reliance on single forms and best practices. Once a form or structure has been created to address an issue, that structure can take on permanence and be referred to ad infinitum, even when it has lost its validity. In some sense, there is little reliance on intent, on the ambition or hidden streams of realization. This whole aspect of inner force is often not latched into, instead the focus is on forms. Yet, to even enter into a frame where there is more reliance on the vision and less concern with the outward forms, requires a deeper relationship with life—a relationship where the reliance on outward form becomes secondary to the essence or drive that is contained within it. But to even recognize that necessitates that one recognize it in oneself first. Wheatley refers to some Goethean methods, based on developing intuitive, holistic thinking, for entering into a different kind of relationship with life.

Wheatley points out the inadequacy of analytical methods to solve current problems of any kind. "But is that surprising, given the complex nature of reality, which we are only beginning to get a sense for?" She asks. While our sense for the complexity of reality is beginning to change, especially through the work of natural scientists, our methodologies to deal with them are still rooted in the methods of the 17th century. Reality is revealing itself as a large, completely connected system, which has an Intelligence of its own. Yet, we break everything into parts and try to understand the individual pieces. Further, we do not reflect upon the Whole, nor do we even in minuscule fashion appreciate the role it plays in each of the parts. A whole different way of perceiving the Wholeness and the play of the part in that Wholeness is required. To reiterate, even when it seems that there is chaos, there is actually order, when one perceives differently. And that shift in perception allows one to act that much more effectively.

It is important to point out that Wheatley ascribes much of today's maladies to the Newtonian and Cartesian view of the Universe. Yet, those world-views did have their place and did prepare an analytical bent of mind in humans. The process of analytic thinking has created elements in the mind which enable a human to have a more complex relationship with the Wholeness, in that there is now a more complex structure of mind with which to grasp the Wholeness. Both holistic and analytic thinking are, therefore, necessary for a higher level of effectiveness.

Fuzziness

Wheatley contemplates the relative importance of individual versus the system. Which of the two has more influence? She concludes that relationship between two or more elements is what is more important, and what may be evoked in present reality is a function of the relationships that are present at the moment. This leads her to believe that there is an inherent fuzziness in situations. Nothing can be known. Outcomes are dependent on the situation. She further bolsters her position through citing what physicists have found to be an inherent 'fuzziness' in the universe. This she says is due to the fact that matter is inherently two-faced. It is important to point out here that her arguments parallel the findings of natural scientists, and in many instances even conform to them. This is an oversimplification of the situation.

Looking in more detail at the 'fuzziness' of physicists, we see that it has come about because physicists may tend to view matter to be the starting point and basis of all phenomena. Yet in reality it is not the starting but the end-point. It is the end-point because matter is the final amongst many layers of reality. While scientists have begun to realize the presence of an overarching and connected system, they have not yet attributed to it the depth of its being, in terms of the multiple 'views' or layers that make it up. As a result, they have reached the conclusion that matter is "fundamentally two-faced: acting either as particle or as wave". The fact is that matter is a condensation of that which stands behind it, and further, can even be thought of as the meeting point of several 'layers' or realities. In fact, when matter is viewed as a wave, in reality what is being viewed is a subtler layer, which stands behind the more easily viewed material layer. When matter is viewed as a particle, what is being viewed is the more material aspect in matter. Further, each individual too is made of 'layers' that correspond to the layers of the Whole. When a physicist says therefore that the outcome of an experiment is influenced by what the observer wants to see, what he actually means is that the action of 'mund', which is a more subtle layer of reality, and which is intricately interconnected with 'mind' in the Whole and with 'mind' in matter, has acted through its own law to invoke a certain response in the way matter appears. There is actually nothing 'fuzzy' about this. The only 'fuzziness' is in the model and perception of reality that the physicists hold in their own minds. Wheatley has unfortunately been disproportionately influenced by the physicist's incomplete conclusions. The real issue has not been uncovered, and conveniently the reason for results is attributed to inherent 'fuzziness' in the universe. How can a universe where even chaos turns out to be order be fuzzy? It cannot. Fuzziness means that we are fuzzy, and need to change our world-view to know what is actually happening.

The root of the physicists' problems and therefore in Wheatley's conclusion lies in the attribution of 'process' as being the root cause. Process, the observed behavior of systems and parts, is only a surface dynamic. Things happen, not because of the process, but because of a deeper intent that lies behind the process. That is what needs to be tapped into to truly know, and to truly solve.

Enactment

Another powerful idea that has been expressed in the book is that of Karl Weick, an organizational theorist. Karl Weick drew attention to an organizational phenomenon he calls 'enactment' "The environment that the organization worries about is put there by the organization," he says. That is, the environment is co-created through our acts of observation, what we choose to notice and worry about. The implication of this is that there is no objective reality 'out there'. Therefore, there is no right or wrong. If one developed sensitivity to this realization, time would not be wasted on trying to figure out who's right or wrong. Instead, focus could be directed on issues of effectiveness.

What is happening here, in terms of the dynamics of being, is that we are moving from a certain layer of our being, to a deeper, more constructive layer. We are moving out of the layer where blame, fear, anger, hate, insecurity exist—in a sense the 'emotional' layer, to a deeper layer where reason, intelligence, objective thinking—the 'mental' or 'conceptual' layer become active. When that layer becomes active in us, through the power of interconnectedness it becomes active in the organization, and a progressively different reality begins to come to the surface. As one moves from the 'emotional' to the 'conceptual' layer in oneself, greater degrees of freedom are felt. Acting from emotion may lock us into a certain way of being where we do not examine new possibilities for their merits, but just reactively, based on preconceived bias and preference, decide on what to do. When we act in this manner, we manifest forces from this realm of the Whole, and the organization becomes like that too. On the other hand, when we act from the layer of 'mind', we see in each thing more of the truth that is represented in it, in a more unbiased and complete fashion. We naturally begin to choose what is right, rather than what is preferred, and a different kind of organizational reality manifests. Needless to say, we also pull similar forces from the Whole, which therefore creates more leverageable points of possibility in our created environments.

Weick has also introduced the idea of acting before planning. It is only when we act to implement something that we create the environment. This is counter to our notion of strategic planning, where it seems we are acting in response to a demand in the environment. In reality, he argues, "we create the environment through our own intentions." He implies that strategies should be 'just in time', supported by more investment in general knowledge and trust in intuition. Thinkers such as Mintzberg have furthered this notion by thinking in terms of 'strategic thinking' rather than 'strategic planning'—rather than being able to predict it is more important to be aware, and to react effortlessly. Even Jack Welch, Wheatley points out, has stated that it is more important to react than to predict.

If indeed, as the New Science seems to be indicating, each of the parts is intricately connected to the Whole, and further, at some deep level seems to determine and be determined by the Whole, then Weick's idea that one's intent can create the environment holds water. Yet, we are confronted with a chicken-and-the-egg

problem—was it a necessity in the evolution of the Whole that has manifested an idea which finds expression in an individual, or is it that the individual has come up with an idea, which then in some sense puts pressure on the Whole to create a certain environment where that idea can find fulfilment? Either way, if the idea has originated from a deeper layer of being, where the separation between part and Whole collapses, because of the ‘depth’ of its intent, it will probably manifest and an environment will be created where it can work itself to completion. If however, the idea or intent originated from a more surface layer in the individual, then it is likely tied to a personal and possibly selfish need, and will be only one intent vying against the myriad selfish intents of countless parts, to find expression therefore with far greater difficulty.

Fields

Another important idea she brings forward, which is a result of observations in the quantum world, is that small local actions can have global effects. There is a predisposition to imagine that a critical mass is required for any change to occur. However, Wheatley points out, the quantum view explains the success of small efforts quite differently. Changes in small places have an effect on the global system because every small system participates in an unbroken whole. Thus, if one organization makes some change, it is now easier for all organizations to make the same change, because in a sense the ‘imprint’ of that change is now subtly available in the appropriate layer of the Whole. This idea is akin to Sheldrake’s idea of ‘Morphic Fields’, from his work in biology. Morphic fields are built up through the skills that accumulate as members of the same species learn something new. Behavior collects in the morphic field, and when an individual’s energy combines with it, the field patterns the behavior of the individual. Skill thus is pulled from the field.

In fact, scientists today are beginning to perceive the Universe as comprising a number of fields. Scientists have not yet classified the fields into types. If this is done, it will be found that largely speaking there are many different fields that fall into the ‘emotional’ layer, many different fields that fall into the ‘mental’ layer, and so on. The classification of fields will be found to fall into distinct layers. At a practical level, if an employee wanted to perform excellent customer service, it is almost like linking with the appropriate set of sub-fields, or allowing the right combination of layers to become active within him. In fact, Wheatley defines organizational behavior as being influenced by these many invisible fields, that we knowingly or unknowingly create and propagate. To truly change organizational behavior, one would have to tend to the many ‘invisible’ fields that have created it. How can this be done? Through becoming more conscious at every moment of the various behaviors that we often, without thinking, push forward. For each behavior that is projected forward is in fact an opening for the resonant field that is behind it to come forward and spread its vibration into the atmosphere. If therefore we practice conscious behavior we can allow certain behaviors of compassion, brilliance, joy, for example, to come forward.

and manifest in the atmosphere. So it is that organizational behavior can change.

In fact, when the idea of manifestation of fields dependent on individual behavior is pushed further, it becomes apparent that who one is will depend on who one meets. There are many possibilities that live in each of us. When we meet another there is a resonance at a subtler, 'invisible' layer, which determines which fields will become active in that interaction. Wheatley points out that instead of having traditional organizational charts, what would be more interesting is to plot 'reaction channels'—places where energy meets up with other energy to create new possibilities. This idea is rooted in the physicist's S-Matrix Diagram. These map particles coming into being as intermediate states in a network of interactions. The energy of any particle can combine with other energy sources to create new particles. Lines in the diagram represent particles as 'reaction channels' through which energy flows.

Wheatley gives high importance to information. She calls it the creative energy of the universe. Where there is not a free flow of information, there is stagnation. Where energy is constantly created, assimilated, responded to, there living systems exist. In actuality, the 'information' she is talking about is a flexible selection of active elements from the subtler layers of the Whole. What she appears to be saying is that when the deeper layers of being are consciously tapped into to help influence life, then meaning and therefore complexity and evolution result.

Summary

The main ideas of the book—co-evolution, enactment, chaos & order, fields, are summarized in her approach to bringing about change in organizations. "To bring about true change, four shifts are needed," she says. A system is composed of parts, but we cannot understand a system by looking only at its parts. We need to work with the whole of the system. This is the first shift. This requires a different way of 'thinking'. Intuition needs to come to the forefront. We need to begin to sense the Whole. The second shift is about focusing on the organizing dynamics of a living system. A system can restore itself only by connecting to more of itself. The system needs to learn more about itself from itself. The third shift is about intent. Any living thing will change only if it sees change as the means for preserving itself. The fourth shift is about perception and sensing of fields. Processes that are immaterial cause change at the material level. We must, therefore, look for invisible processes rather than for the things they engender.

PRAVIR MALIK