

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

OCTOBER 2019

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00; Two years Rs. 400.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail (USA & Canada):

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. DD/Cheque should be sent by speed post only. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual subscription and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

Alternatively one can pay by NEFT/net banking as per the following details: Beneficiary Name: SAAT A/C Mother India; Account Number: 0927101035721; Beneficiary Bank Name: Canara Bank; Beneficiary Branch Name: Pondicherry, Muthialpet; IFSC code: CNRB0000927. Kindly email us the details of the bank transfer.

Subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any inquiry. The correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with the correct PIN code.



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.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriaurobindoashram.org.in

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 10

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

IN THE BATTLE (Poem)	...	7
“ARYA” — ITS SIGNIFICANCE	...	8
THE HOUR OF GOD	...	11
THE DELIGHT OF WORKS	...	12
ARYAN ORIGINS	...	15

The Mother

‘ONE MUST ALWAYS BE VIGILANT, ATTENTIVE TO THE LEAST CALL’	...	24
A CONVERSATION OF 5 APRIL 1957	...	25

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

THE POETIC EXPERIENCE	...	29
-----------------------	-----	----

Chitra Sen

NEEDLEWORK IN THE MOTHER’S EMBROIDERY DEPARTMENT	...	34
--------------------------------------------------	-----	----

Gautam Malaker

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA”	...	48
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	----

Dyuman Aditya

SANSKRIT AND COMPUTERS	...	63
------------------------	-----	----

Ratri Ray

SRI AUROBINDO’S EARLY POETRY ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA — VII	...	80
----------------------------------------------------------	-----	----

IN THE BATTLE

Often, in the slow ages' wide retreat
On Life's long bridge through Time's enormous sea,
I have accepted death and borne defeat
If by my fall some gain were clutched for Thee.

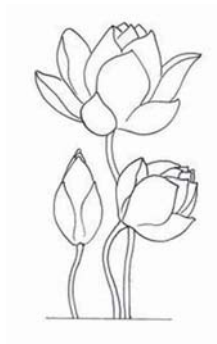
To this world's inconscient Power Thou hast given the right
To oppose the shining passage of my soul:
She levies on each step the tax of Night.
Doom, her unjust accountant, keeps the roll.

Around my way the Titan forces press;
This earth is theirs, they hold the days in fee,
I am full of wounds and the fight merciless:
Is it not yet Thy hour of victory?

Even as Thou wilt! What still to Fate Thou owest,
O Ancient of the worlds, Thou knowest, Thou knowest.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 614)



“ARYA” — ITS SIGNIFICANCE

What is the significance of the name, “Arya”?

The question has been put from more than one point of view. To most European readers the name figuring on our cover¹ is likely to be a hieroglyph which attracts or repels according to the temperament. Indians know the word, but it has lost for them the significance which it bore to their forefathers. Western Philology has converted it into a racial term, an unknown ethnological quantity on which different speculations fix different values. Now, even among the philologists, some are beginning to recognise that the word in its original use expressed not a difference of race, but a difference of culture. For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supraphysical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.

In later times, the word Arya expressed a particular ethical and social ideal, an ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatriya. Everything that departed from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan. There is no word in human speech that has a nobler history.

In the early days of comparative Philology, when the scholars sought in the history of words for the prehistoric history of peoples, it was supposed that the word Arya came from the root *ar*, to plough, and that the Vedic Aryans were so called when they separated from their kin in the north-west who despised the pursuits of agriculture and remained shepherds and hunters. This ingenious speculation has little or nothing to support it. But in a sense we may accept the derivation. Whoever cultivates the field that the Supreme Spirit has made for him, his earth of plenty within and without, does not leave it barren or allow it to run to seed, but labours to exact from it its full yield, is by that effort an Aryan.

If Arya were a purely racial term, a more probable derivation would be *ar*, meaning strength or valour, from *ar*, to fight, whence we have the name of the

1. आर्य — the word “ārya” printed in Devanagari script on the cover of the review.

Greek war-god Ares, *areios*, brave or warlike, perhaps even *aretē*, virtue, signifying, like the Latin *virtus*, first, physical strength and courage and then moral force and elevation. This sense of the word also we may accept. “We fight to win sublime Wisdom, therefore men call us warriors.” For Wisdom implies the choice as well as the knowledge of that which is best, noblest, most luminous, most divine. Certainly, it means also the knowledge of all things and charity and reverence for all things, even the most apparently mean, ugly or dark, for the sake of the universal Deity who chooses to dwell equally in all. But, also, the law of right action is a choice, the preference of that which expresses the godhead to that which conceals it. And the choice entails a battle, a struggle. It is not easily made, it is not easily enforced.

Whoever makes that choice, whoever seeks to climb from level to level up the hill of the divine, fearing nothing, deterred by no retardation or defeat, shrinking from no vastness because it is too vast for his intelligence, no height because it is too high for his spirit, no greatness because it is too great for his force and courage, he is the Aryan, the divine fighter and victor, the noble man, *aristos*, best, the *śreṣṭha* of the Gita.

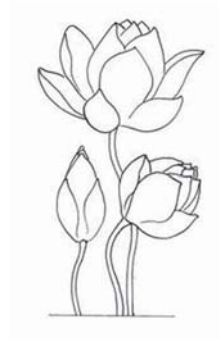
Intrinsically, in its most fundamental sense, Arya means an effort or an uprising and overcoming. The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature. He overcomes earth and the body and does not consent like ordinary men to their dullness, inertia, dead routine and tamasic limitations. He overcomes life and its energies and refuses to be dominated by their hungers and cravings or enslaved by their rajasic passions. He overcomes the mind and its habits, he does not live in a shell of ignorance, inherited prejudices, customary ideas, pleasant opinions, but knows how to seek and choose, to be large and flexible in intelligence even as he is firm and strong in his will. For in everything he seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom.

Self-perfection is the aim of his self-conquest. Therefore what he conquers he does not destroy, but ennobles and fulfils. He knows that the body, life and mind are given him in order to attain to something higher than they; therefore they must be transcended and overcome, their limitations denied, the absorption of their gratifications rejected. But he knows also that the Highest is something which is no nullity in the world, but increasingly expresses itself here, — a divine Will, Consciousness, Love, Beatitude which pours itself out, when found, through the terms of the lower life on the finder and on all in his environment that is capable of receiving it. Of that he is the servant, lover and seeker. When it is attained, he pours it forth in work, love, joy and knowledge upon mankind. For always the Aryan is a worker and warrior. He spares himself no labour of mind or body whether to seek the Highest or to serve it. He avoids no difficulty, he accepts no cessation from fatigue. Always he fights for the coming of that kingdom within himself and in the world.

The Aryan perfected is the Arhat. There is a transcendent Consciousness which surpasses the universe and of which all these worlds are only a side-issue and a by-play. To that consciousness he aspires and attains. There is a Consciousness which, being transcendent, is yet the universe and all that the universe contains. Into that consciousness he enlarges his limited ego; he becomes one with all beings and all inanimate objects in a single self-awareness, love, delight, all-embracing energy. There is a consciousness which, being both transcendental and universal, yet accepts the apparent limitations of individuality for work, for various standpoints of knowledge, for the play of the Lord with His creations; for the ego is there that it may finally convert itself into a free centre of the divine work and the divine play. That consciousness too he has sufficient love, joy and knowledge to accept; he is puissant enough to effect that conversion. To embrace individuality after transcending it is the last and divine sacrifice. The perfect Arhat is he who is able to live simultaneously in all these three apparent states of existence, elevate the lower into the higher, receive the higher into the lower, so that he may represent perfectly in the symbols of the world that with which he is identified in all parts of his being, — the triple and triune Brahman.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 441-44)



THE HOUR OF GOD

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty. Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force or misuse the moment; for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction.

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again, even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected, the incalculable, the immeasurable. Mete not the power of the Breath by thy petty instruments, but trust and go forward.

But most keep thy soul clear, even if for a while, of the clamour of the ego. Then shall a fire march before thee in the night and the storm be thy helper and thy flag shall wave on the highest height of the greatness that was to be conquered.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 146-47)

THE DELIGHT OF WORKS

In thy works there are always these three, the Master, the Worker and the Instrument. To define them in oneself rightly and rightly to possess them is the secret of works and of the delight of works.

Learn thou first to be the instrument of God and to accept thy Master. The instrument is this outward thing thou callest thyself; it is a mould of mind, a driving-force of power, a machinery of form, a thing full of springs and cogs and clamps and devices. Call not this the Worker or the Master; it can never be the Worker or the Master. Accept thyself humbly, yet proudly, devotedly, submissively and joyfully as a divine instrument.

There is no greater pride and glory than to be a perfect instrument of the Master.

Learn thou first absolutely to obey. The sword does not choose where it shall strike, the arrow does not ask whither it shall be driven, the springs of the machine do not insist on the product that shall be turned out from its labour. These things are settled by the intention and working of Nature and the more the conscious instrument learns to feel and obey the pure and essential law of its nature, the sooner shall the work turned out become perfect and flawless. Self-choice by the nervous motive-power, revolt of the physical and mental tool can only mar the working.

Let thyself drive in the breath of God and be as a leaf in the tempest; put thyself in His hand and be as the sword that strikes and the arrow that leaps to its target. Let thy mind be as the spring of the machine, let thy force be as the shooting of a piston, let thy work be as the grinding and shaping descent of the steel on its object. Let thy speech be the clang of the hammer on the anvil and the moan of the engine in its labour and the cry of the trumpet that proclaims the force of God to the regions. In whatsoever way do as an instrument the work that is natural to thee and appointed.

The sword has a joy in the battle-play, the arrow has a mirth in its hiss and its leaping, the earth has a rapture in its dizzy whirl through space, the sun has the royal ecstasy of its blazing splendours and its eternal motion. O thou self-conscious instrument, take thou too the delight of thy own appointed workings.

The sword did not ask to be made, nor does it resist its user, nor lament when it is broken. There is a joy of being made and a joy of being used and a joy of being put aside and a joy too of being broken. That equal joy discover.

Because thou hast mistaken the instrument for the worker and the master and because thou seekest to choose by the ignorance of thy desire thy own state and thy own profit and thy own utility, therefore thou hast suffering and anguish and hast many times to be thrust into the red hell of the furnace and hast many times to be reborn and reshaped and retempered until thou shalt have learned thy human lesson.

And all these things are because they are in thy unfinished nature. For Nature is the worker and what is it that she works at? She shapes out of her crude mind and life and matter a fully conscious being.

*
* *

Know thyself next as the Worker. Understand thy nature to be the worker and thy own nature and All-Nature to be thyself.

This nature-self is not proper to thee nor limited. Thy nature has made the sun and the systems, the earth and her creatures, thyself and thine and all thou art and perceivest. It is thy friend and thine enemy, thy mother and thy devourer, thy lover and thy torturer, the sister of thy soul and an alien and a stranger, thy joy and thy sorrow, thy sin and thy virtue, thy strength and thy weakness, thy knowledge and thy ignorance. And yet it is none of these things, but something of which they are attempts and imperfect images. For beyond all these it is an original self-knowledge and an infinite force and innumerable quality.

But in thee there is a special movement, a proper nature and an individual energy. Follow that like a widening river till it leads thee to its infinite source and origin.

Know therefore thy body to be a knot in Matter and thy mind to be a whirl in universal Mind and thy life to be an eddy of Life that is for ever. Know thy force to be every other being's force and thy knowledge to be a glimmer from the light that belongs to no man and thy works to be made for thee and be delivered from the error of thy personality.

When that is done, thou shalt take thy free delight in the truth of thy individual being and in thy strength and in thy glory and in thy beauty and in thy knowledge; and in the denial of these things thou shalt take delight also. For all this is the dramatic mask of the Person and the self-image of the self-Sculptor.

Why shouldst thou limit thyself? Feel thyself also in the sword that strikes thee and the arms that embrace, in the blazing of the sun and the dance of the earth, in the flight of the eagle and the song of the nightingale, in all that is past and all that is now and all that is pressing forward to become. For thou art infinite and all this joy is possible to thee.

The Worker has the joy of her works and the joy of her Lover for whom she works. She knows herself to be his consciousness and his force, his knowledge and his reserving of knowledge, his unity and his self-division, his infinity and the finite of his being. Know thyself also to be these things; take thou also the delight of thy Lover.

There are those who know themselves as a workshop or an instrument or the thing worked, but they mistake the Worker for the Master; this too is an error. Those

who fall into it can hardly arrive at her high, pure and perfect workings.

The instrument is finite in a personal image, the worker is universal with a personal trend, but neither of these is the Master; for neither is the true Person.

*
* *

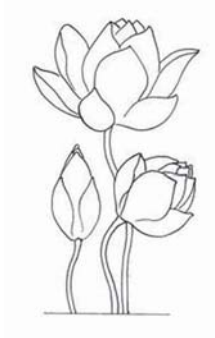
Know last the Master to be thyself; but to this self put no form and seek for it no definition of quality. Be one with That in thy being, commune with That in thy consciousness, obey That in thy force, be subject to That and clasped by it in thy delight, fulfil That in thy life and body and mentality. Then before an opening eye within thee there shall emerge that true and only Person, thyself and not thyself, all others and more than all others, the Director and Enjoyer of thy works, the Master of the worker and the instrument, the Reveller and Trampler in the dance of the universe and yet hushed and alone with thee in thy soul's silent and inner chamber.

The joy of the Master possessed, there is nothing else for thee to conquer. For He shall give thee Himself and all things and all creatures' gettings and havings and doings and enjoyings for thy own proper portion, and He shall give thee that also which cannot be portioned.

Thou shalt contain in thy being thyself and all others and be that which is neither thyself nor all others. Of works this is the consummation and the summit.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 163-66)



ARYAN ORIGINS

Introductory

Among all the many promising beginnings of which the nineteenth century was the witness, none perhaps was hailed with greater eagerness by the world of culture and science than the triumphant debut of Comparative Philology. None perhaps has been more disappointing in its results. The philologists indeed place a high value on their line of study, — nor is that to be wondered at, in spite of all its defects, — and persist in giving it the name of Science; but the scientists are of a very different opinion. In Germany, in the very metropolis both of Science and of philology, the word Philologe has become a term of disparagement; nor are the philologists in a position to retort. Physical Science has proceeded by the soundest and most scrupulous methods and produced a mass of indisputable results which, by their magnitude and far-reaching consequences, have revolutionised the world and justly entitled the age of their development to the title of the wonderful century. Comparative Philology has hardly moved a step beyond its origins; all the rest has been a mass of conjectural and ingenious learning of which the brilliance is only equalled by the uncertainty and unsoundness. Even so great a philologist as Renan was obliged in the later part of his career, begun with such unlimited hopes, to a deprecating apology for the “little conjectural sciences” to which he had devoted his life’s energies. At the beginning of the century’s philological researches, when the Sanscrit tongue had been discovered, when Max Muller was exulting in his fatal formula, “*patēr, pater, pitā, Vater, father*”, the Science of Language seemed to be on the point of self-revelation; as the result of the century’s toil it can be asserted by thinkers of repute that the very idea of a Science of Language is a chimera! No doubt, the case against Comparative Philology has been overstated. If it has not discovered the Science of Language, it has at least swept out of existence the fantastic, arbitrary & almost lawless etymology of our forefathers. It has given us juster notions about the relations and history of extant languages and the processes by which old tongues have degenerated into that detritus out of which a new form of speech fashions itself. Above all, it has given us the firmly established notion that our investigations into language must be a search for rules & laws and not free & untrammelled gambollings among individual derivations. The way has been prepared; many difficulties have been cleared out of our way. Still scientific philology is non-existent; much less has there been any real approach to the discovery of the Science of Language.

Does it follow that a Science of Language is undiscoverable? In India, at least, with its great psychological systems mounting to the remotest prehistoric antiquity,

we cannot easily believe that regular and systematic processes of Nature are not at the basis of all phenomena of sound and speech. European philology has missed the road to the truth because an excessive enthusiasm and eager haste to catch at and exaggerate imperfect, subordinate and often misleading formulae has involved it in bypaths that lead to no resting-place; but somewhere the road exists. If it exists, it can be found. The right clue alone is wanted, and a freedom of mind which can pursue it unencumbered by prepossessions and undeterred by the orthodoxies of the learned. Above all, if the science of philology is to cease to figure among the petty conjectural sciences, among which even Renan was compelled to classify it — and conjectural science means pseudo-science, since fixed, sound and verifiable bases and methods independent of conjecture are the primary condition of Science, — then the habit of hasty generalisations, of light and presumptuous inferences, of the chase after mere ingenuities and the satisfaction of curious & learned speculation which are the pitfalls of verbal scholarship must be rigidly eschewed and relegated to the wastepaper basket of humanity, counted among its nursery toys which, having now issued out of the nursery, we should put away into their appropriate lumber-room. Where there is insufficient evidence or equal probability in conflicting solutions, Science admits conjectural hypotheses as a step towards discovery. But the abuse of this concession to our human ignorance, the habit of erecting flimsy conjectures as the assured gains of knowledge is the curse of philology. A Science which is nine-tenths conjecture has no right, at this stage of the human march, to make much of itself or seek to impose itself on the mind of the race. Its right attitude is humility, its chief business to seek always for surer foundations and a better justification for its existence.

To seek for such a stronger & surer foundation is the object of this work. In order that the attempt may succeed, it is necessary first to perceive the errors committed in the past and to eschew them. The first error committed by the philologists after their momentous discovery of the Sanscrit tongue, was to exaggerate the importance of their first superficial discoveries. The first glance is apt to be superficial; the perceptions drawn from an initial survey stand always in need of correction. If then we are so dazzled & led away by them as to make them the very key of our future knowledge, its central plank, its basic platform we prepare for ourselves grievous disappointments. Comparative Philology, guilty of this error, has seized on a minor clue and mistaken it for a major or chief clue. When Max Muller trumpeted forth to the world in his attractive studies the great rapprochement, *pitā, patēr, pater, Vater, father*, he was preparing the bankruptcy of the new Science; he was leading it away from the truer clues, the wider vistas that lay behind. The most extraordinary & imposingly unsubstantial structures were reared on the narrow basis of that unfortunate formula. First, there was the elaborate division of civilised humanity into the Aryan, Semitic, Dravidian & Turanian races, based upon the philological classification of the ancient and modern languages. More sensible &

careful reflection has shown us that community of language is no proof of community of blood or ethnological identity; the French are not a Latin race because they speak a corrupt & nasalised Latin, nor are the Bulgars Slavs in blood because the Ugrofinnish race has been wholly Slavonicised in civilisation and language. Scientific researches of another kind have confirmed this useful and timely negation. The philologists have, for instance, split up, on the strength of linguistic differences, the Indian nationality into the northern Aryan race & the southern Dravidian, but sound observation shows a single physical type with minor variations pervading the whole of India from Cape Comorin to Afghanistan. Language is therefore discredited as an ethnological factor. The races of India may be all pure Dravidians, if indeed such an entity as a Dravidian race exists or ever existed, or they may be pure Aryans, if indeed such an entity as an Aryan race exists or ever existed, or they may be a mixed race with one predominant strain, but, in any case, the linguistic division of the tongues of India into the Sanscritic & the Tamilic counts for nothing in that problem. Yet so great is the force of attractive generalisations & widely popularised errors that all the world goes on perpetuating the blunder, talking of the Indo-European races, claiming or disclaiming Aryan kinship & building on that basis of falsehood the most far-reaching political, social or pseudo-scientific conclusions.

But if language is no sound factor of ethnological research, it may be put forward as a proof of common civilisation and used as a useful & reliable guide to the phenomena of early civilisations. Enormous, most ingenious, most painstaking have been the efforts to extract from the meanings of words a picture of the early Aryan civilisation previous to the dispersion of their tribes. Vedic scholarship has built upon this conjectural science of philology, upon a brilliantly ingenious & attractive but wholly conjectural & unreliable interpretation of the Vedas, a remarkably minute & captivating picture of an early half-savage Aryan civilisation in India. How much value can we attach to these dazzling structures? None, for they have no assured scientific basis. They may be true & last; they may be partly true, yet have to be seriously modified; they may be entirely false & no trace of them be left in the ultimate conclusions of human knowledge on the subject: we have no means of determining between these three possibilities. The now settled rendering of Veda which reigns hitherto because it has never been critically & inimically examined, is sure, before long, to be powerfully attacked & questioned, & one thing may be confidently expected that even if India was ever invaded, colonised or civilised by northern worshippers of Sun & Fire, yet the picture of that invasion richly painted by philological scholarship from the Rigveda will prove to be a modern legend & not ancient history, & even if a half-savage Aryan civilisation existed in India in early times, the astonishingly elaborate modern descriptions of Vedic India will turn out a philological mirage & phantasmagoria. The wider question of an early Aryan civilisation must equally be postponed till we have sounder materials. The present theory is wholly illusory; for it assumes that common terms

imply a common civilisation, an assumption which sins both by excess and by defect. It sins by excess; it cannot be argued, for instance, that because the Romans & Indians have a common term for a particular utensil, therefore that utensil was possessed by their ancestors in common previous to their separation. We must know first the history of the contact between the ancestors of the two races; we must be sure that the extant Roman word did not replace an original Latin term not possessed by the Indians; we must be sure that the Romans did not receive the term by transmission from Greek or Celt without ever having had any identity, connection or contact with our Aryan forefathers; we must be assured against many other possible solutions about which Philology can give us no guarantee either negative or affirmative. The Indian *suraṅga*, a tunnel, is supposed to be the Greek *surinx*. We cannot therefore argue that the Greeks & Indians possessed the common art of tunnel-making before their dispersion or even that the Indians who borrowed the word from Greece, never knew what an underground excavation might be till they learned it from Macedonian engineers. The Bengali term for telescope is *dūrbīn*, a word not of European origin. We cannot conclude that the Bengalis had invented the telescope independently before their contact with the Europeans. Yet on the principles by which the philologists seem to be guided in their conjectural restorations of vanished cultures, these are precisely the conclusions at which we should arrive. Here we have a knowledge of the historical facts to correct our speculations; but the prehistoric ages are not similarly defended. Historical data are entirely wanting & we are left at the mercy of words and their misleading indications. But a little reflection on the vicissitudes of languages and especially some study of the peculiar linguistic phenomena created in India by the impact of the English tongue on our literary vernaculars, the first rush with which English words attempted to oust, in conversation & letter-writing, even common indigenous terms in their own favour and the reaction by which the vernaculars are now finding new Sanscritic terms to express the novel concepts introduced by the Europeans, will be sufficient to convince any thoughtful mind how rash are the premises of these philological culture-restorers & how excessive and precarious their conclusions. Nor do they sin by excess alone, but by defect also. They consistently ignore the patent fact that in prehistoric & preliterate times the vocabularies of primitive languages must have varied from century to century to an extent of which we with our ideas of language drawn from the classical & modern literary tongues can form little conception. It is, I believe, an established fact of anthropology that many savage tongues change their vocabulary almost from generation to generation. It is, therefore, perfectly possible that implements of civilisation and culture ideas for which no two Aryan tongues have a common term may yet have been common property before their dispersion; since each of them may have rejected after that dispersion the original common term for a neologism of its own manufacture. It is the preservation of common terms and not their disappearance that is the miracle of language.

I exclude, therefore, and exclude rigidly from the domain of philology as I conceive it all ethnological conclusions, all inferences from words to the culture & civilisation of the men or races who used them, however alluring may be these speculations, however attractive, interesting and probable may be the inferences which we are tempted to draw in the course of our study. The philologist has nothing to do with ethnology. The philologist has nothing to do with sociology, anthropology and archaeology. His sole business is or ought to be with the history of words and of the association of ideas with the sound-forms which they represent. By strictly confining himself to this province, by the self-denial with which he eschews all irrelevant distractions & delights on his somewhat dry and dusty road, he will increase his concentration on his own proper work and avoid lures which may draw him away from the great discoveries awaiting mankind in this badly-explored tract of knowledge.

But the affinities of languages to each other are, at least, a proper field for the labours of philology. Nevertheless even here I am compelled to hold that the scholarship of Europe has fallen into an error in giving this subject of study the first standing among the objects of philology. Are we really quite sure that we know what constitutes community or diversity of origin between two different languages — so different for instance as Latin and Sanscrit, Sanscrit & Tamil, Tamil and Latin? Latin, Greek & Sanscrit are supposed to be sister Aryan tongues, Tamil is set apart as of other & Dravidian origin. If we enquire on what foundation this distinct & contrary treatment rests, we shall find that community of origin is supposed on two main grounds, a common body of ordinary and familiar terms and a considerable community of grammatical forms and uses. We come back to the initial formula, *pitā, patēr, pater, Vater, father*. What other test, it may be asked, can be found for determining linguistic kinship? Possibly none, but a little dispassionate consideration will give us, it seems to me, ground to pause and reflect very long & seriously before we classify languages too confidently upon this slender basis. The mere possession of a large body of common terms is, it is recognised, insufficient to establish kinship; it may establish nothing more than contact or cohabitation. Tamil has a very large body of Sanscrit words in its rich vocabulary, but it is not therefore a Sanscritic language. The common terms must be those which express ordinary & familiar ideas & objects, such as domestic relations, numerals, pronouns, the heavenly bodies, the ideas of being, having etc. — those terms that are most commonly in the mouths of men, especially of primitive men, and are therefore, shall we say, least liable to variation? Sanscrit says, addressing the father, *pitā*, Greek *pater*, Latin *pater*, but Tamil says *appā*; Sanscrit says addressing the mother *mātar*, Greek *mēter*, Latin *māter*, but Tamil *ammā*; for the numeral seven Sanscrit says *saptan* or *sapta*, Greek *hepta*, Latin *septem*, but Tamil *ēlu*; for the first person Sanscrit says *aham*, Greek *egō* or *egōn*, Latin *ego*, but Tamil *nān*; for the sun, Sanscrit says *sūra* or *sūrya*, Greek *hēlios*, Latin *sol*, but Tamil *nāyirū*; for the idea of being Sanscrit has

as, *asmi*, Greek has *einai* (*esnai*) and *eimi*, Latin *esse* and *sum*, but Tamil *iru*. The basis of the differentiation, then, appears with a striking clearness. There is no doubt about it, Sanscrit, Greek & Latin belong to one linguistic family which we may call conveniently the Aryan or Indo-European, Tamil to another for which we can get no more convenient term than Dravidian.

So far, good. We seem to be standing on a firm foundation, to be in possession of a rule which can be applied with something like scientific accuracy. But when we go a little farther, the fair prospect clouds a little, mists of doubt begin to creep into our field of vision. Mother & father we have; but there are other domestic relations. Over the daughter of the house, the primaeval milkmaid, the Aryan sisters show the slight beginnings of a spirit of disagreement. The Sanscrit father addresses her in the orthodox fashion *duhitar*, O milkmaid; Greek, as well as German & English parents follow suit with *thugater*, *Tochter*, and *daughter*, but Latin has abandoned its pastoral ideas, knows nothing of *duhitā* and uses a word *filia* which has no conceivable connection with the milk-pail & is not connected with any variant for daughter in the kindred tongues. Was Latin then a mixed tongue, drawing from a non-Aryan stock for its conception of daughterhood? But this is only a single & negligible variation. We go farther and find, when we come to the word for son, these Aryan languages seem to differ hopelessly and give up all appearance of unity. Sanscrit says *putra*, Greek *huios*, Latin *filius*, the three languages use three words void of all mutual connection. We cannot indeed arrive at the conclusion that these languages were Aryan in their conception of fatherhood & motherhood, but sonhood is a Dravidian conception — like architecture, monism & most other civilised conceptions, according to some modern authorities, — for Sanscrit has a literary term for child or son, *sūnuh*, with which we can connect the German *Sohn*, English *son* & more remotely the Greek *huios*. We explain the difference then by supposing that these languages did possess an original common term for son, possibly *sūnu*, which was dropped by many of them at least as a colloquial expression, Sanscrit relegated it to the language of high literature, Greek adopted another form from the same root, Latin lost it altogether & substituted for it *filius* as it had substituted *filia* for *duhitā*. This sort of fluidity in the commonest terms seems to have been common — Greek has lost its original word for brother, *phrātēr*, which its sisters retain, & substituted *adelphos*, for which they have no correspondents; Sanscrit has abandoned the common word for the numeral one, *unus*, *ein*, *one* and substituted a word, *eka*, unknown to any other Aryan tongue; all differ over the third personal pronoun; for moon Greek has *selēnē*, Latin *luna*, Sanscrit *candra*. But when we admit these facts, a very important part of our scientific basis is sapped & the edifice begins to totter. For we come back to this fatal fact that even in the commonest terms the ancient languages tended to lose their original vocabulary & diverge from each other, so that if the process had not been arrested by an early literature all obvious proof of relationship might well have disappeared. It is only the accident of an early

& continuous Sanscrit literature that enables us to establish the original unity of the Aryan tongues. If it were not for the old Sanscrit writings, if only the ordinary Sanscrit colloquial vocables had survived who could be certain of these connections? or who could confidently affiliate colloquial Bengali with its ordinary domestic terms to Latin any more certainly than Telugu or Tamil? How then are we to be sure that the dissonance of Tamil itself with the Aryan tongues is not due to an early separation and an extensive change of its vocabulary during its preliterate ages? I shall be able, at a later stage of this inquiry, to afford some ground for supposing the Tamil numerals to be early Aryan vocables abandoned by Sanscrit but still traceable in the Veda or scattered & imbedded in the various Aryan tongues & the Tamil pronouns similarly the primitive Aryan denominatives of which traces still remain in the ancient tongues. I shall be able to show also that large families of words supposed to be pure Tamil are identical in the mass though not in their units with the Aryan families. But then we are logically driven towards this conclusion that absence of a common vocabulary for common ideas & objects is not necessarily a proof of diverse origin. Diversity of grammatical forms? But are we certain that the Tamil forms are not equally old Aryan forms, corrupted but preserved by the early deliquescence of the Tamilic dialect? Some of them are common to the modern Aryan vernaculars, but unknown to Sanscrit, & it has even been thence concluded by some that the Aryan vernaculars were originally non-Aryan tongues linguistically overpowered by the foreign invader. But if so into what quagmires of uncertainty do we not descend? Our shadow of a scientific basis, our fixed classification of language families have disappeared into shifting vestibules of nothingness.

Nor is this all the havoc that more mature consideration works in the established theory of the philologists. We have found a wide divergence between the Tamil common terms and those shared in common by the "Aryan" dialects; but let us look a little more closely into these divergences. The Tamil for father is *appā*, not *pitā*; there is no corresponding word in Sanscrit, but we have what one might call a reverse of the word in *apatyam*, son, in *aptyam*, offspring and *apna*, offspring. These three words point decisively to a Sanscrit root *ap*, to produce or create, for which other evidence in abundance can be found. What is there to prevent us from supposing *appā*, father, to be the Tamil form for an old Aryan active derivative from this root corresponding to the passive derivative *apatyam*? Mother in Tamil is *ammā* not *mātā*; there is no Sanscrit word *ammā*, but there is the well-known Sanscrit vocable *ambā*, mother. What is to prevent us from understanding the Tamil *ammā* as an Aryan form equivalent to *ambā*, derived from the root *amb*, to produce, which gives us *amba* & *ambaka*, father, *ambā*, *ambikā* and *ambi*, mother and *ambariṣa*, the colt of a horse or young of an animal. *Sodara*, a high Sanscrit word, is the common colloquial term in Tamil for brother and replaces the northern vernacular *bhā* & classical *bhrātā*. *Akkā*, a Sanscrit word with many variants, is the colloquial term in Tamil for elder sister. In all these cases an obsolete or high literary term in

Sanskrit is the ordinary colloquial term in Tamil, — just as we see the high literary Sanskrit *s̄nuh* appearing in the colloquial German *Sohn* & English *son*, the obsolete & certainly high literary Aryan *adalbha*, undivided, appearing in the colloquial Greek *adelphos*, brother. What are we to conclude from these and a host of other instances which will appear in a later volume of this work? That Tamil is an Aryan dialect, like Greek, like German? Surely not; — the evidence is not sufficient; — but that it is possible for a non-Aryan tongue to substitute largely & freely Aryan vocables for its most common & familiar terms & lose its own native expressions. But then we are again driven by inexorable logic to this conclusion that just as the absence of a common vocabulary for common and domestic terms is not a sure proof of diverse origin, so also the possession of an almost identical vocabulary for these terms is not a sure proof of common origin. These things prove at the most intimate contact or separate development; they do not prove and in themselves cannot prove anything more. But on what basis then are we to distinguish & classify various language families? How can we positively say that Tamil is a non-Aryan or Greek, Latin & German Aryan tongues? From the indication of grammatical forms & uses, from the general impression created by the divergence or identity [of the] bulk of the vocables inherited by the languages we are comparing? But the first is too scanty & inconclusive, the second too empirical, uncertain & treacherous a test; both are the reverse of scientific, both, as reflection will show, might lead us into the largest & most radical errors. Rather than to form a conclusion by such a principle it is better to abstain from all conclusions and turn to a more thorough and profitable initial labour.

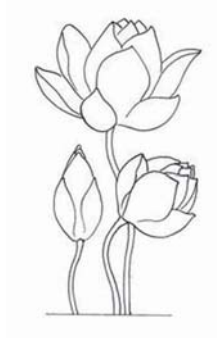
I conclude that it is too early in the history of philological research, we have made as yet too crude and slender a foundation to rear upon it the superstructure of scientific laws and scientific classifications. We cannot yet arrive at a sound & certain classification of human tongues still extant in speech, record or literature. We must recognise that our divisions are popular, not scientific, based upon superficial identities, not upon the one sound foundation for a science, the study of various species in their development from the embryo to the finished form or, failing the necessary material, a reverse study tracing back the finished forms to the embryonic and digging down into the hidden original facts of language. The reproach of the real scientist against the petty conjectural pseudo-science of philology is just; it must be removed by the adoption of a sounder method & greater self-restraint, the renunciation of brilliant superficialities and a more scrupulous, sceptical & patient system of research. In the present work I renounce, therefore, however alluring the temptation, however strong the facts may seem to a superficial study, all attempt to speculate on the identities or relationships of the different languages, on the evidence of philology as to the character & history of primitive human civilisations, or any other subject whatever not strictly within the four walls of my subject. That subject is the origin, growth and development of human language as it is shown to us by the

embryology of the language ordinarily called Sanscrit and three ancient tongues, two dead & one living, which have evidently come at least into contact with it, the Latin, Greek & Tamil. I have called my work, for convenience' sake, the Origins of Aryan Speech; but I would have it clearly understood that by using this familiar epithet I do not for a moment wish to imply any opinion as to the relationship of the four languages included in my survey, or the race-origin of the peoples speaking them or even of the ethnic origins of the Sanscrit speaking peoples. I did not wish to use the word Sanscrit, both because it is only a term meaning polished or correct and designating the literary tongue of ancient India as distinct from the vernaculars used by the women & the common people and because my scope is somewhat wider than the classical tongue of the northern Hindus. I base my conclusions on the evidence of the Sanscrit language helped out by those parts of the Greek, Latin & Tamil tongues which are cognate to the word-families of Sanscrit, and by the origins of Aryan speech, I mean, properly, the origin of human speech as used & developed by those who fashioned these word-families and their stocks & offshoots. The significance of the word Aryan as I use it, goes no farther.¹

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Vedic and Philological Studies*, CWSA, Vol. 14, pp. 547-559)

1. *The remaining portion of this essay will appear in the next issue of Mother India.*



‘ONE MUST BE ALWAYS VIGILANT, ATTENTIVE TO THE LEAST CALL’

June 25, 1914

What wisdom is there in wanting to be like this or like that? Why torment oneself thus? Art Thou not the supreme worker? Is it not our duty to be Thy docile instruments and, when Thou putteth the instrument aside for a time, will it complain that Thou abandonest it because Thou dost not make it work? Will it not be able to enjoy calm and repose after having enjoyed activity and struggle?

One must be always vigilant, attentive to the least call, so as not to be asleep or inert when Thou givest the signal for action, whether with the mind, the feelings or the body; but one must not confuse this constant state of expectation and devoted goodwill with an anxious and uneasy agitation, a fear of not being this or that and of displeasing Thee, that is, of not conforming with what Thou expectest of us.

Thy heart is the supreme shelter, that wherein all care is soothed. Oh, leave it wide open, this heart, so that all those who are tormented may find there a sovereign refuge! . . .

Pierce this darkness, let light flash forth;
Still this tumult, establish peace;
Calm this violence, let love reign;
Become the warrior, triumphant over obstacles;
Win the victory.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 185)

A CONVERSATION OF 5 APRIL 1967

(*Mother writes a note.*) It is an answer to a question. Do you know what I told the teachers of the school? I have been asked another question. Here is the beginning of my reply:

“The division between ‘ordinary life’ and ‘spiritual life’ is an outdated antiquity.”
Did you read his question? Read it again to me.

“We discussed the future. It seemed to me that nearly all the teachers were eager to do something so that the children could become more conscious of why they are here. At that point I said that in my opinion, to speak to the children of spiritual things often has the opposite result, and that these words lose all their value.”

“Spiritual things” — what does he mean by spiritual things?

Obviously, if the teachers recite them like a story . . .

Spiritual things . . . They are taught history *or* spiritual things, they are taught science *or* spiritual things. That is the stupidity. In history, the Spirit is there; in science, the Spirit is there — the Truth is everywhere. And what is needed is not to teach it in a false way, but to teach it in a true way. They cannot get that into their heads.

He adds: “I have suggested that it might be better to meet and listen to Mother’s voice,¹ for even if we don’t understand everything, your voice would accomplish its own inner work, which we are not in a position to evaluate. About this, I would like to know what is the best way of bringing the child into relation with you. For all the suggestions, including mine, seemed arbitrary to me and without any real value.

“Mother, wouldn’t it be better if the teachers were to concentrate solely on the subjects they are teaching, for you are taking care of the spiritual life?”

I shall give him this reply: There is no “spiritual life”! It is still the old idea, still the old idea of the sage, the sannyasin, the . . . who represents spiritual life, while all the others represent ordinary life — and it is not true, it is not true, it is not true at all.

If they still need an opposition between two things — for the poor mind doesn’t work if you don’t give it an opposition — if they need an opposition, let them take

1. Tape-recordings of Mother’s classes during the 1950s.

the opposition between Truth and Falsehood, it is a little better; I don't say it is perfect, but it is a little better. So, in all things, Falsehood and Truth are mixed everywhere: in the so-called "spiritual life", in sannyasins, in swamis, in those who think they represent the life divine on earth, all that — there also, there is a mixture of Falsehood and Truth.

It would be better not to make any division.

(Silence)

For the children, precisely because they are children, it would be best to instil in them the will to conquer the future, the will to always look ahead and to want to move on as swiftly as they can towards . . . what will be — but they should not drag with them the burden, the millstone of the whole oppressive weight of the past. It is only when we are very high in consciousness and knowledge that it is good to look behind to find the points where this future begins to show itself. When we can look at the whole picture, when we have a very global vision, it becomes interesting to know that what will be realised later on has already been announced beforehand, in the same way that Sri Aurobindo said that the divine life will manifest on earth, because it is *already* involved in the depths of Matter; from this standpoint it is interesting to look back or to look down below — not to know what happened, or to know what men have known: that is quite useless.

The children should be told: There are wonderful things to be manifested, prepare yourself to receive them. Then if they want something a little more concrete and easier to understand, you can tell them: Sri Aurobindo came to announce these things; when you are able to read him, you will understand. So this awakens the interest, the desire to learn.

I see very clearly the difficulty he is referring to: most people — and in all the things that are written, or in the lectures they give — use inflated speech, without any truth of personal experience, which has no effect, or rather a negative effect. That is what he is referring to.

Yes, that is why they should do as I have said.

Ah! But not so long ago, most of the teachers were saying, "Oh! But we must do this, because it is done everywhere." (Smiling) They have already come a little distance. But there is much more to be covered.

But above all, what is most important is to eliminate these divisions. And every one of them, all of them have it in their minds: the division between leading a spiritual life and leading an ordinary life, having a spiritual consciousness and having an ordinary consciousness — there is only one consciousness.

In most people it is three-quarters asleep and distorted; in many it is still

completely distorted. But what is needed, very simply, is not to leap from one consciousness into another, but to open one's consciousness (*upward gesture*) and to fill it with vibrations of Truth, to bring it in harmony with what must be here — there it exists from all eternity — but here, what must be here: the “tomorrow” of the earth. If you weigh yourself down with a whole burden that you have to drag behind you, if you drag behind you everything that you must abandon, you will not be able to advance very fast.

Mind you, to know things from the earth's past can be very interesting and very useful, but it must not be something that binds you or ties you to the past. If it is used as a spring-board, it is all right. But really, it is quite secondary.

(*Silence*)

It would be interesting to formulate or to elaborate a new method of teaching for children, to take them very young. It is easy when they are very young. We need people — oh! we would need remarkable teachers — who have, first, an ample enough documentation of what is known so as to be able to answer every question, and at the same time, at least the knowledge, if not the experience — the experience would be better — of the true intuitive intellectual attitude, and — naturally the capacity would be still more preferable — at least the knowledge that the true way of knowing is mental silence, an attentive silence turned towards the truer Consciousness, and the capacity to receive what comes from there. The best would be to have this capacity; at least, it should be explained that it is the true thing — a sort of demonstration — and that it works not only from the point of view of what must be learned, of the whole domain of knowledge, but also of the whole domain of what should be done: the capacity to receive the exact indication of *how* to do it; and as you go on, it changes into a very clear perception of what must be done, and a precise indication of when it must be done. At least the children, as soon as they have the capacity to think — it starts at the age of seven, but at about fourteen or fifteen it is very clear — the children should be given little indications at the age of seven, a complete explanation at fourteen, of how to do it, and that it is the only way to be in relation with the deeper truth of things, and that all the rest is a more or less clumsy mental approximation to something that can be known directly.

The conclusion is that the teachers themselves should at least have a sincere beginning of discipline and experience, that it is not a question of accumulating books and retelling them like this. One can't be a teacher in this way; let the outside world be like that if it likes. We are not propagandists, we simply want to show what can be done and try to prove that it *must* be done.

When you take the children very young, it is wonderful. There is so little to do: it is enough to *be*.

Never make a mistake.

Never lose your temper.

Always understand.

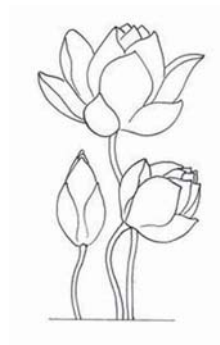
And to know and see clearly why there has been this movement, why there has been this impulse, what is the inner constitution of the child, what is the thing to be strengthened and brought forward — this is the only thing to do; and to leave them, to leave them free to blossom; simply to give them the opportunity to see many things, to touch many things, to do as many things as possible. It is great fun. And above all, not to try to impose on them what you think you know.

Never scold them. Always understand, and if the child is ready, explain; if he is not ready for an explanation — if you are ready yourself — replace the false vibration by a true one. But this . . . this is to demand from the teachers a perfection which they rarely have.

But it would be very interesting to make a programme for the teachers and the true programme of study, from the very bottom — which is so plastic and which receives impressions so deeply. If they were given a few drops of truth when they are very young, they would blossom quite naturally as the being grows. It would be beautiful work.

THE MOTHER

(*On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, pp. 401-05)



THE POETIC EXPERIENCE

If poetry is to glow with true beauty it must rise from living experience. This is not to rule out the Ariels of song: imagination may weave rainbows upon a delicate air, but the rainbows must be a genuine revelation and no coloured falsity. In other words, poetry is not confined to facts of mere earth: it can float in more tenuous regions, but it must create an impression that these regions, however incredible to the normal mind, do exist behind or beyond the familiar and tangible loveliness. The sole criterion, therefore, is: Does poetry come with an authentic power or no? Keats's magic casements may be only the eyes of daydream, they may exist only in his brown-study and in no recognisable room; yet his art is such as to create a feeling of their reality. Our minds are charmed into what Coleridge called a suspension of disbelief. The imagery and the music go home with an inevitable sense of truth. Somewhere, we seem to tell ourselves, these wonderful apertures are to be found; the rhythmic language in which they are described is like a current generated by the poet's touch with their strangeness to produce a television in our own soul. The experience is proved by this convincing spell thrown on us. We must not ask if an emotion or an object poetised is part of common life; we must only inquire whether it lives in its own way with a convincing beauty and appears real, even though its reality be remote from our ordinary perspectives.

Nor is it necessary for a poet to pass completely through the inner experiences recorded by him of subtle realities. A mystic surge may convey to us a thrill of God's presence or a superb spiritual phenomenon like

The lonely waters of eternal ease

with such a strong mood-atmosphere that we pass into that very state of rapture; and yet there would be no reason to believe that to the poet the substance of his writing was equally intimate. When a Vedic Vishwamitra rolls some gorgeous hymn to the Truth-Sun wherein the Self of self has its being, we are aware that he is voicing an experience, but that is because we have the independent knowledge that Vishwamitra was a Rishi. If we did not have this knowledge we would not be justified in arguing from the sense of reality implicit in the poem to an experience on the poet's part. All that can be said is that the poet who could bring so assuring a vibration of mystical ecstasy had an extraordinary imagination open to spheres of reality which transcend the reach not only of the average man but also the average poet of the first rank — say, Homer or Shakespeare. For, in poetry the main factor is imagination: we should never forget this central truth if we are to gauge rightly the nature of inspired utterance. Emotion makes poetry throb: it is the animating flame behind all

idea and figure, but this emotion is not necessarily what is felt in the accustomed human way. It is a thrill, a warmth, an *enthousiasmos* of the imagination. And what the imagination, as a rule, does is to take suggestive hints given by actual experience, outer or inner, and then transform them into a power of measured beauty by reflecting or transmitting the response from some centre of consciousness beyond the normal human nature: that is to say, the imagination is a medium.

Some poets are close to their own experience-stuff; still, they too reshape it in order to embody as perfect a glow or gusto of beauty as possible: depths are plumbed, associations explored, velleities stressed rendering the new substance different from the old. In art the demand is for the beautiful, and if changing the stuff of experience brings out a heat and a light which deepen and accentuate beauty, the poet will not and should not hesitate to do so. His purpose, his ideal, is obviously not to photograph the mere outer life; it is not even to be faithful to his own inner life; he is essentially a revealer of shines and shadows from a supernormal plane. All poetry is a marriage of known symbols with unknown modes of being. When the Elizabethan poet writes that tall trees, struck by the first gleam of day,

Dandled the morning's childhood in their arms,

a supernormal perception goes quickening the sight of familiar objects; he has unveiled, without relinquishing his hold on these objects, a vision not of the earth-life as we daily contact it. And the supernormal vision increases as the poet becomes a channel of yet rarer subtleties, the culmination being the sheer mystical afflatus. The point, however, is that his sole concern is to be an instrument for perfect aesthetic creation, without stickling after so-called probability or needing to live out inwardly the full substance of the poetic work.

What, then, of sincerity in art? It is necessary to admit and emphasise that a poet who goes against his nature's aesthetic idealistic trend by living quite in disharmony with it is liable to diminish the frequency no less than the strength of his inspiration. The afflatus will hesitate to visit him and instead of producing masterpieces in abundance he will bring forth sovereign speech as a rare rush of light amidst shimmering vacuities. Poetry is a grave occupation, and though we may not convert it into an ostentatious ceremonial it does not bear being trifled with. The crown of utterance, it calls for a high seriousness in the instrument chosen by the gods. The old conception of the Muse is psychologically correct: the poet does appeal to something higher than his quotidian consciousness, he strains and poises himself and rarefies his mood in order to catch the inevitable phrase, the authentic rhythm, the real-sense of inspiration. Sarojini Naidu, after a brief spell of delicate music, grew dumb because she was not jealous enough of the gift bestowed on her: the drum and trumpet of politics deafened her to those flute-voices of her young delight which had given us poem after tremulous poem shot with tones of flame and

faëry. A poet has to recognise his vocation, his destiny, and not fritter away the precious soul-stuff which takes images from beyond the ephemeral surface life. However, we must not impute insincerity to him even if he wastes his energy, provided the work he occasionally offers us pulses with the secret heart-throb of creative imagination. For then it is a cry from the lips of the gods, and the significant form that makes its beauty is the luminous ever-living body of the Muse. Fundamentally, the Muse and not the man is responsible also for the creative work of a life spent in tune with the aesthete and the idealist in one's nature.

If a mystic poet, for instance, were to claim that his work invariably mirrored his inner experiences, he would be an insincere fraud. But his poems themselves are neither insincere nor fraudulent: if they are inspired, the "I" of each poem is not the human ego but some entity which has an experience on a superhuman plane and sends down its self-expression through a human medium, coloured in a certain measure by the medium's personality yet not vitiated by it. The vitiation takes place only when there is a capricious fanciful play or a dry intellectual interference. So long as there is a moved precision in language, an assured lift of rhythm, a masterful harmony in the whole, a poem is a genuine echo to some subtle reality behind the poet's imagination. It remains a revelation of the real, though its author may have experienced nothing — nothing except the joy of the creative labour, which gives him mostly a mere sympathetic thrill. If people do not understand this paradox and attribute the described experience in its complete form to the man who serves as an instrument, it is after all their own fault. The reaction they undergo on discovering that the man did not have the entire experience is to believe that the poem is a tissue of falsehoods and that poetry is worthless since it does not depict truth. They must understand that both idolatry and iconoclasm are extreme errors.

The test here of sincerity, truth, authenticity, value is, first and last, Inspiration — Inspiration working through any part of man's nature. The outward-going body-conscious mind of Homer describes Apollo's descent from Olympus with an intense atmosphere of the god's subtle physicality of power. Shakespeare passes a sudden voice from spiritual heights through the life-force's peculiar thrill and colour and we get

the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

Sri Aurobindo intuits in a self-transfiguring lift of the pure mental consciousness the supreme Spirit's

Force one with unimaginable rest.¹

1. "The Life Heavens", *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 551.

In all these expressions the inspiration is absolutely unmarred. Sri Aurobindo has experienced the very state he poetises, while Homer never knew Apollo's deific puissance nor Shakespeare the world-soul's profound reverie; yet their language when filled with a mystic intuition has not suffered the least weakness in imparting a real-sense. For each has conveyed with an aesthetic finality in the terms of his own habitual colour a superhuman magnitude; the perfect inspired beauty which bears evidence of truth behind the veil has been equally present. And this is all that matters.

No doubt, the examples I have mentioned are in a certain category of style which is exceptional — a style in which even poets of the pre-eminent order do not always write. They write in the main with a simple lucidity, a vivid vigour, a shining richness or, at their rarest, a spelled exaltation; no more than a few snatches we have in them of all these styles, distinct or mixed, reaching not only their own perfections but at the same time a special quality for which we have no name. And it is possible to argue that, given an identical measure of poetic capacity, one who has himself gone through high spiritual experiences is more likely to produce a large amount of work irradiating their influence than the man whose imagination only has been inspired, and to get more often their full depth and movement by means of this unusual mode of style. Still, it must be remembered that to write in another mode does not cast a shadow of insincerity or untruth over a poem. A poem may not reflect or echo the very stuff of Spirit but it can have a mystical genuineness of its own: the Spirit now is not felt in a language instinct with its essential vibration, it is felt with a true receptivity through a different poetic manner. And, in art, any style can attain the extreme pitch of sincerity, of inevitableness, which marks out the masterpiece. Take these lines from Yeats where he says that he has seen

In all poor foolish things that live a day
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way.

Yeats is a listener to occult footfalls, a singer haunted by unearthly presences, but not, like Sri Aurobindo, a yogi who has climbed the ultimate summits; and his words and rhythm in the couplet above do not voice the Spirit's substance with the direct grandeur of Sri Aurobindo's. Nor can they fill us with the same quantity, so to speak, of spiritual meaning as would an utterance by Sri Aurobindo couched in a similar style-key:

Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss.²

2. "Rose of God", *Ibid.*, p. 564.

Nevertheless, who will call Yeats's lines inferior poetry? Who can miss in them the inspiration and the beauty that give some kind of authentic touch with a superhuman reality? It is a different kind of touch from what Sri Aurobindo manifests; yet to question its sincerity and truth would be tantamount to saying that to feel a body naked with the hand or through a transparent fabric proves actuality whereas a contact through a silk robe does not. When the inspired perfection is there, it is as much an error to level the charge of falsity at a mystical phrase for being in a particular style with a particular content as for being written by a man like Shakespeare to whom mysticism was quite a *terra incognita*.

Suppose even the Spirit experience of a high plane gets completely changed in the transmission; then too the result is no falsity but a new interpretative vision, the symbol of one level fused with a significance of another. An illustration is Cleopatra's rhapsodical words to Antony:

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven.

Though a tremendous love-thrill between two human beings has usurped here for its own glorification a mystical light, one cannot declare that, because Cleopatra was not a mystic, Shakespeare has made her play a hypocrite's role by using spiritual language for an apotheosis of intense passionate rapture. Mystic or no, the upshot is a ring of utter genuineness, a poetic splendour absolute in its intense yet restrained sincerity of emotion. The real-sense is perfect — since art deals with realities on various planes and is not ostensibly preoccupied with conveying the Spirit by sight, sound or significance. Any mood-thrill imparted through any species of style by any poetic temperament bears the stamp of authenticity if that one *sine qua non* is found — the unanalysable but ever unmistakable force from subtle worlds we know as Inspiration, the living experience whose sole sign of truth lies in whatever figure reveals itself of a beauty that is intrinsic and not meretricious.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Adventures in Criticism*; published by The Integral Life Foundation, Waterford, USA, 1996, pp. 107-13.

First published in *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual* 1976, then in *Mother India*, June 1984.)

NEEDLEWORK IN THE MOTHER'S EMBROIDERY DEPARTMENT

When the Mother decided to form a fully equipped Ashram collectivity, a self-sufficient unit within the town, each group of activities was known as a 'department' or a 'service'. Thus, we always spoke of the unit for construction and maintenance of houses as the Building Service and the group looking after the clothing of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as the Embroidery Department. This department grew into prominence simply because the everyday wear and tear of the Mother's clothes had to be taken care of.

The photographs taken in the latter part of the 19th century show the Mother in long dresses reaching down to the ankles — just as the women in France wore in those days. But those taken in Japan in the early 20th century (1916 to 1920), show her wearing the Japanese kimono. After 1920, when she came to India, the photographs show her wearing a gown or a saree.

In 1946, when she started playing table-tennis in the evenings, she would wear a saree. In 1948, she changed into salwar kameez for the game of tennis which she started playing then. After her game, around 5.30 or 5.45 p.m., she came to the Ashram Playground and was there till about 8.15 or 8.30 p.m., at times even till 9 p.m.

Needless to say, her elegance was unsurpassable in each attire, as is apparent in every one of these pictures. She was indeed the very embodiment of grace and refinement. The Embroidery Department of the Ashram spent all its time and energy creating with thread and needle exquisite dresses for the Mother. It also took care of mending the Mother's as also of Sri Aurobindo's garments. For these young women working in this department, it was a unique occasion to feel close to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and they felt it was a special grace bestowed on them to be able to help the Mother in this way; everything was done with a loving care as part of their spiritual life, it was their sadhana. Let us go back in time and try to find out how this unusual department came into being and developed into an important feature of the Ashram.

Dorothy Hodgson, an Englishwoman, had met the Mother in France in 1915-16. When the Mother went to Japan in 1916, Dorothy was teaching in a well-known school in Japan. She was about six years older than the Mother. She saw the Mother again in the beautiful garden of cherry blossoms of Japan. At the very first sight of the Mother amongst the cherry blossoms she felt that the Mother was not an ordinary human being, that she was the Divine in a human form. She felt attracted to the Mother and took the opportunity to help her with a few of her minor needs. When in 1920 the Mother decided to come to India, she asked Dorothy whether she would

like to accompany her — and that is how Dorothy came with her to India. Shortly after their arrival, there was a great tempest and heavy rainfall, a nearby house collapsed. The roof of the Mother's house started leaking dangerously. To avoid any accident Sri Aurobindo asked his young followers to help them shift to the residence where he was staying with these young men.

Sri Aurobindo gave the Mother's companion, Miss Hodgson, a new name — 'Datta' — entire self-giving. And she did offer herself entirely to them. In 1922, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo shifted from the building where they were staying — Guest House — situated on François Martin Street to a new house referred to then as the Library House situated at rue de la Marine, on the South-Western side of the present Ashram building. Datta, their full-time attendant, stayed in one of the rooms on the first floor of this building. In 1927, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo shifted to the present section of the Ashram building known as the Meditation House. Datta was given accommodation in a building across the road on the western side of the main Ashram building, now known as 'Datta House'.

In that spacious building Datta made arrangements for all her work — a kitchen for cooking, another small room for storing coal, a different place for washing vessels, and one for washing clothes. There was a long hall where clothes were dried. Datta worked there with her helpers. She took care of all the linen used for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and all personal clothes of the Mother were also taken care of by her. She was a perfectionist in her work. In 1927, the Mother accepted Vasudha, a young Gujarati girl of fourteen who had come here with her brother Chandulal, as an inmate of the Ashram. She sent her to Datta, to be trained in all that had to be done for the Mother's clothes. Swarna, a Bengali woman from East Bengal, who came here for the first time in 1933 was also sent to Datta by the Mother to learn this work. These two finally took care of all the clothes used by the Mother. Datta taught them cutting, stitching, as well as mending the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's clothes. They learnt from her how to wash and even the way to iron all that the Mother used for her everyday wear.

Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo, used to visit us in that house. She was the sister of the well-known politician of those times — Sarojini Naidu. During one of her visits in 1923, she taught the Mother how to wear the saree. Both the Mother and Datta now discarded their usual western attire and started wearing the saree. We have heard that initially the Mother had only two sarees. She would wash one, wait for it to dry to wear it again. Her saree was even patched up over torn places. We come to know of this through one of her letters written to Vasudha on December 10, 1935.

My dear little smile,

You are quite right. I prefer a beautiful embroidered sari to a lace gown by far. It is not a question of number or need. For years I was perfectly satis-

fied with two saris per year — but I am proud of the beautiful things my dear children make for me and I wear them with love and joy. . . .

My blessings and love are always with you.

Your maman

(*Letters to my little smile*, p. 107)

Later on, in the morning hours, the Mother used to wear an inner chemise over which she put on a long ankle-length silk gown with short sleeves, then a sleeveless coat reaching down to her knees. The coat was made of a very light material and had beautiful embroidered designs. When she met people she covered her head with a veil — a piece of cloth fixed round her head. After her bath late in the morning she put on a saree with a matching blouse. Her blouses were long. A gown-like petticoat of matching colour was stitched. Over this she used a broad cloth band to tuck in her saree. Her head was always covered with the pallu of the saree, which was kept in place by tying a narrow band of cloth, known here as the crown. She wore a light pair of sandals. In 1948 when the Mother started to play tennis, she wore a salwar and kameez with a kitty cap covering her head. Henceforth this was her evening attire. She stopped wearing a saree every day. She wore a saree for the special blessings on the four puja days. However, on her ninetieth birthday in 1968, she put on a saree for that special occasion. From the middle of March 1960 her daily programme changed. She stayed in her room on the second floor of the main Ashram building. Now instead of the coat she used a stole over her gown. All her garments were hand-stitched. She never bought any clothes for herself. The Mother wore whatever was offered to her by the devotees.

Sri Aurobindo's answers regarding the Mother's attire:

Why does the Mother wear rich and beautiful clothes?

Beauty is as much an expression of the Divine as Knowledge, Power or Ananda. Does anyone ask why does the Mother want to manifest the divine consciousness by knowledge or by power and not by ignorance and weakness? It would not be a more absurd or meaningless question than this one put by the vital against wearing artistic and beautiful dresses.

27 February 1933

(CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 596)

*

Does it make any difference to the Mother's consciousness whether she puts on the best saris or the old ones, whether she lives in a palace or a forest? What do these outer things add to the inner reality?

Outer things are the expression of something in the inner reality. A fine sari or a palace are expressions of the principle of beauty in things and that is their main value. The Divine Consciousness is not bound by these things and had no attachment, but it is also not bound to abstain from them if beauty in things is part of its intended action. The Mother, when the Ashram was still unformed, was wearing patched cotton saris; when she took up the work, it was necessary to change her habits, so she did so.

22 October 1935

(*Ibid.*)

Some ladies started embroidery work quite early in the Ashram. We find in the monthly magazine *Mother India* as well as in some old publications of the Bengali quarterly *Bartika* interesting details regarding this activity. A few of those who work in the Embroidery Department today have also shared with us their views and experiences. It is from these main sources that we have built up the account of this department.

* * *

This is how things seem to have taken shape. A few young ladies had joined the Ashram between 1927-1929.¹ The Mother had given them work in different departments, and yet what was common to all of them was that they did some embroidery for the Mother. This they did in their own homes after their regular work in other departments was over. They embroidered beautiful designs on tablecloths, bedspreads, cushion covers, wall hangings, tray-cloth, handkerchiefs and many such things. All of these were done as an offering to the Mother. This activity also became a part of their spiritual life here, and it gave them immense satisfaction and pleasure.

Lalita, a Parsi lady, who arrived here in December 1927, wrote that once she did a very detailed embroidery work on a kimono for the Mother; the design was of the Buddha seated in his well-known posture, with a group of his disciples all around him. It took her a pretty long time to complete the work but she managed to finish it. The Mother, she says, looked magnificent in it. Lalita embroidered one of the Mother's sarees with the design of swans and silver clouds. Meenakshamma, Tripura, Tara and Vasudha helped her. She had been also entrusted by the Mother to stitch her blouses and her crowns.

One day, Lalita asked Vasudha how she managed to keep her patience for months to finish one saree. Vasudha replied that every day she concentrated only

1. We have gathered from old articles the names of some of the ladies of those years: Meenakshamma, Lalita, Vasudha, Tripura, Tara, Subhadra, Lila, Sahana, Padmasini, Tajdar.

on what she had to finish on that day and never thought of the rest of the saree. This was a very good lesson for Lalita, who considered herself to be of a very impatient type. She writes that when she was doing the embroidery work on the Mother's saree she kept on wondering when she would complete it!

Lalita mentions a work done by Tara and Lila. Usually these two did the embroidery work on different pieces other than sarees. She says that once Tara embroidered the design of a lion on a bedcover for Sri Aurobindo and it was done very well and was admired by everyone, specially by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The first name that occurs to us, prominently, in golden letters, is that of Vasudha, known to the younger generation as 'Akka' — 'elder sister' in Tamil. 'Embroidery' and 'Vasudha' always go together in the Ashram. A few days after her arrival, when she was receiving her cup of soup from the Mother after the evening meditation, she noticed a band with some ordinary zari-work around the Mother's head. She told the Mother in Gujarati that she knew how to do this type of work. The Mother did not understand her Gujarati. Champaklal who was present there explained to the Mother what Vasudha was saying.

The very next day the Mother sent her to Datta who gave her the first work which was to make vase mats out of a fine bamboo mat. Then Datta gave her to sew the Mother's blouse. Gradually her work increased. She was washing, ironing, mending the Mother's clothes along with her regular embroidery work.

It is a beautiful and uplifting story — how a young girl of fifteen developed through the Mother's loving guiding force and was able to make embroidery a wonderful creation of art.

The Mother encouraged her to learn French and English. Vasudha also attended the mathematics class as well as a physics class conducted by Pavitra for some of the young Ashram inmates.

The Mother guided her through her difficulties and tribulations. Here are some golden nuggets gleaned from the book, *Letters to my little smile*, Vasudha's correspondence with the Mother.

The mind always runs like a madman. The first step is to detach *one's consciousness* from it and to let it run by itself without *running with it*. (p. 9)

. . . It is good to observe oneself in order to see one's weaknesses and to be able to correct them. (p. 9)

Keep your smile, little child, it is that which gives you your strength. (p. 11)

We shall, however, concentrate on what concerns her work.

Once, the Mother came to see Vasudha's house and asked her whether she would embroider a saree for her.

Vasudha replied, "Oh, yes!" and the Mother imitated her "Oh, yes!". In 1929, Vasudha embroidered her first saree, the design for which was made by Amal Kiran. Once the Mother had asked her to get the design made by Krishnalal, one of our artists here.

The Mother wrote to her in 1933:

I am very happy when I wear your saris, but also I want to keep them with as much care as one keeps works of art and that is why I do not wear them very often. (p. 33)

At that time any work for the Mother was a means of sadhana. This conscious effort of offering is expressed so well in Vasudha's correspondences with the Mother.

She would inform through her letters "I have prayed with my body" or "Today I prayed to you with my body for more than ten hours", "At every stitch that I make, I aspire to Thee, all day I try to concentrate on Thee — to keep my mind on Thee" and the Mother answered, "You are a lovely and skilful worker, my little smile, and I am proud of you and your work that is so beautiful."

Vasudha used to work ten hours or more in a day on her embroidery work. We might remind ourselves that for quite some years when her work continued into the night, she worked in the light of a kerosene lamp, as that was then the only source of light at night. Pujalal, who used to distribute kerosene to the inmates every month as per their requirement, wrote to the Mother:

It seems Vasudha requires more than two litres of kerosene and she may even require more than three litres per month. Up to what limit can she take?

I am giving her a third bottle of kerosene today.

This is the Mother's letter to Vasudha:

Little child,

What is this? Why so much kerosene? I hope you are not working at night. You would spoil your eyes and it would be such a great pity! . . . If it is for some other use it does not matter. I do not care for the kerosene but for your eyes.

December 21, 1931

(p. 4)

It was only in the middle of 1933 that an electric connection was provided to the house.

On April 6, 1933, Vasudha wrote to the Mother: "Have you seen my little roses on your gown? Are they nice?"

Mother's answer:

They are most lovely! It is impossible to say which is the original and which the copy, and it might very well be that the copy is lovelier. Did you see that I was wearing the gown when I went for a walk on the terrace? (p. 39)

The Mother wrote to her on June 21, 1933:

This morning I was literally filled with admiration. It is magnificent; the birds are so beautiful and so living; I found their little heads with the lovely little silver aigrette very pretty, much prettier than on the original. The little diamonds also are very nice, and in silver on the sari it will be magnificent.

Where did you iron? It is good that you are learning. (pp. 49-50)

Vasudha was also drawing the designs needed for her work. Once the Mother complimented Vasudha on her "most beautiful drawing. It is exactly what I wanted". On another occasion, Vasudha made a drawing of iris flowers from a photograph. She expressed her difficulty in making a design of it for her embroidery work. The Mother called her to her room and promised to help her with the design on the crown. Each time that Vasudha learnt something new, there was always a word of appreciation from the Mother. "I did not know that you had learnt knitting, — that is one more skill acquired." Vasudha cuts for the first time a chemise for the Mother, and the Mother wrote to her, "You are most hard working and diligent". The Mother sent her a sewing machine for her work.

Once when Vasudha was given a grey georgette saree to do an embroidery on its border with the design of fishes, she did not do it the usual way. She passed her threaded needle between the woven threads of the saree to create her design. This was something unique. Though Vasudha was not satisfied with her work, the Mother was very pleased to see it. Vasudha was a master of this art.

Maman, this sari that you put on today is, I think, my "finest" embroidery. Don't you think so?

It is a work of art. It is simply *splendid*. I feel I am *clothed in light*.

September 1, 1933

(p. 63)

Vasudha also embroidered a design of fishes on a handkerchief that she had stitched for Sri Aurobindo; he greatly admired it. We reproduce here a letter of Sri Aurobindo to Vasudha regarding one of her embroidery works:

Vasudha,

What a beautiful fish! and every detail so perfectly filled in! It is a supramental fish surely!

September 12, 1935

(p. 107)

In the context of embroidery, we quote a few words from Jayantilal, one of the artists in the Ashram, on Sanjivan, another artist who joined the Ashram in 1933:

Sanjivan, because he had done drawing and wished to pursue art, the Mother asked him to develop drawing and he was given the work of drawing flowers. Mother slowly began to give him the work of preparing designs for the Embroidery Department. You have no idea about the kind of work he had done in preparing designs with flower motifs. The Mother often used to give even the measurements for the designs of the sarees. She used to say the 'pallu' must be twelve inches, one border four inches and the other border must be only two inches and all these kinds of instructions. There is a very big collection of these designs which he did, and some of them I hear are not in good shape today because they were used so often.

(Jayantilal, *Mother India*, 1992, pp. 399-400)

Another artist, Krishnalal, also made designs for the Mother's dresses when needed.

Lalita remembered:

Once when the Mother had no new sari to wear on a certain Darshan Day, I told the Mother that I would buy one from Bombay and get a design embroidered on it. Finally the design was made, most probably by Sanjivan. It was a design of wheat stalks with a bunch of grains on each stalk. This design was embroidered with silver threads on a grey georgette sari. The Mother, very pleased, wore it on the Darshan Day and looked very beautiful.

At that time small frames used to be fixed on the sarees during embroidery work. When Lalita told the Mother that in Bombay larger frames were being used for doing embroidery on sarees, Mother had a large frame made for Vasudha. There was a special process of fixing the saree on the large frame which Lalita taught her friends after informing the Mother. (*Mother India*, 1979, pp. 4-10)

On August 12, 1933, Vasudha informed the Mother, "I have started fixing the sari on the embroidery frame and tomorrow this work of fixing the sari will be over. And then I shall start the embroidery . . ."

I remember that one day in 1940, as I was going to visit a lady staying in the same building as Vasudha and as I passed in front of a hall, I saw a few ladies sitting together on the ground and doing some embroidery work. I came to know later that they were embroidering the Mother's saree. I could not quite figure out as to how all those ladies could together do some embroidery on one saree. I still remember the faces of two of them: they were Meenakshiamma and her daughter, Anusuya. They must have been using the long frame made for this work.

Mother once wrote to Vasudha:

The beautiful Japanese and Chinese embroideries are always done without any cloth underneath and generally, the Japanese embroideries have no right side and wrong side. That is to say, they are absolutely identical on either side. The embroideries that they do here are, I think, quite coarse.

September 23, 1933

(p. 65)

This advice of the Mother was the guideline for the workers. The embroidery done here has such perfect stitches, and often both sides of the cloth have an identical design.

The sadhikas who worked on these designs were a devoted group. Some of them worked for 8 to 10 hours a day for eight months to a year-and-a-half to complete their work. It is only if you have a chance to see these finished pieces that you will understand the amount of work that had gone into them.

In 1933 while she herself was working on the Mother's saree, Vasudha guided two others — Bala, who was preparing a carpet for the Mother, and Subhadra, working on the Mother's blouse. They were both working in Vasudha's house. On getting this information the Mother wrote to her, "It is very good — if you continue you will soon have a little school of embroiderers!" a prophetic comment indeed! Gradually some ladies — Meenakshamma, Subhadra, Lila, Tara, Anusuya — started doing embroidery work in Vasudha's house.

Vasudha became increasingly competent in embroidery and could do many different kinds of needlework, laces etc. She had once shown to some of her young students a thick encyclopedic volume on needlework and had told them that she could do all the different types of work detailed in that book! Thus she developed into a perfect instrument of the Mother for her work in this line.

It was quite common in those years for many young girls and ladies to do some needlework as offering to the Mother. They received unstinted help from Vasudha who taught the new girls, students or visitors alike, embroidery and hand-stitching of the Mother's clothes. One young student, about eleven years old, wanted to stitch the Mother's gown. Vasudha first took the Mother's permission who graciously allowed this little girl to stitch her gown. This young student still remembers how carefully Vasudha taught her step by step, all the care one had to take while doing Mother's gown. She sat crosslegged on the ground, first a lap cloth was put over her legs, she had to put some powder on her palms so that there would not be any perspiration to spoil the Mother's clothes. She was cautioned that the end of the thread which would be inserted into the eye of the needle should never be wetted by putting it in the mouth as is commonly done. A small bowl of water was kept there for this purpose; also no knot should be tied at the end of the thread. Lastly, the most important part, was that the worker should concentrate on her work and there

should be no talking while stitching, to remember always that she was stitching the Mother's gown. She was then taught the way to stitch. She was the youngest person to have stitched Mother's gown.

Everyone was eager to prepare something for the Mother. Many, young or old, men or women did some hand work to offer to the Mother on their birthdays. It was a joy to spend extra hours trying to do some beautiful item for her. Offering these items to her was a heavenly experience and everyone was eager to get a direct contact with her through these offerings. It is incredible how the Mother appreciated and accepted each and every item however insignificant it might be! With what grace and love she received the things offered to her! It was a unique means of an unforgettable communion with her.

We mention now another example of embroidery done in those years. We have something interesting from Sahana's reminiscences. When she joined the Ashram in 1928, she was already a well-known vocalist in Bengal. She was given work in the Building Service of the Ashram and the embroidery for the Mother at home. A few years later, she was given charge of the ladies' tailoring section where the garments are stitched for the lady inmates. A few ladies worked with her.

She recounts:

The French litterateur and poet Maurice Magre was coming. I was busy embroidering a curtain for the big door of the Mother's room on the design submitted by Sanjivan . . . The old French houses of Pondicherry have large doors and windows. Consequently the curtain too was large.

I had gone to ask the Mother about some points as regards the curtain when, after a moment's reflection, she asked, "Maurice Magre is expected, do you think you will be able to finish the curtain before his arrival? There are still three months in hand." Guessing her intention, I said enthusiastically, "Yes, Mother, most certainly." Mother was very pleased and blessed me. . . .

Mentally working it out, it seemed that to finish the curtain within three months would entail a work of eleven to twelve hours a day, which I put in, but strange to say I never felt tired even after such long hours of work. The work was intricate and extensive — a very thick trunk of a tree spreading proportionate branches mounting upwards; on a branch towards the top a white peacock looking down and on a lower branch another white peacock gazing up towards the other bird. The size of the birds would come up to the stature of a full-grown Bengali girl. The design was superb too. I was surprised at the energy with which I was able to complete the work without tiring — it was clearly derived from the Mother herself. When it was taken to the Mother and spread on the floor for her inspection, I can hardly describe the expression of her eyes, I wonder if I have ever seen anyone appreciating in like manner. After looking at it for a long time with a face beaming with joy she said in

French, "Oh, c'est magnifique!" Even today the same curtain is hung in Sri Aurobindo's room on every Darshan Day of 24th November; and each time I gaze at it in wonder, I try to imagine what I had offered the Mother and how she had transformed it, that even after nearly four decades it hangs as perfectly as on the first occasion — a perfect example of preserving a thing with the utmost possible care. (Sahana, in *Breath of Grace*, pp. 157-58)

To the girls working with her, Sahana taught a special type of embroidery — the drawn thread technique, and they prepared a whole set of curtains in this style for the Mother's room. This type of embroidery was done here for the very first time.

Swarnaprabha, known to us as Swarna, came to the Ashram from Chittagong in 1933. She was young, fair-complexioned, soft-spoken and yet firm; she was already connected to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through her correspondence. The call for this life was so great that she left her six-year-old daughter with her mother and had come now to serve Them.

She had brought with her some good quality wool. She wove a small mat with this and offered it to the Mother. The Mother was pleased with this work and she made some small ones and then larger ones for the Mother. Mother wanted to see her embroidery work. Swarna embroidered a small flower at the edge of Mother's saree. The Mother was pleased with the work. She was sent to Datta with whom she then worked. She had to stitch or darn the old pillow covers, bed sheets, towels, Mother's dress, saree, handkerchief etc. Both Datta and the Mother were happy with her perfect work. She was then given the Mother's clothes to wash and iron. Datta repeatedly reminded her ward, "Swarna, remember always that the Mother is not an ordinary woman; She is Divine. When stitching her clothes, it should be done in a clean manner with as much purity as possible."

Now Swarna was allotted a more difficult work. She had learned to cut the Mother's gown. The Mother would tell her the measurements needed and Swarna would quickly jot them down. All stitching was done by hand. Once the Mother received a few sarees offered to her by some businessman of Pondicherry. The Mother chose one saree and said that she would like to wear it on the next 'Prosperity' day, which is the first day of each month. That meant that there was just one day's time for Swarna to complete the work. A blouse from the same cloth had to be stitched and the pallu of the saree too had to be embroidered. Datta asked, "What, Swarna, will you be able to complete so much work?"

"If the Mother wants to wear the saree, she will make me do it," thought Swarna. The next morning Swarna had an early breakfast and sat down to her work. Her hands moved fast, silently concentrated only on her work. This was her sadhana. At eleven thirty at night she completed her work. The next day when the Mother came to the 'Prosperity' wearing the saree, what a wave of joy passed through Swarna.

And the Mother was looking at her with a mysterious smile on her face. Datta remarked, "Look, Swarna, the Mother is looking so wonderful! Do you know how many hours you worked yesterday? You have worked sixteen hours at a stretch!"

Many people offered sarees to the Mother and Swarna took care of the Mother's sarees. She would darn the places which were damaged, she would also embroider a small beautiful flower at one corner of the saree so that the Mother did not have to waste her time searching for the reverse or obverse side of the cloth.

A French couple who had lost their two beloved children had come to Pondicherry in search of peace. The Mother permitted them to stay in the Ashram and gave them work and also new names: 'Sarala' to the wife, and 'Suchi' to the husband. The Mother gave Sarala some work with her and thus Sarala was blessed with the opportunity of being in the Mother's presence every day for a short while. The Mother had sent a few ladies, Swarna was among them, to learn embroidery from Sarala. Others could not continue as they had other things to do. But Swarna continued her work, and they became quite close friends. Sarala did very fine embroidery work. Swarna and Sarala together made a chemise for the Mother, entirely by crochet work. Swarna worked on the small rose flowers while Sarala did the larger ones. These were joined to form a chemise. The Mother was very happy with the work. She looked at the chemise from all angles, appreciated it and praised their perfect work with her wonderful smile of love. We may mention here that Suchi was a very talented worker. We have seen Nolini-da with a skull cap on his head to protect him from the hot Pondicherry sun. He once told us that this cap was made by Suchi, and when the street urchins saw him in the street wearing this strange cap, they would shout gleefully, "Quel bonnet! Quel bonnet!" What a cap!

We, my sister and me, came here in 1940. I remember seeing many of the ladies often wearing sarees darned in a few places, and as I was fascinated with this work, I used to observe those parts and try to figure out how were they done. The inmates of the Ashram receive four sets of clothing every year. These get easily worn out. Mother did not like anyone to wear torn clothes. The ladies darned or patched up their sarees. The men sent their torn garments to the tailoring section of the Ashram to get them repaired.

The Mother never liked rejecting any item just because it was much used and old. Once, Swarna received a few of the Mother's kerchiefs from Datta. Some of them had been used so much that there was hardly any thread left in them. Swarna wondered how could she repair them? She mentioned her problem to Datta. Then Datta told her that once she had received one hanky which was so used and worn out that after informing the Mother, she had rejected it and thrown it in the waste paper box. Perhaps the Mother was busy with some other work and had not quite heard Datta. Later, she asked for that hanky, and being told that it had been put in the waste box, the Mother carefully searched the pile, found the hanky and took it so gratefully, saying, "You have thrown this hanky? Do you know the number of

years it has served me?" For the Mother all objects, animate or inanimate had a consciousness! They were living entities.

Pranab-da writes:

Mother used to take great care of her things of daily use. She never threw her old torn clothes away. She would get them mended by Swarna-di and use them again. I remember once seeing Mother use a handkerchief which was stitched and mended like that.

Once she gave Swarna-di a dress to mend. It had become extremely worn out so Swarna-di suggested to Mother to discard it. Mother answered: "You are asking me to discard this? Do you know how well it has served me?"

(*I Remember*, Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, p. 228)

Here is another similar example.

Once the Mother gave to Datta a blue satin gown covered with black lace, with instructions to see if it could be altered for the Mother's use. Datta entrusted it to Swarna who used to sew the Mother's dresses. Swarna reported to Datta that the satin had become so old that it simply disintegrated in her hands.

When she heard this, the Mother instructed, "Tell her my grandmother used to wear this gown. She should remove the satin very carefully and bring the lace-net to me." Swarna-di separated the lace-net with utmost care and sent it to the Mother.

Then the Mother said, "Tell Swarna to make a manteau from it for me. I will wear it with a satin gown." Swarna made a manteau which the Mother liked and wore over a new satin gown. We have a photograph of the Mother in this gown. (*More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Shyam Kumari, 1991, pp. 43-44)

We quote here from Priti Das Gupta's book where we get yet again the Mother's unwillingness to discard old dresses.

I would notice while going to the Mother for her blessing that flowers were embroidered on the Mother's gown at several places. It was quite puzzling to me. Minu, Jaya, Bela and others were responsible for stitching the Mother's gowns. So one day I asked Minu:

"Why do you keep embroidering flowers here and there on the Mother's gown? Can't you do it in a certain pattern? It looks so strange."

Minu laughed and said:

"Is the Mother short of gowns? But the Mother will not throw any of her old gowns away. As soon as there is a tear in the gown, she asks us to patch

that area and embroider a flower over it. All the flowers on a gown just go to show how old [the gown is]. The Mother has many such gowns on which we have embroidered flowers on her instructions." (*Moments Eternal*, p. 271)

When Swarna's daughter, Minu, whom Swarna had left back home with her mother in Bengal, came to the Ashram in 1942, she was allotted work with Swarna. Bela joined her in her house, and later another young girl, Madhuri was also given work there. They learnt some stitching and a little of embroidery as also washing and taking care of the Mother's garments. These young girls were later transferred by the Mother to Vasudha's workplace and in 1948 she gave a name to the workplace — "Mother's Embroidery Department". That is how this department was started and as long as Vasudha was alive she remained its overall in-charge.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

The psychic self-control that is desirable in these surroundings and in the midst of discussion would mean among other things:

1. *Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.*

2. *To avoid all debate, dispute or too animated discussion and simply say what has to be said and leave it there. There should also be no insistence that you are right and the others wrong, but what is said should only be thrown in as a contribution to the consideration of the truth of the matter. . . .*

3. *To keep the tone of speech and the wording very quiet and calm and uninsistent.*

4. *Not to mind at all if others are heated and dispute, but remain quiet and undisturbed and yourself speak only what can help things to be smooth again.*

5. *If there is gossip about others and harsh criticism (especially about sadhaks), not to join — for these things are helpful in no way and only lower the consciousness from its higher level.*

6. *To avoid all that would hurt or wound others.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – IV, CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 87)

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA”

(Continued from the issue of September 2019)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION (Part 2)

When Sri Aurobindo arrived on the shores of India in 1893, fourteen years had passed since he had seen his family. He must have been eager to meet them but had to wait yet another year, for it was only after a year’s service at Baroda State that he was granted privilege leave to visit his maternal relations at Deoghar, sometime in early 1894. It was an emotional get-together. His grandfather, the doyen Rajnarayan Bose (1826-1899) embraced him ecstatically. He met all his relations — his mother Swarnalata, his younger siblings Sarojini and Barin, his maternal uncle Jogendra Bose and others. Barindra Kumar Ghose (1880-1959) was then a 14-year-old boy attending a local school. After the death of their father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, in December 1892, both Sarojini and Barin were living with their grandfather at Deoghar. Sri Aurobindo’s mother was staying five kilometres away at the village Rohini. When they met she did not recognise him — fifteen years had passed since she had last seen him as a small boy. She wondered, “My Aurobindo was not so big, he was small.” When it was explained to her that he had come back from England after finishing his studies she suddenly had a flash of memory and said, “My Aurobindo had a cut on his finger.” In fact, the mark of a cut, received from a broken glass bottle during his childhood, was shown to her and she then recognised him.¹ Sri Aurobindo’s cousin, Basanti Mitra (1884-1965) writes that Sri Aurobindo’s mother “was a pious and devoted woman, very dedicated to her father. . . . Her complexion was very fair: the English called her ‘Rose of Rangpur’”.²

Let us chronicle Sri Aurobindo’s ancestry for both his paternal and maternal side were illustrious families of Bengal. Sri Aurobindo, apparently, inherited several fine qualities from his lineage. Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, was a man of several outstanding qualities many of which — for instance his compassion, ability and steely determination — he shared with his son, Aurobindo. Indeed Sri Aurobindo’s grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, has remarked that Krishnadhan “has several astonishing qualities, gentlemanliness, philanthropy being part of them.”³ Krishnadhan

1. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 43.

2. Basanti Chakravarti (*née* Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 83.

3. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

was born around the year 1845, his parents being Kaliprasad Ghose and Kailasabasini Devi, a lady known for her remarkable beauty, religiosity and her exceptional piety. The family house or palace, though “quite in ruins” was “a very noble building”, not far from Calcutta. In Krishnadhan’s time the family underwent financial difficulties. “Living almost entirely by charity of friends”, Krishnadhan, by his sheer grit and perseverance had a meritorious educational discipline. After completing his schooling in 1858 he passed the entrance examination of the Calcutta University to join Calcutta Medical College. When he was in his fourth year at the Medical College, he married Swarnalata Devi, aged twelve and the eldest daughter of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, according to the rites of Adi Brahma Samaj. It was the alliance of two authentic and forceful families of Bengal.⁴ Sri Aurobindo has stated that his father was “a man of great ability and strong personality”.⁵

Krishnadhan left for Great Britain in 1869 to pursue his studies in advanced medicine. He returned to India in 1871 with a higher medical degree from Aberdeen University, Scotland.⁶ Sri Aurobindo writes that his father “had been among the first to go to England for his education.”⁷ To undertake such a novel project in a far-flung foreign country whose Government happened also to be his country’s master reflected Krishnadhan’s enterprise and daring.

After his stay in Europe Krishnadhan became a firm believer in Western civilisation; and wished that India could transform itself into a self-confident, progressive and powerful nation.⁸ After his return from Britain, his father-in-law, Rajnarayan Bose — to whom he was particularly close — wrote about him:

In 1871, my eldest son-in-law returned from abroad. I had expressed the sentiment in my English sonnet that he would not have lost his attachment to his country during his stay abroad. But it is a matter of sorrow that he returned from abroad completely anglicised. Before going there, he had been a dedicated, enthusiastic Brahma, but upon his return I discovered the change in him. I saw the extent to which suspicion had pervaded his mind. I have dedicated ‘Dharmatatwadipika’ to him. I have expressed the hope in the dedicatory note that the manner in which he tended to the sick in his capacity as a doctor, he would similarly care for spiritual suffering through the means of religious preaching. I was terribly disappointed when my hopes failed to materialise. However I pray to the Almighty for his happiness wherever he be. He has several astonishing qualities, gentlemanliness, philanthropy being part of them. He has not lost these qualities during his stay abroad. He has a very

4. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 25.

5. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 15.

6. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 26.

7. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 15.

8. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 26.

sweet nature. This sweetness expresses itself on his face. When I was in Kanpur, the then priest of the English poltoon, Rev. Mill told me: “I have never seen such a sweet face as his.” The priest had invited me for a meal but I could not make it. It was not possible for me to do so even for the sake of courtesy. Whatever might have happened in the past, I no longer eat with the English, for several reasons; I only take some fruit and tea.⁹

Sri Aurobindo notes that his father was amongst the first to go to England for his education and

. . . returned entirely Anglicised in habits, ideas and ideal, — so strongly that Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani only and learned his mother tongue only after his return from England. He was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. While in India they were sent for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns’ school in Darjeeling and in 1879 he took his three sons to England and placed them with an English clergyman and his wife with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.¹⁰

Krishnadhan’s humane side was such that it impelled him to dedicate himself to selflessly serve the common people. Dr. Krishnadhan was one of the finest civil surgeons of his day but what stood out was his commitment to the cause of public health. On his return from Britain, the orthodox sections in his hometown, Konnagar, wanted that he go through the purification ceremony for having sojourned in an alien land. Dr. Krishnadhan, a strong-willed independent-minded person, refused to bow down to this superstitious custom and preferred rather to leave Konnagar for good. Interestingly, when Sri Aurobindo got married, the Shastras enjoined he undergo certain ritualistic purificatory rites — since he also had lived in England — but he, too, declined.

Since Krishnadhan was departing Konnagar for good he sold his ancestral house and property to a local Brahmin for a nominal price. Soon after, a relation offered a more tempting offer but he turned it down; the word had been given, and Krishnadhan wouldn’t go back on it! After leaving the place of his birth, Krishnadhan moved from district to district as the Government Civil Surgeon, endearing himself to the people everywhere by his innumerable acts of charity and benevolence. In Bhagalpur, Rungpur and Khulna — especially in the last place — Dr. Krishnadhan’s

9. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

10. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 15.

name became almost a household word. “Wherever he served,” writes A. B. Purani, “he was very popular and highly respected by all. He used to take a very prominent part in civic life, and interested himself in schools, hospitals, municipalities and other public bodies. The people of Khulna afterwards started a school in his name and his photograph was placed in the town hall. It is said that he changed the whole face of the town of Khulna.”¹¹ Krishnadhan’s astonishing generosity made him give away more than he could afford, as a result his financial support to his three elder sons during their fourteen-year education in England was consistently irregular and far from adequate and the cause of their poverty in England.

Basanti Mitra considered that both Sri Aurobindo and his father shared the virtue of selfless generosity and gentleness. About Krishnadhan she writes:

Baromeshomashay [Krishnadhan Ghose] was a civil surgeon. He was westernised but very gentle at heart. He treated the poor without charge. He worked for a long time in Khulna and in Rangpur. As a token of gratitude for his large-heartedness, the people of Khulna established a school in his name and hung an oil painting of him in the town-hall. And the residents of Rangpur out of admiration for his qualities, dug a canal through the town and named it K. D. Canal in order to perpetuate his memory.¹²

Jyotindra Mohan Banerjee writes that Krishnadhan was very compassionate and loved by all for his gentle behaviour. He expended his energies to do many charitable works for the ordinary people. At Khulna he introduced the yearly fair so that the people had some form of entertainment and social gatherings. He also started a film show which in those days was impossible to imagine since it was a rarity. During the film show he gave the explanations in English but later, after realising only few understood the language, switched to Bengali.¹³

Indeed, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose’s generosity was legendary. Sri Aurobindo gave him the ultimate compliment: “He was extremely generous. Hardly anyone who went to him for help came back empty-handed.”¹⁴ The nationalist leader, Bipin Chandra Pal, had this to say of Dr. K. D. Ghose:

Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness, regardless of his own ones, but sensitive to the sufferings of others — this was the inventory of the character of Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. The rich blamed him for his recklessness, the man of the world condemned him for his

11. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 26-27.

12. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 83.

13. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

14. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., p. 624.

absolute lack of prudence, the highest virtue in his estimation. But the poor, the widow and the orphan loved him for his selfless pity, and his soulful benevolence.¹⁵

Dinendra Kumar Roy had this to say about Dr. K. D. Ghose in his *Aurobindo Prasanga*:

For many years he held the position of Civil Surgeon in Rangpur and later in Khulna. In both places, he became well-known for his extraordinary reputation and influence. Everyone loved and respected him highly. He earned vast sums of money and spent it freely. When he died he was hardly able to leave anything to his children.¹⁶

Once when Sri Aurobindo was talking about the Swadeshi movement his father's name cropped up because in 1902 he and Debabrata Bose had visited Khulna for some political work:

At Khulna, we had a right royal reception, not so much because I was a politician, but because I was a son of my father. They served me with seven rows of dishes and I could hardly reach out to them, and even from others I could eat very little.

My father was very popular at Khulna; wherever he went he became all powerful. When he was at Rangpur he was very friendly with the magistrate there. (We went to his cousin's place in England afterwards, the Drewetts.) It was always the doctor who got things done at Rangpur. When the new magistrate came he found that nothing could be done without Dr. K. D. Ghose. So he asked the Government to remove him and he was transferred to Khulna. It was since that time that he became a politician. That is to say, he did not like the English domination. Before that every thing Western was good!¹⁷

In a talk Nirodbaran relates how a tutor in Cambridge took the initiative to write a strongly worded letter to Sri Aurobindo's father about his pupil's strained financial circumstances in England and danger of his being hauled up in court for failing to pay up some arrears. Nirodbaran states, "The father at once sent the remittances but wrote an admonishing letter to the son, Sri Aurobindo, that he was too extravagant! Sri Aurobindo said to us smilingly, 'When we had not even one

15. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 192.

16. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 9 (Dinendra Kumar Roy's *Aurobindo Prasanga* — Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

17. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 623-24.

sufficient meal a day, where was the question of being extravagant?’ But he had no feeling of resentment or bitterness towards his father. Whenever he spoke of him it was always with affection and tenderness.”¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo was acutely aware that his father adored him. Once in a letter of 1906 to his father-in-law he explained his habit of seldom writing letters by saying that he seemed “to inherit the defect” from his father. But he continued, “In all my fourteen years in England I hardly got a dozen letters from him, and yet I cannot doubt his affection for me, since it was the false report of my death which killed him.”¹⁹

From all accounts the three brothers admired their father. Manmohan (1869-1924) wrote to his poet friend, Laurence Binyon (1869-1943): “My father’s character may well be called ‘thorough’. He is determined to give them [his children] a good education, tho’ he is toiling under difficulties. He must be a man of iron nerves. . . . Indeed he says, ‘my body is as stern as my mind to have survived all the trouble which I have endured’. I cannot but be proud with admiration at the sight of such dauntless self-sacrifice and heroic perseverance.”²⁰

On his part, the father truly adored his sons. In a letter he wrote on 2nd December 1891, shortly before his death, to his brother-in-law Jogendra Bose, he proudly proclaimed:

The three sons I have produced, I have made giants of them. I may not, but you will live to be proud of the three nephews who will adorn your country and shed lustre to your name. . . . Beno will be his ‘father’ in every line of action — self-sacrificing, but limited in his sphere of action. Mano will combine the feelings of his father, the grand ambitions of a cosmopolitan spirit that hate and abhor angle and corner feelings, with the poetry of his grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose. Ara, I hope, will yet glorify his country by a brilliant administration. . . . He is at King’s College, Cambridge, now, borne there by his own ability.²¹

Krishnadhan was acutely aware of Sri Aurobindo’s greatness for he not only earned a scholarship to King’s College by his own merit at the rigorous scholarship exam but also overawed the examiner by his brilliance. A year earlier Sri Aurobindo had written to his father:

18. See *Mother India*, August 1970, pp. 407-08 (*Talks by Nirodbaran — December 1969 to July 1970*, Edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 219).

19. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 147.

20. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo — a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 35.

21. *Ibid.*

Last night I was invited to coffee with one of the Dons and in his rooms I met the Great O.B. otherwise Oscar Browning, who is the feature par excellence of King's. He was extremely flattering; passing from the subject of cotillions to that of scholarships he said to me "I suppose you know you passed an extraordinarily high examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time [seen] such excellent papers as yours (meaning my classical papers at the scholarship examination). As for your essay it was wonderful." In this essay (a comparison between Shakespeare and Milton) I indulged in my Oriental tastes to the top of their bent; it overflowed with rich and tropical imagery; it abounded in antitheses and epigrams and it expressed my real feelings without restraint or reservation. I thought myself that it was the best thing I had ever done, but at school I would have been condemned as extraordinarily Asiatic & bombastic. The Great O.B. afterwards asked me where my rooms were & when I had answered he said "That wretched hole!" then turning to Mahaffy "How rude we are to our scholars! we get great minds to come down here and then shut them up in that box! I suppose it is to keep their pride down."²²

Krishnadhan was keen that Sri Aurobindo join the highly prestigious I.C.S. "I appeared for I.C.S. because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand,"²³ said Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo simultaneously prepared for the demanding I.C.S. examinations and pursued his studies of Classical Tripos at Cambridge. Sri Aurobindo remarked that his father wanted "all his sons to be great; at that time to join the I.C.S. was to become great."²⁴

Sri Aurobindo once casually said: "Everyone makes all the forefathers of a great man very religious-minded, pious, etc. It is not true in my case at any rate. My father was a tremendous atheist."²⁵

Once a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo, "You must have lived a very short time with your father?" "Yes," replied Sri Aurobindo, "only the early years. When I was seven we left for England and before we returned he had died. I was in a way the cause of his death. He was suffering from heart disease. Grindlays informed him that I was to start on a particular steamer. . . . He asked me to return to India by a particular ship. I don't know why on that ship. . . . The steamer went down off the coast of Portugal and many lives were lost. Somehow I didn't sail by it. Grindlays didn't know it. They telegraphed the news to my father and he died on receiving the news. But I hadn't sailed on it at all."²⁶

22. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 121.

23. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 568.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 624.

25. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 112-13.

26. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 13.

A friend of Krishnadhan's, Brajendranath De, an I.C.S. and Magistrate at Khulna, who lived nearby, gave the following account of the doctor's last days:

Dr. Ghose believed up to the very end that his son had been admitted into the I.C.S. and was in fact coming out. He, in fact, took a month's leave to go and meet him in Bombay, and bring him back in triumph. But he could not get any definitive news as to when he was coming out and returned from Bombay in a very depressed frame of mind. At last one afternoon he got a wire from his Agents in Bombay. . . . It so happened that that very night he and the Superintendent of Police were coming to dine at my house. The dinner was ready, the Superintendent came, but there was no sign of the doctor, although his bungalow was quite close to my house. After waiting for some time I sent an orderly to remind him of the fact that he had agreed to dine at my house that night. The man came back and informed me that the doctor was very ill. I at once went round, heard of the telegram and found the doctor very ill and quite unconscious. The medical men in the station were assiduous in their attentions. I did all I could. But it was all of no avail. The poor man lingered on for a day or two and then passed away. . . . I had to take the body to the cremation grounds and to attend the cremation.²⁷

A long procession accompanied the mortal remains of Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. Heaps of flower garlands covered his body. The whole grief-stricken Khulna town poured in at the cremation ground to pay their last respects and mourned the death of their beloved and benevolent doctor.

Krishnadhan died in December 1892. His obituary was published on the 15th in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. A couple of days later an obituary was also published in the *Bengalee*, an extract of which reads:

He was in many respects a distinguished man. Rungpur owes him a debt immense of endless gratitude for the important sanitary works, which were carried out at his instance, and under his immediate supervision. If Rungpur is a healthier place now than it was twenty years ago, the result is due in no small degree to the efforts of the late Dr. Ghosh.

He was at one time a candidate for the Health Officership of Calcutta and would have been appointed to that office, but that his dark skin was against him. We offer our heart-felt condolence to his bereaved family.²⁸

27. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

28. See *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The news of Krishnadhan's death was concealed from his mother Kailasbasini for a year. Her son would write her a letter every month and visit her twice a year. And each month he would send her Rs. 50 for her expenses. Dr. Krishnadhan was very devoted to his mother. Once, to fulfil her wish, he spent Rs.1000 and got a gold plaque fitted on a wall of the Kashi Vishwanath temple at Benares. It was only when she demanded insistently the whereabouts of her son that the family revealed to her the news at which she instantly fainted and fell into an unconscious state that lasted for a month.²⁹

It is rather tragic that after a fourteen-year separation destiny prevented a doting father from meeting his favourite son.

Despite his typical benevolent actions, Krishnadhan Ghose had to endure more than his fair share of difficulties. A spirited man, he often said in sorrow, "If I were to meet Destiny, I would have asked Him, why did you write so much of suffering on my forehead?" Like King Dasaratha of another Age, who died while uttering his son Rama's name in sorrow, Sri Aurobindo's father also died in grief while uttering the name of his son: "Ara-Ara."³⁰ Referring to his death being falsely reported to his father, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "it was while uttering his name in lamentation that the father died."³¹

Let us now traverse to an earlier generation, Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather. Sri Aurobindo's cousin, Basanti Chakravarty (*née*) Mitra, writes that Sri Aurobindo "received great affection from the saintly Dadamoshay, Rajnarayan Bose."³² "I was at Deoghar several times," writes Sri Aurobindo, "and saw my grandfather there, first in good health and then bedridden with paralysis."³³

Basanti Chakravarty (*née*) Mitra alluded to a close tie between Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. K. D. Ghose and his maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose:

Baromeshomashay's name was Krishnadhan Ghose. He respected and revered my grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, and loved him like a father. This can be clearly seen from all his letters. And his heart's deepest aspiration was by proper education to make of his sons 'beacons of the world'.³⁴

When Rajnarayan Bose wrote his first book he dedicated it to his son-in-law K. D. Ghose.³⁵

29. See *Ibid.*, p. 16.

30. See *Ibid.*

31. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 36.

32. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

33. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 45.

34. Basanti Chakravarty (*née* Mitra), 'Our Aurodada', *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 83.

35. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

Sri Aurobindo fondly recounted an anecdote to his disciples about his maternal grandparents: “Your question reminds me of the story of my grandmother. She said: ‘God has made such a bad world. If I could meet Him I would tell Him what I think of Him.’ My grandfather said: ‘Yes, it is true. But God has so arranged it that you can’t get near Him so long as you have any such desire in you.’”³⁶

Rajnarayan Bose was a towering god-like personality. He was an early synthesis of the East and the West, and in the heyday of his hallowed life “represented the high-water mark of the composite culture of the country”. He has been called “the militant defender of his country, the Olympian champion of truth, the ruthless antagonist to sham”; he was a leader of the Brahmo Samaj in its robust days, and Devendranath Tagore said of his books: “Whatever falls from the lips of Rajnarayan Babu creates a great sensation in the country”; one of the makers of modern Bengal, he has been described as the “grandfather of Indian nationalism”.³⁷ Sri Aurobindo wrote that “Rajnarayan Bose formed once a secret society of which Tagore, then a very young man, became a member, and also set up an institution for national and revolutionary propaganda, but this finally came to nothing.”³⁸

Rajnarayan Bose was a writer and intellectual of the Bengal Renaissance. He was one of the best known prose writers in Bengali in the nineteenth century, writing often for the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, a premier Brahmo journal. He was born in Boral in 24 Parganas and studied at the Hare School and Hindu College (now known as Presidency College), both premier institutions in Calcutta at that time. At a young age he was noticed by his teachers for his brilliance and intelligence. His father Nanda Kishore Basu was a disciple of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and later one of his secretaries. Rajnarayan was a great teacher and educationist. He began his teaching career in 1849 at a pay of Rs 200/-. He even taught English to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. In 1851 he became the Headmaster of Midnapore District School and served there till 1866. His teaching methods were quite novel and innovative. He was against the standard practice at schools of students learning by heart, in other words cramming. Instead, he discussed a certain subject or a passage with his students in such a manner that he got the problem and questions solved by them, thus stimulating original thinking. He encouraged his students to question and discuss, and not be passive, so that they could get a thorough understanding of the subject. As headmaster he introduced many progressive practices like abolishing corporal punishment and instead promoting a friendly and supportive atmosphere among the teachers and students to make education more interesting to them. At the same time he put emphasis on character building of the students and thus moral values were inculcated. He also understood that physical exercise and sports were important

36. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 661.

37. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 25-26.

38. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 33.

for the students, so he got made a lawn tennis court and a gymnasium in the school premises. In addition he introduced debate associations and a mutual improvement association in school.

Rajnarayan also founded the first girls' school and a night school for educating the illiterates. He established a public library that is still in use, now known as the "Rishi Rajnarayan Basu Memorial Library", which is the oldest public library in West Bengal.

After leaving the school he wrote four books including *Science of Religion*, *Adi Brahma Samaj as a Church*, and *Theistic Tolerance and Diffusion of Theism*.³⁹ In 1868, he retired and moved to Deoghar where he spent the rest of his life. After retiring, he was given the honorary title of *Rishi* or sage.

Rajnarayan Bose was greatly influenced by Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), who was his elder and whom he looked upon as a friend and a guardian. Devendranath was active in the Brahma Samaj and founded the Brahma religion in 1848. Sri Aurobindo notes, "Rammohan Roy arose with a new religion in his hand, which was developed on original lines by men almost greater one thinks than he, by Rajnarayan Bose and Debendranath Tagore."⁴⁰ Devendranath's eldest son Dwijendralal Tagore (1840-1926) — Rabindranath Tagore was the youngest of the 13 surviving children — and Rajnarayan Bose were great friends. Sri Aurobindo had remarked, "I don't think there was anyone in Brahma Samaj with spiritual realisation. Dwijendranath had something in him and Shiva Nath Shastri too, and perhaps Keshab Sen. Bejoy Goswami ceased to be a Brahma."⁴¹

Jyotindra Mohan Banerjee writes that Rajnarayan was a saintly person and even Michael Madhusudan and Bhudev Mukherjee have written about his simplicity, candidness and truthfulness.⁴² The priests of the Baidyanath temple, too, revered Rajnarayan and even Swami Vivekananda met him several times at Deoghar.⁴³

When Dinendra Kumar Roy first went to Deoghar in 1898, Rajnarayan Bose was already bedridden with paralysis. Roy, awestruck with his high spirits, said to Jogendranath, "Your father can laugh a lot. I haven't met anyone who can laugh in such an open-hearted manner. Despite the pain inflicted by the illness how much he laughs!" Jogendra replied, "This is nothing! When father talks with Dwijenbabu and the two friends go on laughing, the very roof of the house seems about to be swept away by the waves of their laughter!"⁴⁴

39. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives; sourced and adapted from the website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajnarayan_Basu on 8/7/19/.

40. CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 94.

41. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 537.

42. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

43. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 75.

44. *Ibid.*

Sri Aurobindo shared an intimacy with his grandfather. He once clarified:

I don't think my grandfather was much of a philosopher; at any rate he never talked to me on that subject. My politics were shaped before I came to India; he talked to me of his Nationalist activities in the past, but I learned nothing new from them. I admired my grandfather and liked his writings "Hindu Dharmar [Sresthata]" and "Se Kal ar E Kal"; but it is a mistake to think that he exercised any influence on me. I had gone in England far beyond his stock of ideas which belonged to an earlier period. He never spoke to me of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.⁴⁵

When his grandfather died in 1899, Sri Aurobindo honoured him by writing a sonnet, titled "Transiit, Non Periiit"

Not in annihilation lost, nor given
 To darkness art thou fled from us and light,
 O strong and sentient spirit; no mere heaven
 Of ancient joys, no silence eremite
 Received thee; but the omnipresent Thought
 Of which thou wast a part and earthly hour,
 Took back its gift. Into that splendour caught
 Thou hast not lost thy special brightness. Power
 Remains with thee and the old genial force
 Unseen for blinding light, not darkly lurks:
 As when a sacred river in its course
 Dives into ocean, there its strength abides
 Not less because with vastness wed and works
 Unnoticed in the grandeur of the tides.⁴⁶

During his service at Baroda Sri Aurobindo spent his vacations in Bengal, which generally coincided with the Puja holidays. During his teaching years he usually had two vacations which were from 15th April to 9th June and from 30th September to 2nd January. He generally stayed at Deogarh but also passed a few days at his maternal aunt's house at Calcutta.⁴⁷ All his cousins would congregate in Deogarh during the Puja holidays. Basanti Mitra, who for ten years edited a Bengali magazine for children with distinction, writes: "Every Puja holiday Aurobindo came from Baroda to be with us. He remained in Deogarh as long as the holidays lasted". She further writes in her article 'Our Aurobindo':

45. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 45-46.

46. CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 282.

47. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 48.

Each year over the Puja holidays we used to go to the house of our Dadamashay [maternal grandfather] Rishi Rajnarayan Bose at Deogarh. Wandering in the open spaces and fields and by the river banks of the healthful hill-station, looked after with love and care by our relatives, we spent the holidays most happily.⁴⁸

It was during one of these walks that grandfather Rajnarain was found asleep standing. “There are some who go to sleep standing like a horse. My grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, was like that. One day we were walking together at night. Suddenly we missed him. When we came back we saw him sleeping standing,”⁴⁹ remarked Sri Aurobindo. One of the spots the family was certain to visit was Rohini, the place where Sri Aurobindo’s mother lived. Her bungalow had so many big, shady trees that it became an ideal place for a day-long picnic.⁵⁰

About his first experience of Deoghar, Sri Aurobindo’s elder brother, Manmohan, describes to his poet friend Laurence Binyon: “I arrived on October 25th [1894], and have been staying at a beautiful country place called Baidyanath, in my grandfather’s house, all among the mountains and green sugar-cane fields and shallow rivers. My own people I found charming and cultivated folk, and spent an extremely pleasant time among them. This, I think very fortunate indeed — to find at once friends, and that of one’s own blood, so congenial and interesting as soon as I landed.”⁵¹

Basanti Mitra further expands on the pleasant family get-togethers at Deogarh: “During these Puja holidays in Deogarh, our people used to come together, and then the house would fill with our happy chatter and singing. All of us brothers and sisters would sit around our beloved Boromama [eldest maternal uncle] Jogendranath Bose and chat heartily about many things. Boromama took part cheerfully in our talk; we felt him to be one of us.”⁵²

“My elder uncle Jogendranath Bose rejected the Deputy’s position assigned by Sir Henry Cotton; he earned his living as a reporter. My younger uncle Manindranath Bose was a famous wrestler at Baidyanath, very courageous, beat foreigners most daringly,” writes Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother, Barin.⁵³ Sri Aurobindo’s mother, Swarnalata was Rishi Rajnarain’s eldest daughter and Boromama Jogendranath Bose, was her younger brother and Rajnarain’s eldest son. “Aurodada loved Boromama dearly”,⁵⁴ writes Basanti Mitra.

48. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 82.

49. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 551.

50. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 56, 71-72.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

52. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 82.

53. See Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Agñiyug* (translated from Bengali — sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives).

54. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 82.

Sri Aurobindo humorously referred to Boromama as “the prophet of Isabgul”, because that was his invariable prescription for almost all types of stomach trouble. Despite the epithet Sri Aurobindo did take a cue from Boromama, since every morning at Baroda, he would take a glass of *Isabgul* mixed with water. He could not do without it and if it was not available in Baroda he would procure it from elsewhere.⁵⁵

Sri Aurobindo appears to have taken another cue from Boromama. In a letter dated August 1894 to Sarojini (1876-1957), Sri Aurobindo writes, “If you want to understand the new orthography of my name, ask uncle.” Here he is referring to his Boromama, Jogendranath, who may have explained to his nephew that his name spelled A-R-A did not give the correct Bengali pronunciation. That may have brought about the change in the spelling. In any case in this letter Sri Aurobindo for the first time adopted the new orthography of his name: AURO.⁵⁶

Dinendra Kumar Roy remarks that Sri Aurobindo “had a great deal of affection for his siblings and cousins”.⁵⁷ After his first visit to Deoghar, Sri Aurobindo, in a letter to Sarojini, expressed his affection for his family members by alluding to Deoghar being heaven and in comparison Baroda being hell. Although Sri Aurobindo had just met Sarojini for the first time there was a sense of intimacy in the letter which he signed off as “With love, Your affectionate brother, Auro.”⁵⁸

Apropos Sri Aurobindo’s closeness with his relatives, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

One of Aurobindo’s paternal uncles was at this time head-clerk in the Bhagalpur Commissioner’s office. Once, Aurobindo went there to meet him. I remember he was invited to dine at his uncle’s house. In fact, it doesn’t seem that Aurobindo was very close to his father’s family. He rather preferred his maternal uncle and grandfather and was close to his mother’s family. Such is the case with most families where the father is no more. The mother’s side of the family is more affectionate and loving than the father’s. . . .⁵⁹

Besides his warm feelings towards his family, Sri Aurobindo was very generous to them with his money. Dinendra Kumar Roy recounts that Sri Aurobindo spent very little money on himself, instead he regularly sent money to his family members:

The first thing he did on receiving his salary was to send an allowance to his mother and sister. His sister was at that time studying and staying with the ‘Aghor-family’ at Bankipur. I saw him sending them money-orders at other times too.

55. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 24-25.

56. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 60.

57. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 11.

58. See CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 124.

59. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 12.

... I was moved by Aurobindo's uncommon devotion to her [his mother]. ...⁶⁰

Once, when Sri Aurobindo was sending a money-order to his mother, Dinendra Kumar Roy also expressed his desire to send a money-order home. Sri Aurobindo smilingly checked his bag and said, "This is all I have. You send it." A taken-aback Roy narrates:

I replied, "What do you mean? You were just filling out a money-order form so that you could send money. You send the money. Do it. I'll send some later." Aurobindo shook his head and said, "That isn't right. Your need is greater than mine. It won't matter if I send it later."

Roy was so deeply moved that he added:

We read in history or in novels about great-souled, magnanimous people who place the need of another above their own. But I don't think I've ever seen an actual example of it in this day and age.⁶¹

"Nobleness and generosity are the soul's ethereal firmament; without them, one looks at an insect in a dungeon," writes Sri Aurobindo.⁶²

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

62. *CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 456.

SANSKRIT AND COMPUTERS — A FUTURE TOGETHER?*

Preface

Sanskrit — so much can be attributed to this 4,000-year old tongue. It isn't just a beautiful language; it distinguishes one of the greatest cultures the world has ever seen. Sanskrit — a magical language spoken by the great rishis and pandits of India, the language used to compose august Indian scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana — the celebrated Indian epics that are to this day read and taught to children, were also written in Sanskrit. All this was a long time ago however, and in today's India very few people are fluent in the language. Indeed, Sanskrit remains largely dormant and neglected. But can this ancient *Bhashā* be revived in today's modern technological world? Computer scientists have become aware of what Sanskrit has to offer in the field of Computer Science. Will these insights bring this fabulous language back to life?

Introduction

Before I dive into this topic of Sanskrit and computers, I'd like to briefly recount to you the beginning of my own journey in this field of research.

My outlook towards Sanskrit now is one of respect and admiration, although I can't say that it has always been so. I remember feeling when I was much younger that Sanskrit classes and the overwhelming amounts of homework we had to do for them were such unpleasant burdens. I started Sanskrit classes with students who had already been learning the language for five years, and I couldn't help feeling bored and lost. This continued for a very long time until I was about twelve years old and in the P3 class.

At this point, the annual progress reports were being sent to my parents. I don't think my Sanskrit teachers or my parents were too happy with me. It was around this point of my life when someone, I just cannot remember who it was, mentioned — perhaps as a prompt for me to do better in my classes — that Sanskrit is the language of the future, and that computer scientists are studying the possibility of it becoming a more effective programming language — a code used to give orders to computers. This was because these scientists believed Sanskrit to be the most precise and concise among the world's languages. Ever since I came to know

* A class talk by a secondary-level student.

this about Sanskrit, my interest in learning the language got greatly boosted.

That was not the last I heard of Sanskrit being used in tech-fields. I remember there being some speculation in our class about how NASA was only letting in people who knew Sanskrit very well because they were starting to use the language for the next generation of supercomputers and for space missions. The reasoning behind this was again that Sanskrit was compact, free of ambiguities and therefore easy for computers to understand. The idea of space always fascinated me, and taking these speculations seriously, I even imagined that if I worked hard enough, I too would get a chance to work in NASA!

I never had second thoughts about these conjectures, and never thought to question them until I started writing computer programs myself. It was then that I realised that there were a few flaws in the common beliefs about using Sanskrit with computers.

Let's consider first the reasons why some scholars considered Sanskrit to be a suitable programming language.

How do programmers make the claim that Sanskrit is precise and unambiguous? By way of background, we have to remember that there has been a long historical relationship between Sanskrit and mathematics. This is not just because ancient Indian mathematicians happened to speak Sanskrit, but because Sanskrit was an integral part of the development of mathematical knowledge. The converse is also true! Sanskrit appears to have developed in some historical phases so that it could better express mathematical values. Take the *katapyadi* system, for example. This was a system where numerical values were assigned to Sanskrit characters. But when you assign numbers to letters, you could wind up with meaningless words. For example, the number of revolutions of the moon in a *yuga* (calculated as 57,753,336 days) is the unpronounceable word '*cayagiynusuchir*'! Later mathematicians reconfigured the number-letter notation so that the words representing numbers actually made sense! For example, the value for pi correct up to 31 digits is represented by the Sanskrit shloka:

गोपीभाग्य मधुव्रातः श्रुंगशोदधि संधिगः ।
खालजीवितखाताव गलहाला रसंधरः ॥

gopibhāgya madhuvrātaḥ śruṅgaśodadhi saṁdhigaḥ
khālajīvitakhātāva galahālā rasamdharaḥ

which is a hymn to Lord Krishna. From this we see that Sanskrit language and mathematical expression appear to have co-evolved.

Pāṇini, the famous Indian grammarian, whose ideas have been foundational to modern linguistics, wrote the *Ashtadhyayi* in the 6th century BCE. The *Ashtadhyayi*

contains about 4,000 sutras which are rules or formulae written in verse, precisely defining Sanskrit linguistics, syntax, semantics and even pronunciations! Many scholars have remarked on the rigorous logic and algebraic structure of the *Ashtadhyayi*. The Sanskrit that was spoken 2,000 years ago would not be any different grammatically and syntactically from the Sanskrit spoken now — meaning that the formulae identified by Pāṇini still accurately govern modern Sanskrit forms.

In contrast, let's look at English and examine some examples of its ambiguities. We know that prepositions and their positions in English sentences are very important. Prepositions mark special relationships between persons, objects and locations. In case you've forgotten some of your English grammar, here's a sentence: "*I am going to his house.*" 'To' is the preposition in this sentence which relates the verb 'going' to the word 'house'. Most sentences like these are very straightforward. Sometimes, however, you find an exception where there are multiple prepositions and ambiguous words, as in the following sentence: "*I saw a man on a hill with a telescope.*" This sentence could have multiple interpretations, depending on how it is read:

- There's a man on a hill, and I'm watching him with my telescope.
- There's a man on a hill, who I'm seeing, and he's looking through a telescope.
- There's a man, and he's on a hill that also has a telescope on it.
- I'm on a hill, and I saw a man using a telescope,

and even

- There's a man on a hill, and I'm sawing him with a telescope!

Any of these readings could be credible! The last sounds a bit absurd but if you were to ask a computer to interpret it, you cannot expect it to exercise discretion and to discriminate between sensible and 'senseless' interpretations. Even the smallest ambiguities can cause big confusions, and in this particular case we have both lexical and structural ambiguities. There are many more sentences and words like this in English. Sanskrit, by contrast, solves this type of problem by incorporating the preposition into the noun. To take the first example, the Sanskrit translation of the phrase "*I am going to his house*" would be: अहम् तस्य गृहम् गच्छामि (*aham tasya grham gacchāmi*). The word *grham* combines the words 'to' and 'house' to form one word, and makes it the object of the sentence. This eliminates any possible confusion or ambiguity in the meaning of the sentence. The words in the Sanskrit sentence can be spoken in any order without altering the meaning. Now if we take back the ambiguous English sentence and figure out which interpretation we wish to express, the Sanskrit translation precisely and clearly lays out the exact meaning. Words can then be shifted around and said in any order without the meaning getting altered.

Linguists and others claim that Sanskrit has an extremely high information-to-word-count ratio compared to English and most other languages; it is often recognised, therefore, for its concision. For example: सूर्य (sūrya) means sun, कोटि (koti) means crore, सम (sama) means equivalent and प्रभ (prabha) means effulgence. By joining these words together, you get: सूर्यकोटिसमप्रभ (Sūryakotisamaprabha) which means: *One whose effulgence is equivalent to that of a 10 million (crore) suns*. We are all used to casually saying that the Sanskrit word सूर्य means ‘the sun’. But in reality, सूर्य does not mean ‘the sun’. The definition of सूर्य is सरति आकाशे (sarati ākashe) which means ‘Moves in the sky’, or लोकं कर्मणि प्रेरयति (lokam karmaṇi prerayati) which translates to ‘Inspires the world to work’. These are all qualities that describe the sun. Even the word *Sanskrit* means complete or perfect, which indeed are qualities of this language.

The same goes for other Sanskrit nouns. This allows us to put only essential Sanskrit words in succession without the clutter of prepositions, articles, and so on to make a meaningful sentence. Sanskrit is sometimes said to be obsolete because relatively few people speak it today and there are numerous new technical terms that do not yet have their equivalents in the language. But because all material objects are conventionally described by their properties in Sanskrit, and because anyone can introduce a new word for any object simply by naming its properties it cannot be called an outdated language. The new word would likely be easily understood by other Sanskrit speakers and quickly become an integral part of the language.

But do these factors of precision, unambiguity, concision and a potentially unlimited vocabulary of new words make it a better programming language than English-based equivalents?

What Makes a ‘Good’ Programming Language?

Most of the programming languages that have been developed till now are all based on English keywords — including the very popular ones like C++, Fortran etc. There are over 300 of these programming languages, and not one of them is perfect! Every language has its abilities and disabilities. Computer languages have evolved over the years to suit human requirements such as efficiency and simplicity.

The process of successfully giving orders to a computer first requires a human to enter instructions written in a programming language, then for a compiler to process the code and interpret it into machine language (binary) for it to be understood by the computer.

Human → Programming Language → Compiler → Computer

As we see in this flowchart, both human and compiler interact directly with the programming language. This means that the programming language has to work harmoniously with the human, on the one hand, and with the compiler, on the other, translating human thoughts into binary forms.

The interaction between a programmer and a programming language has to be made as straightforward and user-friendly as possible. In other words, it has to be easy to code.

Programming languages have to be built logically and in a very structured manner to be easily understood and learnt by humans.

A programmer should be able to look at someone else's code and be able to read it as easily as a book. The more English keywords are built into a programming language, the better the logical structure — the simpler and faster it is for a programmer.

The next step is for the code written in a programming language to be compiled and turned into simple binary. This is where every function of the program is converted into a specific series of '1's and '0's. This is an extremely precise process, because even one zero out of place can cause havoc.

There should be a complete absence of any sort of ambiguity. Each function or keyword built into the program should have one purpose only, unless defined specifically otherwise. Ambiguities built into the language will create confusion for the compiler, which will then abort the program. For example: If a **sum** () function exists, it should have the sole purpose of adding numbers together and giving you their sum. It should not be capable of giving you a product of the numbers as well, otherwise it will create confusion for the compiler.

A code compiler should be able to perform its task of conversion as efficiently as possible. Therefore, the programming language has to be compact and occupy as little memory space as possible.

Therefore from what we have just seen, a good programming language is logical, unambiguous, concise and easy for a human to read and understand.

Sanskrit as a Programming Language?

Sanskrit as we have seen earlier, is logical, compact, therefore efficient, and com-

pletely unambiguous. It is also a natural language used to communicate and can be read and understood easily by someone else. These qualities are just what are needed to make a good programming language. If Sanskrit has what is necessary to be a very good programming language, then why hasn't a Sanskrit-based computer language and a compiler for it been created? Why don't you hear of big — for that matter any — software programs running on Sanskrit?

The question we should be asking ourselves is not *Why Sanskrit isn't a programming language*, but *Whether Sanskrit can be a programming language at this point in time*.

True, Sanskrit has everything to be a perfect programming language, but so does C++ and all the other artificial computer languages out there! Artificial Languages are derived from natural languages such as English to suit the requirements of a computer language *i.e.* C#, HTML, Python, Fortran etc. These Artificial Languages were invented with the sole purpose of being 'good' programming languages. They have a fairly large head-start over Sanskrit, for this reason.

Writing code in Sanskrit is only possible if the programmer is well-versed in the language himself. The 2011 census showed that only about 25,000 out of 1.34 billion Indians registered Sanskrit to be their main language of communication. A quick estimate tells us that in 2020, there will be about 120,000 Indians and 100,000 non-Indians fluent in Sanskrit. Globally, a meagre 0.0029% of the world's population will speak Sanskrit compared to the 20% (1.5 billion) of English speakers. Most of the world will therefore not be able to write or understand code in Sanskrit, greatly limiting the possibility of Sanskrit becoming a widely adopted, viable programming language.

But the amazing properties and beauty of the language is spreading far and wide. The number of people learning Sanskrit is going up quickly. However, until Sanskrit's widespread influence reaches a large percent of the world's population, there seems no reason to spend time and money developing a new Sanskrit-based computer language.

However, there might be one advantage in using Sanskrit as a programming language; more people in Sanskrit-speaking villages and others who are well-versed in Sanskrit but who have no knowledge of how to program, might find that they can write their own computer programs in Sanskrit as if they were having a conversation with someone. In this manner Sanskrit-speaking Indians can start to find jobs in tech mainstreams. But globally, very few know Sanskrit and for this reason, there is no 'Sanskrit computer language' yet.

Every language has its advantages and disadvantages. If Sanskrit were to become a programming language, it would be like any other coding language. This should be enough to call all the claims about Sanskrit being the next *best* programming language as incorrect. But was there some information based on which these claims were established, or did they arise completely at random?

Knowledge Representation and Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Indeed, the two claims about Sanskrit being the best programming language and about NASA using Sanskrit as a language for their supercomputers emerge from one specific paper written in the late 1980s by a NASA scientist named Rick Briggs. His paper was published in the AI Magazine titled: ‘Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence’. Brigg’s paper was revolutionary to the world of Computer Science. It was the birth of the idea that Sanskrit could benefit computing. To understand what his paper was about, let’s look at what knowledge representation is.

What is Knowledge Representation?

What is meant by ‘*knowledge representation*’ is not much different from the meaning of the words themselves: it is to ‘*Represent Knowledge*’ in a computer.

An Artificially Intelligent system is given the attribute of being ‘*Intelligent*’ because it has a vast knowledge-base. Just as human individuals are considered intelligent if they are knowledgeable, so also with AI systems. For the system to hold a vast knowledge-base, a human being has to program that knowledge into it. In other words, a human has to give the system a representation of that knowledge. The manner in which this is done is known as Knowledge Representation. You can think of Knowledge Representation as the ‘problem solving capability’ of the robot. The more the knowledge represented on the system, the more problems it can handle.

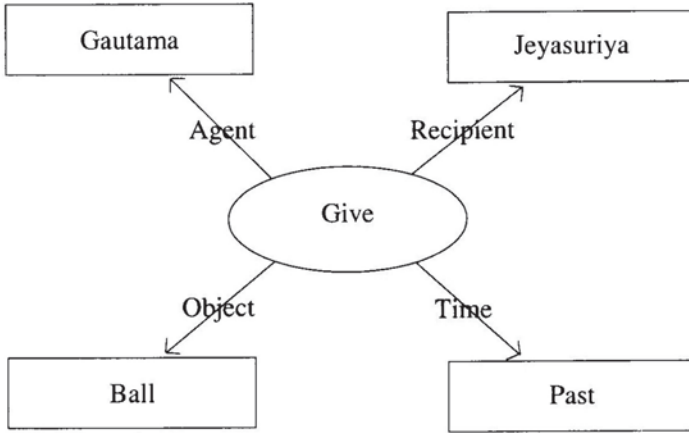
What is Natural Language Processing (NLP)?

Every bit of technology out there operates on the basis of commands. Programmers write commands in the form of Artificial Languages which are then turned into binary (machine language) as we have seen earlier.

Natural Language Processing is the ability a computer has to analyse and understand a human language as it is spoken. In other words, the capability to turn a human language into machine language. This ability obviously has to be given to the computer in the form of code, telling it exactly how to associate each word in the sentence to its function in the sentence. For example, take the sentence: “*Gautama gave the ball to Jeyasuriya.*” To analyse this simple sentence, the computer has to know how to recognise the verb, object and subject and any other details. This process is called parsing. After the sentence has been parsed, it would look something like this:

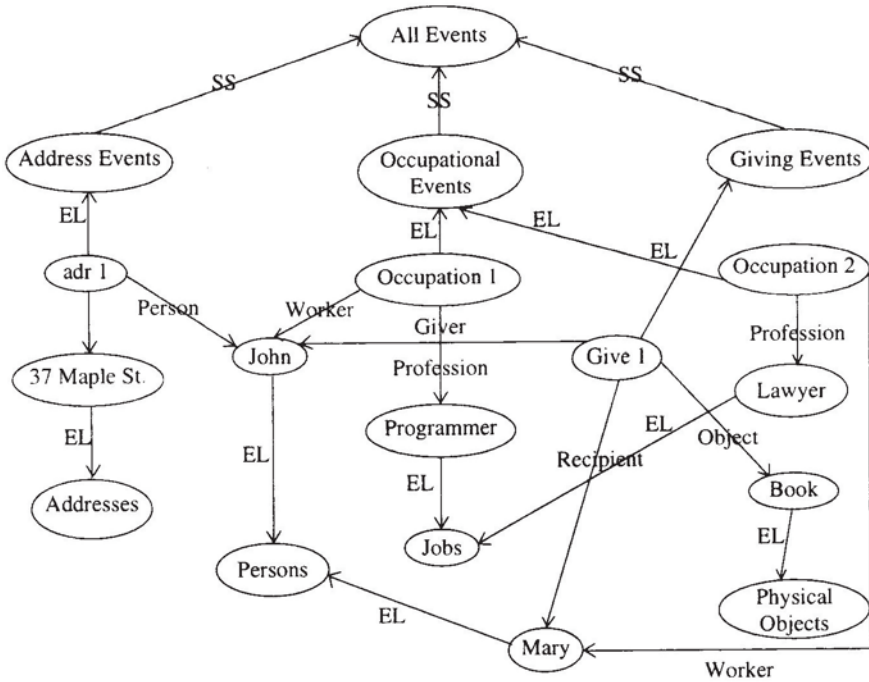
Give, Agent, Gautama
Give, Object, Ball
Give, Recipient, Jeyasuriya
Give, Time, Past

Schematically, this would look like this:



Everything is centred around the verb. The computer finds out the subject, object, the recipient of the verb and the tense of the verb.

This analysis becomes more and more complicated as the sentences become more complex. For example, the sentence: "John, a programmer living at Maple St., gives a book to Mary, who is a lawyer" would schematically look like the picture below after being parsed by a computer:



[Image Source: <https://machinelearningmadeeasy.blogspot.com/2016/0R/knowledge-representation-in-sanskrit.html>]

The picture above depicts complex linguistics and semantics.

Great! Now a computer can understand a human language, but you might ask: what purpose does this serve? Even if we don't notice, Natural Language Processing has become a crucial part of our everyday lives. Every Google search, every anticipated word autocorrect offers you while texting and every alarm you set with Siri, relies on Natural Language Processing. As Natural Language Processing technologies advance, possible interactions between humans and computers become more complex and precise.

Let's look at an example of where knowledge representation and natural language processing would be crucial to a system.

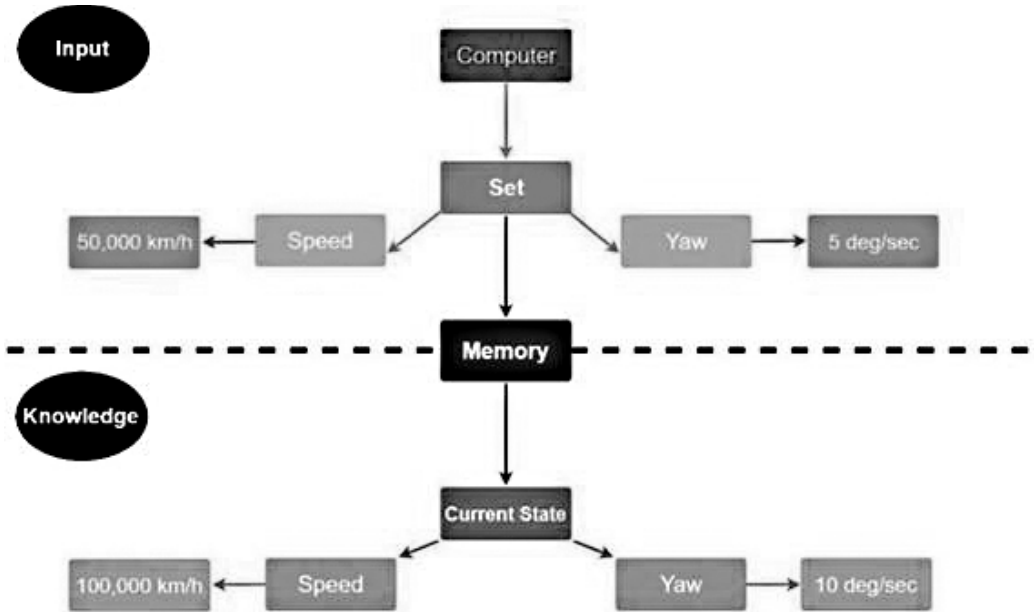
An Example of Knowledge Representation and NLP in a System

Imagine a scenario where ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization) is going to attempt to send the world's first manned spacecraft to Mars. To give you an idea of the massive journey, the distance to Mars is about 142 times the distance to the moon. To save fuel and time, the spacecraft is made as compact as possible and can only house one astronaut. It would be too hard for the astronaut to man the spacecraft all by himself, so the researchers at ISRO have designed a computer built into the spacecraft capable of assisting the pilot. It has arm-like mechanisms that allow the computer to do anything from serving food to using controls to avoid asteroids. The pilot will have no communication with the earth for the next few years and the robot will serve as a conversational companion as well. This computer is similar in concept with CIMON (Crew Interactive MOBILE Companion), which floats around because of zero-gravity in the ISS (International Space Station) assisting the crew with minor procedures. Except, in our case, the computer is much more advanced and has unlimited capabilities.

For the computer to be capable of doing almost anything, it has to have a pre-programmed knowledge of every procedure and the knowledge of how to perform any action it might ever need to. The computer will be far from any Wifi range or ISRO server in space and therefore has to have everything it needs to know embedded in the spacecraft's memory. This computer is made to be as user-friendly as possible. To access any information or give any command, the astronaut has to simply convey his message to the robot in the form of a Natural Language, as opposed to Artificial Languages which are computer languages such as C++ etc. Let's assume that the Natural Language being used by the astronaut at the moment is English.

A possible command the astronaut can give to the computer could be: "*Set our speed to 50,000 km/h and our yaw to 5 degrees per second.*" (Yaw is the rotation around the Z-axis). Once the command has been received, the computer first has to make sense out of the order the astronaut just gave it by *parsing* the sentence. This is exactly what Siri or Google Assistant do when you give them a

command. The computer has to analyse the sentence by sorting the words according to their function in the sentence, and recognise keywords it needs to execute the command. This is displayed visually in the top part of the image below.



The intelligent system then reaches into its information network and finds out what the current speed and yaw is so that it can adjust it accordingly. This is only possible because of the robot's vast information network (that is, its knowledge), and its ability to analyse and process a command put forth in a Natural Language — which is, in our case, English.

The Problems (as always)

Every bit of the knowledge represented on the computer's system is in the form of code, or an Artificial Language. This way of storing the data is straightforward and very precise because Artificial Languages, as we have seen before, are unambiguous. However, keep in mind that a large parcel of knowledge is required on the system to tell the computer how to analyse the sentence put forth by the astronaut (NLP). Therefore, the knowledge on the system has to accurately translate the English command into machine language. However, this translation is never 100% accurate. Natural Languages like English are complicated to work with and cannot function in complete harmony with the knowledge represented on the system for the following reasons.

The computer first has to be able to understand the command given to it. The system requires a certain knowledge to be able to parse and analyse a sentence as

we have seen earlier. This can be made possible by programming it to pull out certain important words from the sentence. But this is not an easy task for Natural Languages like English. Ambiguities, nuances, subtleties and expressions thrive in most languages and can make things very complicated for the parser. The longer and more information-packed the sentences get, the harder it is for a computer to analyse the sentences. The plethora of articles (a, an, the etc.), demonstratives (that, this etc.), possessive pronouns (my, your, their etc.), and prepositions (in, at, on etc.) make it extremely difficult for the computer to attribute each small word to the correct noun.

The computer has to communicate data back to us once we have given it our command. But it has to be given back not just in any form, but in a specific Natural Language (in our case English) so that the data is comprehensible. I don't think anyone would be very happy if the computer spat out a few lines of code in response to our command or question. In order to communicate back to the user, the computer needs to be able to generate an intelligible sentence with all of the necessary data embedded in it. Now generating a sentence sounds easy, but handing the task over to an Artificially Intelligent system is a complex endeavour. For simple systems with small amounts of data, you can program the computer to use a few ready-made sentences. But the larger the data networks get, the less you can do this because of the variety of data types. For example, if you've given the computer a standard sentence: "*He is — feet tall*", the system will replace the empty dash by a height value stored in its memory. But if a person's weight is also part of the data, then you have to pre-program another sentence: "*He weighs — kilogrammes*". The number of sentences you will need to pre-program the computer to say are innumerable for our example. The only other option is to give the computer **all** the rules in the English language, and **all** of the exceptions for it to be capable to generate unlimited sentences correctly.

Punctuation is an essential part of every language. I'm sure everyone has seen what a major role it plays in the meaning of a sentence whether it's a text or in an English essay. You don't really notice the presence of punctuation in day-to-day conversations because your brain looks at all the possibilities and picks out the most sensible one. But for a computer all possibilities are "sensible" possibilities because computers cannot exercise the kind of discretion we humans can. So, when the astronaut is conversing with the computer, misunderstandings may occur due to incorrect punctuation interpretations. Let's look at some simple everyday punctuation marks: commas, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks. Commas and full stops can be understood by the degree of pauses between words and sentences. Question and exclamation marks can be recognised by the exaggerated tone of the speaker. Pauses and exaggerated tones are very subjective descriptions, and a computer cannot be 100% accurate when dealing with subjective parameters. Have you ever dictated a message or a passage to a computer? If you have, you might

have realised that to use any punctuation you have to spell it out for the computer. For example, if you wanted to dictate: *“I’m sorry, you can’t come with us”*, you would say, *“I’m sorry comma you can’t come with us”* to the computer. This becomes inconvenient after a point especially if you are an astronaut trying to direct all your attention into performing complex tasks in space. A computer can still bypass the process of understanding question marks and exclamation marks because it can make an accurate guess based on the structure of the sentence. For example, a question usually starts with the words *“How”*, *“When”* or *“Where”*. Commands are usually given in one single sentence. Therefore, the computer doesn’t need to know how to identify a full stop. The comma is the hardest to deal with. A slight mistake in the position of a comma in a sentence causes havoc.

Let’s eat Grandpa!
Let’s eat, Grandpa!

To sum up what was said in the previous three points, we have seen that Natural Languages like English are ambiguous, without definite rules and therefore cannot be easily parsed with the knowledge represented on the system. Generating a completely new sentence is also extremely difficult because there are no definite rules that can define the entire language. Finally, to be able to have a computer understand punctuation is almost impossible because of the subjective parameters involved.

Using Sanskrit as a Language for Human-Computer Interactions

This brings us back to Rick Briggs’ revolutionary paper. He starts off by saying that much time, money and effort have gone into finding an accurate representation of Natural Languages to make them accessible for computer processing. In other words, computer scientists have had great difficulty developing a representation of knowledge that guides the computer with the parsing and generation of Natural Languages. What we have seen in our example is in accord with what Rick Briggs says: the knowledge represented on our system isn’t fully compatible with the Natural Language. Briggs goes on to say that the common conception has become that Natural Languages are too ambiguous and cumbersome to use as vehicles for the transmission of logical data. But there **is** at least one language which defies all current beliefs, Briggs says. That language is Sanskrit.

Because of Sanskrit’s precision, concision, and unambiguity, it resembles a programming language, as we have seen earlier. It is for these reasons that Rick Briggs stated that it was a perfect language to use for human-computer interactions. The knowledge represented on the system to parse and generate Sanskrit sentences would not be as difficult and complicated as the knowledge represented to parse and generate English sentences.

If you recall, Pāṇini's *Ashtadhyayi* is a set of 4,000 sutras precisely defining all the rules of Sanskrit linguistics, syntax, semantics and even pronunciations. If all these sutras could be compiled and represented as the system's knowledge, the generation and parsing of Sanskrit sentences would be simple. All the computer needs to know is represented in Pāṇini's 4,000 sutras.

Commas are not present in Sanskrit, therefore the computer cannot mix up the meanings of sentences like in English.

Sanskrit seems to bypass all the problems English presented in our example. This is the key reason why Rick Briggs believed it was a perfect language for human-computer interactions.

Knowledge Representation in a Natural Language?

So far, we know that all the knowledge represented in our computer system is in the form of code. We have seen numerous times already that Artificial Languages are precise and can therefore be understood by a computer. But is there an advantage in using a Natural Language to represent knowledge in the system?

To make the computer as powerful as I am describing it to be, the ISRO scientists would have to give it "experience" — of the sort the human astronaut has to have, but vastly larger. By "experience" in this instance, I mean knowledge of and data concerning all the past space missions that have taken place.

Just as aeroplanes have a device called a "black box" embedded in the cockpit to record everything that goes on, spacecrafts hold something similar. Pilots and astronauts are supposed to say what they are doing out loud on a general basis and especially if they have to deal with unpredicted circumstances. In this way, everything that happened in the cockpit can be stored as data and analysed by experts if something goes wrong. From the missions that failed to the missions that were successful, all data is recorded and stored as digital experience. Novice astronauts can even use this resource to study past space missions in their training.

If all this data could somehow be given to our computer to understand and analyse, the system could use it in critical situations to handle the spacecraft just like astronauts from previous missions might have done.

However, all the recorded data is in the form of a Natural Language because what is recorded is what the astronaut says aloud. For the computer to be able to utilise these recordings, it has to be able to understand them. But English and other Natural Languages are riddled with ambiguities! As we have seen, Sanskrit is the only language we know which practically eliminates ambiguity in communication with computers. It is therefore best suited to conveying all the digital experience of previous missions to the computer with the least fidelity loss.

This is an example of why Sanskrit would be suitable as a language to use for Knowledge Representation. (It means, however, that the astronauts would have to

have spoken Sanskrit in the previous missions so that all the recordings are in Sanskrit, ready to be given to our computer.)

Data Storage in Sanskrit

We have talked about Sanskrit's concision a few times before. Taking our previous example of Sanskrit's concision: सूर्यकोटिसमप्रभ (Sūryakotisamaprabha). Whereas the English translation of this sentence: *One whose effulgence is equivalent to that of a 10 million (crore) suns*, has so many more characters! It is a fact that Sanskrit's information to word count ratio is very high. As sentences get longer, Sanskrit's concision becomes more evident. Can this property however, be used to improve data storage?

Let's look at the Internet. Every bit of data is stored on servers across the world. A large percentage of this data on the web is in the form of articles, pdfs, news reports, forums and social media. All of these forms of data have one thing in common: all their information is represented in a Natural Language like English. Each letter in an article or a news report occupies a specific amount of space on a server. To give you an idea, according to *MarTech*, the size of the Internet is calculated to grow to 44 zettabytes by 2020. You might not have heard of the term "zettabytes" before, so to give you a clearer picture, 44 zettabytes is equivalent to 44 billion terabytes. Engineers are constantly developing new and more efficient ways of storing data to keep up with tremendous Internet data growth.

What if all the articles, news reports, facebook posts and pdfs could be translated into Sanskrit and then be stored as data? The concision of Sanskrit allows it to compress the quantity of data stored considerably. All the prepositions, articles and other small English words would merge with the Sanskrit object or noun. Every time you clicked on a link the data for that site stored in Sanskrit would translate back into its original language for you to read.

In our example of Sanskrit's concision, the number of characters in the English sentence is almost four and a half times as the characters in the same sentence in Sanskrit. This would mean that the sentence in Sanskrit would occupy 4 and a half times less space than the sentence in English would. This difference might seem negligible in the beginning, but when 44 billion terabytes come into the picture, the impact of this storage method can be huge.

Problems

Theoretically all of this is possible, but there's just one problem — the translation process. Languages are so different from one another. A word or an expression in one language might not even exist in another. The subtleties and nuances of one language are hard to transform into another. Our Sanskrit teachers have told us

many times that there are so many Sanskrit words for the sun. Which one would be used to translate the English word ‘sun’ into Sanskrit? If the translation process goes wrong, the contents of the Web would be altered. This cannot be allowed to happen. If you post a Tweet, you would expect it to remain the way you have written it and not be tampered with by some mechanised translator.

A Possible Solution

A new translator would have to be made so that the original content of the data isn’t altered. Instead of using a traditional Sanskrit translator that translates text based on the meanings of each sentence, someone could develop a new one that translates **only** small bunches of words associated with each other. The Sanskrit translation of a specific English word should not vary if the word is found somewhere else by the translator. For example, every time the translator sees the word “sun”, it will translate it into “*sūrya*” only. This way, when it is translated back into English, the translator knows for sure that the word is “sun”. Every English word will have a fixed Sanskrit equivalent. This method of translation should be applied for all languages. In this way, the translator ensures that the data isn’t changed during the translation process.

But such a translator is extremely complex and hard to design. Until researchers know for sure that data will not be altered, this method cannot be used.

Conclusion

The prospect of an under-used 4,000-year-old language coming back to life and being used with the most advanced computers, and possibly as an alternate data storage method has fascinated me throughout this project. So far, I have based all my ideas on the premise that Sanskrit needs to be widely spoken in order for its potential value in computing to be realised. But what if this were not the case?

In conclusion, I would like to consider another possibility. Scholars have described how the great mathematicians of ancient India have adapted the Sanskrit language to better express the mathematical insights of those times. What if modern Computer scientists were to take inspiration from these esteemed thinkers — what if we were to take a new technology like AI and adapt Sanskrit anew solving some of the problems I’ve highlighted in this talk? For example: the problem of translation in data storage.

Just as the Indian mathematicians of yore differentiated Sanskrit into three distinct forms, grammatical, logical, and mathematical Sanskrit, perhaps we, too, in this data-driven century, could similarly develop something called ‘*Technological Sanskrit*’. Technological Sanskrit would be a modern form of the language designed for integration with widely spoken languages such as English. Or, conversely,

perhaps we could adapt English to allow for more consistent translation into Sanskrit. Such linguistic innovations could allow for scientists to better their interactions with AI technologies without having to learn Sanskrit extensively and could address the problem of data storage (for example) more effectively. In other words, we could be speaking ‘*Technological Sanskrit*’ to perfect human-computer interactions!

Now, if you are thinking that this is a wild possibility, all you have to do is remember that most of us are already speaking a fair bit of Sanskrit in our own native Indian languages. Even if native English speakers might take a little longer, we in India have a billion people to start off with. That’s quite a head-start! Who knows, maybe the next great Human Computer Interaction (HCI) revolution may happen not only because of advances in technology, but by adapting a venerable old language to the needs of our changing modern times.

DYUMAN ADITYA

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for helping me develop my ideas for this project: Tejas Poddar, Dr. Sampadananda Mishra, Aneesh Raghavan, and of course my parents.

References

- [1] <https://www.aaai.org/ois/index.php/aimagazine/article/view/466>
- [2] <https://www.tutorialride.com/artificial-intelligence/knowledge-representation-nlp-in-ai.htm>
- [3] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221145966> Computer Simulation of Astadhyayi Some Insights
- [4] <https://www.slideshare.net/Hiteshloshi78/sanskrit-in-natural-language-processing>
- [5] http://iiarcsse.com/Before_August_2017/docs/papers/Volume_5/3_March2015/V5I3-0312.pdf
- [6] <http://www.iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/UploadFolder/NATURAL%20LANGUAGE%20PROCESSING%20AND%20SANSKRIT/NATURAL%20LANGUAGE%20PROCESSING%20AND%20SANSKRIT.pdf>
- [7] <https://ramanan50.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/computer-friendly-sanskrit-how-nasa-mission-sanskrit/>
- [8] https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/07/02/what-is-natural-language-processing-and-what-is-it-used-for/#74adbb295d7_1
- [9] <https://www.rsisinternational.org/conference/4ICMRP2017/papers/179-184.pdf>

[10] <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/2011-census-shows-10-000-more-sanskrit-speakers-in-india-18838>

[11] <https://machinelearningmadeeasy.blogspot.com/2016/08/knowledge-representation-in-sanskrit.html>

[12] <https://www.c-sharpcorner.com/article/how-much-data-is-on-the-internet/>

The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world's great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium. The great and noble use made of it by poet and thinker did not fall below the splendour of its capacities. Nor is it in the Sanskrit tongue alone that the Indian mind has done high and beautiful and perfect things, though it couched in that language the larger part of its most prominent and formative and grandest creations.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 314-15)

SRI AUROBINDO'S EARLY POETRY ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA

(Continued from the issue of September 2019)

VII

The poem that follows 'Phaethon' is 'To a Hero-Worshipper'. It is a much longer poem, in two sections and intricate stanza-pattern. The stanzas are of eight lines, but they are not 'ottava rima' or any accepted pattern. They each consist of two enclosed quatrains with lines of varied length, rhyming *abba cddc*.

There is no doubt that the poet himself is the hero being worshipped. In the first section I cannot say that any *rasa* has been evolved. It is but a string of statements. Here is the second stanza:

I am, you say, no magic-rod,
 No cry oracular,
 No swart and ominous star,
No Sinai-thunder voicing God,
I have no burden to my song,
 No smouldering word instinct with fire,
No spell to chase triumphant wrong,
 No spirit-sweet desire.¹

These lines are eloquent of the young poet's poetical powers, but they do not generate *rasa*. The opportunity for that comes in the second section which is devoted to Nature:

For me the daisy shines a star,
 The crocus flames a spire,
 A horn of golden fire,
Narcissus glows a silver bar:
Cowslips the golden breath of God,
 I deem the poet's heritage,
And lilies silvering the sod
 Breathe fragrance from his page.²

1. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 8.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Another stanza follows in which the poet describes himself as a novice. There can be no doubt that the rasa evoked here is *prakṛti rasa*. Everything that has been said earlier about this rasa is true here also. Nature is not the *uddīpana* but the *ālambana* here and the poet is the *āśraya*. We are overwhelmed by the beauty of his description.

'O Coil, Coil', the next poem, is in blank verse and is about the cuckoo. This too evokes *prakṛti rasa* and everything that has been said about the foregoing poem is true about this one also. A few lines are quoted below in support of this claim:

O tireless voice of spring! Again I lie
In odorous gloom of trees; unseen and near
The windlark gurgles in the golden leaves,
The woodworm spins in stillness on the bough:³

Let the reader note here the evocation of the different senses: olfactory image ("odorous gloom"), auditory image ("windlark gurgles"), visual image ("woodworm spins"). The other senses are also brought in later. Wonderful indeed!

The next poem, 'Hic Jacet', is remarkable for its evocation of a fairly modern rasa: *deśabhakti rasa*, which has already been mentioned. It is evoked in the very first line:

Patriots, behold your guerdon. This man found
Erin, his mother, bleeding, chastised, bound,⁴

Dr. Gulab Rai, Prof. Jog and others have accepted it as a rasa with patriotism (*deśa-prema*) as its *sthāyī* and this is definitely present here. It affords us a glimpse into the patriot of the future who made the throne of the British Empire tremble. There are several such poems.

The next poem, 'Lines on Ireland (1896)' is of the same kind. It is a long poem, but no other rasa is evoked so strongly as *deśabhakti*.

'Night by the Sea' is definitely a pastoral poem and has been discussed as such elsewhere. Such poems have *prakṛti* as main rasa as it is here. A few lines are given below:

In this garden's dim repose
Lighted with the burning rose,
Soft narcissi's golden camp
Glimmering or with rosier lamp⁵

3. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

5. *Ibid.*, p.16.

This is definitely *prakṛti* of a high order. But this is not all. We realise a few lines later that it is a love-poem also, for it is addressed to the poet's beloved, "Hearken, Edith, to the sea".

Now, though it is a poem written at night, addressed to his beloved (imaginary?), it is not a serenade for in such a poem, the beloved is at a remove from the poet and here she is with him. So we are justified in treating this as a love-poem. Personally, I think it is *manjiṣṭhā śṛngāra* which is not permanent, but is expressed in rich language:

Ruddy lips of many a boy
Blithe discovered hills of joy
Ruby-guided through a kiss
To the sweet highways of bliss.⁶

The poem is comparatively a long one, covering more than three pages. This is definitely *manjiṣṭhā*. What does Viṣvanātha Kavirāja say:

manjiṣṭhā rāgamāhustada yannāpaiti śobhate,

exactly as here.

In 'The Lover's Complaint' we come across a very different kind of poem indeed. It is a complaint in the traditional manner and it will be interesting to study it as such since such poems were very popular in the Elizabethan times. Here our viewpoint, however, is a totally different one. Studied from such a viewpoint the poem, being a complaint, is based mainly on *karuṇa rasa*. The sage Bharata has given us three kinds, of which it is the *śokakṛta* variety that is appropriate here. The cause of the *rasa* is disappointed love. The complaining lover is a young man whose name is not given but those of his beloved and his successful rival are: Nisa and Mopsus. Disappointed in love, he decided to put an end to his own life:

For me no place abides
By the green verge of thy beloved tides.
To Lethe let my footsteps go
And wailing waters in the realms below,⁷

A few more lines end the poem. This tragic end enhances *karuṇa rasa* but such drastic means are not always adopted.

But *karuṇa* is not the only *rasa* here. There is occasion for *prakṛti* and *śṛngāra* as well. The entire surroundings of the poem is in the very lap of nature: woodland,

6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

with stream and thickly growing trees and the call of birds:

Sweeter than dew's nocturnal breezes weep,
Cool as water in a murmuring pass⁸

There are fine descriptions of autumnal beauty as well, so we have *prakṛti rasa* with Nature as *ālambana*. Yet more important is *śṛṅgāra*. Without doubt we have *nīlī-śṛṅgāra*, for deep and enduring love is portrayed here. Nowhere in the poem is there any indication that he ever told Nisa of his love, his was a silent love, as described by Viśvanātha Kavirāja:

Na cāti śobhate yannāpaiti prema manogatam
*Tannīlī ragamatrustada yathā Srī Rāmasītayoh*⁹

So we have no less than three rasas here, *śokakṛta karuṇa*, *prakṛti* and *nīlī-śṛṅgāra* with the same person as the *āśraya* for all three. There is, however, no *rasavirodha* here, as none of the three go against the others.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

9. Viśvanātha Kavirāja, *op. cit.*



an honest business for honest people

With Best Compliments from:

S. N. Sunderson & Co.

**1, Deshbandhu Gupta Road
Post Box No. 5713
New Delhi - 110 055**

E-mail: contact@snsunderson.com Telephone: 23612776, 43750060
Fax: 011-23620632

Our Lines of Business:

- *Limestone and Dolomite*
- *Coal Handling Agents*

Branches at:

**Kolkata, Dhanbad, Katni, Jukehi, Niwar, Lucknow, Varanasi,
Singrauli, Asansol, Ranchi, Bilaspur, Nagpur, Ramgarh,
Khelari, Manindergarh, Guwahati and Puducherry**

Completed 93 years on Basant 2019