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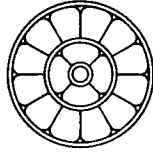
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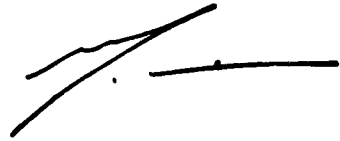
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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THE TRANSCENDENT STEPS INTO TIME

In ceaseless motion round the purple rim
Day after day sped by like coloured spokes,
And through a glamour of shifting hues of air
The seasons drew in linked significant dance
The symbol pageant of the changing year.
Across the burning languor of the soil
Paced Summer with his pomp of violent noons
And stamped his tyranny of torrid light
And the blue seal of a great burnished sky.
Next through its fiery swoon or clotted knot
Rain-tide burst in upon torn wings of heat,
Startled with lightnings air's unquiet drowse,
Lashed with life-giving streams the torpid soil,
Overcast with flare and sound and storm-winged dark
The star-defended doors of heaven's dim sleep,
Or from the gold eye of her paramour
Covered with packed cloud-veils the earth's brown face.
Armies of revolution crossed the time-field,
The clouds' unending march besieged the world,
Tempests' pronunciamientos claimed the sky
And thunder drums announced the embattled gods.
A traveller from unquiet neighbouring seas
The dense-maned monsoon rode neighing through earth's hours .
Then a last massive deluge thrashed dead mire
And a subsiding mutter left all still..
Earth's mood now changed; she lay in lulled repose,
The hours went by with slow contented tread:
A wide and tranquil air remembered peace....
A calmness neared as of the approach of God,
A light of musing trance lit soil and sky....
Three thoughtful seasons passed with shining tread
And scanning one by one the pregnant hours
Watched for a flame that lurked in luminous depths,
The vigil of some mighty birth to come.
Autumn led in the glory of her moons
And dreamed in the splendour of her lotus pools
And Winter and Dew-time laid their calm cool hands
On Nature's bosom still in a half sleep
And deepened with hues of lax and mellow ease
The tranquil beauty of the waning year

Then Spring, an ardent lover, leaped through leaves
 And caught the earth-bride in his eager clasp;
 His advent was a fire of irised hues,
 His arms were a circle of the arrival of joy.
 His voice was a call to the Transcendent's sphere
 Whose secret touch upon our mortal lives
 Keeps ever new the thrill that made the world,
 Remoulds an ancient sweetness to new shapes
 And guards intact unchanged by death and Time
 The answer of our hearts to Nature's charm
 And keeps for ever new, yet still the same,
 The throb that ever wakes to the old delight
 And beauty and rapture and the joy to live....
 Impatient for felicity he came,
 High-fluting with the coil's happy voice,
 His peacock turban trailing on the trees;
 His breath was a warm summons to delight,
 The dense voluptuous azure was his gaze.
 A soft celestial urge surprised the blood....
 The life of the enchanted globe became
 A storm of sweetness and of light and song,
 A revel of colour and of ecstasy,
 A hymn of rays, a litany of cries:
 A strain of choral priestly music sang
 And, swung on the swaying censer of the trees,
 A sacrifice of perfume filled the hours.
 Asocas burned in crimson spots of flame,
 Pure like the breath of an unstained desire
 White jasmynes haunted the enamoured air,
 Pale mango-blossoms fed the liquid voice
 Of the love-maddened coil, and the brown bee
 Muttered in fragrance mid the honey-buds.
 The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
 All Nature was at beauty's festival.

In this high signal moment of the gods
 Answering earth's yearning and her cry for bliss
 A greatness from our other countries came.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol 29, pp 349-353)

HER PRAYERS AND HER ACTION

THREE PRAYERS TO THE DIVINE MOTHER¹

November 28, 1913

MOTHER Divine, grant that today may bring to us a completer consecration to Thy Will, a more integral gift of ourselves to Thy work, a more total forgetfulness of self, a greater illumination, a purer love. Grant that in a communion growing ever deeper, more constant and entire, we may be united always more and more closely to Thee and become Thy servitors worthy of Thee. Remove from us all egoism, root out all petty vanity, greed and obscurity. May we be all ablaze with Thy divine Love; make us Thy torches in the world.

*

September 1, 1914

O Mother Divine, with what fervour, what ardent love I came to Thee in Thy deepest consciousness, in Thy high status of sublime love and perfect felicity, and I nestled so close into Thy arms and loved Thee with so intense a love that I became altogether Thyself. Then in the silence of our mute ecstasy a voice from yet profounder depths arose and the voice said, "Turn towards those who have need of thy love." All the grades of consciousness appeared, all the successive worlds. Some were splendid and luminous, well ordered and clear, there knowledge was resplendent, expression was harmonious and vast, will was potent and invincible. Then the worlds darkened in a multiplicity more and more chaotic, the Energy became violent and the material world obscure and sorrowful. And when in our infinite love we perceived in its entirety the hideous suffering of the world of misery and ignorance, when we saw our children locked in a sombre struggle, flung upon each other by energies that had deviated from their true aim, we willed ardently that the light of Divine Love should be made manifest, a transfiguring force at the centre of these distracted elements. Then, that the will might be yet more powerful and effective, we turned towards Thee, O unthinkable Supreme, and we implored Thy aid. And from the unsounded depths of the Unknown a reply came sublime and formidable and we knew that the earth *was saved*.

*

¹ *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 25, pp 429, 455-56, 457

September 25, 1914

O Divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible? The hour of realisations is near and Thou hast assured us of Thy aid that we may perform integrally the supreme Will.

Thou hast accepted us as fit intermediaries between the unthinkable realities and the relativities of the physical world, and Thy constant presence in our midst is a token of Thy active collaboration.

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute:

A new Light shall break upon the earth.

A new world shall be born,

And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

*

SHE THE EXECUTRIX¹

29 February-29 March, 1956

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

THE MOTHER

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol 15, p 204

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

Mother,

When I started turning myself towards God 22 years ago or so, I never imagined that this could happen to me, not even when Sri Aurobindo openly questioned me. "Who has given you this Yoga?"

Now it has happened. that unfailing confidence and courage got shaken, and I had a breakdown. Yet in all this nervousness, my love for You, my faith in You and our relation is just the same, or rather, we have become closer. You have treated me like a sick baby—Your baby—and it is Your love that is curing me.

YES, you have only to keep your faith unshaken and to be patient—everything will be all right

We are not speaking of work just now, because we want you to rest quietly without any worry—but we have no intention of changing your work. It is waiting for you and you will take it back as soon as you are quite all right.

26 March 1934

Mother,

I feel that the persons who were connected with me in a personal relation are definitely wishing for my recovery. What will be my relation with them when I shall be out? Mother, You will settle it, and I shall obey You

The most important thing will be not to allow them to eat you up as they used to do before.

Mother, I am quite at rest and the days are passing so quickly.

Yes, rest, rest, rest—be quiet and gather strength and force, not only to do work but also, chiefly, to achieve the Transformation.

30 March 1934

Mother,

I have no confidence in the body; it is too sensitive. I cannot be rash. I still fear to drink cold water from the kuja, I go to the filter each time for water. I cover myself before going to sleep

A fear and a feeling of weakness have entered the body, but this fear and this

feeling are not true. They are falsehoods that are to be shaken away and replaced by the contrary conviction and feeling—the conviction that the body will get stronger than before and the feeling that the physical strength, like the rest, belongs to the Divine and that there is no reason why the body should not receive it in plenty.

8 April 1934

Mother,

Now I realise that if I could love You with all my being and keep Your Presence in every single cell and atom, it would not be an inferior work to any outer work or activity.

My dear Mother, do with me as You want I remain completely quiet, obedient, surrendered and cheerful.

Yes, keep quiet and gather peace and strength. When the time has come I shall ask you to start work again and you will see that it will be done quite smoothly.

8 April 1934

Mother,

Today the head is strained—by what I do not know. I feel a great heaviness on the head, as if the whole sky has come down. The body does not want to move, it asks only for rest. When I sit down my eyes close by themselves; at once I feel still, quiet, as if frozen, yet full of life within.

Be very, very quiet, do not think about what the work will be. This week take complete rest, and sleep as much as you feel inclined to sleep. It is [when] perfectly strong and rested, with the *head free*, that you must take up the work again. It is *very important* that the head should be neither heavy nor strained.

14 April 1934

(To be continued)

RISHIHOOD AND THE MANTRA*

NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Raman Maharshi seems a real Maharshi

HE is more of a Yogi than a Rishi, it seems to me. The happiness theory does not impress me,—it is as old as the mountains but not so solid. But he knows a lot about Yoga.

We are puzzled over this word “Rishi”. Dilipda and myself agree that a Rishi is something more than a Yogi.

Why always this less and greater?

Kanai places a Yogi higher than a Rishi. He says, “But then Sri Aurobindo has called Bankim a Rishi.”

A Rishi is one who *sees* or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language—the mantra. Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and realisation.

Raman Maharshi has seen the Truth, can he be called a Rishi?

He has experienced certain eternal truths by process of Yoga—I don't think it is by Rishilike intuition or illumination, nor has he the mantra.

From your definition of a Rishi am I to understand that a Rishi may not necessarily be a Yogi because a truth may not always be the Ultimate Truth?

A Rishi may be a Yogi, but also he may not; a Yogi too may be a Rishi, but also he may not. Just as a philosopher may or may not be a poet and a poet may or may not be a philosopher.

A Rishi will have 2 things: 1) Seeing or discovering a truth—new or old, 2) putting it in a mantra. These two things are quite possible in a man not doing Yoga at all, because intuition and sudden illumination can come to poets, literary people, artists, etc. ... can't they?

Yes, but poetic intuition and illumination is not the same thing as Rishi intuition and illumination

* Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, pp 486-488

You have called Bankim a Rishi. Do you think his Bande Mataram is a real mantra?

Well, the *Bande Mataram* acted as a mantra and so I suppose I gave him the credit of Rishihood

Did he actually see the country as the Mother?

Can't say whether he saw. Must ask him.

When you wrote that you look upon India not as an inert, dead mass of matter, but as the very Mother, the living Mother in bones and flesh, I believe you saw that Truth—or was it just the expression of a poetic or patriotic sentiment?

My dear sir, I am not a materialist. If I had seen India as only a geographical area with a number of more or less interesting or uninteresting people in it, I would hardly have gone out of my way to do all that for the said area.

Merely a poetic or patriotic sentiment—just as in yourself only your flesh, skin, bones and other things of which the senses give their evidence are real, but what you call your mind and soul do not self-exist being merely psychological impressions created by the food you eat and the activity of the glands. Poetry and patriotism have of course the same origin and the things they speak of are quite unreal. Amen.

*

BANKIM'S MUSICAL COMPOSITION

Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee write in their book *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics*, 1964:

Bande Mataram, the musical composition of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, was impregnated with a revolutionary fervour with the commencement of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905 when, at a fated moment, it suddenly became the sanctified hymn of Nationalism, a *mantra* for worshipping the country as a deity. This conception of the country as the Mother was responsible for appropriating for the daily paper its name *Bande Mataram* founded by Bipin Chandra Pal, whom Sri Aurobindo called 'one of the mightiest prophets of Nationalism'.

*

BANDE MATARAM
WITH SRI AUROBINDO'S RENDERING

वन्दे मातरम् ।
सुजलां सुफलां मलयज-शीतलाम्
शस्य-श्यामलां मातरम् ॥

शुभ्र-ज्योत्स्ना-पुलकित-यामिनीम्
फुल्ल-कुसुमित-द्रुमदल-शोभिनीम्,
सुहासिनीं सुमधुर-भाषिणीम्,
सुखदां वरदां मातरम् ॥

सप्तकोटि-कण्ठ-कलकल-निनाद कराले,
द्विसप्तकोटि-भुजैर्धृत-खरकरवाले,
अबला केन मा एत बले !

बहुबल-धारिणी नमामि तारिणीम्
रिपुदल-वारिणीं मातरम् ॥

तुमि विद्या तुमि धर्म,
तुमि हृदि तुमि मर्म,
त्वं हि प्राणाः शरीरे ।
बाहुते तुमि मा शक्ति,
हृदये तुमि मा भक्ति,
तोमारङ्ग प्रतिमा गङ्गि मन्दिरे मन्दिरे ।

त्वं हि दुर्गा दशप्रहरण-धारिणी
कमला कमल-दल-विहारिणी
वाणी विद्यादायिनी नमामि त्वाम्
नमामि कमलाम् अमलाम् अतुलाम्
सुजलां सुफलां मातरम्,
वन्दे मातरम् ।
श्यामलां सरलां सुस्मितां भूषिताम्
धरणी भरणी मातरम् ॥

Hymn to the Mother*

Mother, I bow to thee!
 Rich with thy hurrying streams,
 Bright with thy orchard gleams,
 Cool with thy winds of delight,
 Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
 Mother free.

Glory of moonlight dreams
 Over thy branches and lordly streams,—
 Clad in thy blossoming trees,
 Mother, giver of ease,
 Laughing low and sweet!
 Mother, I kiss thy feet,
 Speaker sweet and low!
 Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
 When the swords flash out in seventy million hands
 And seventy million voices roar
 Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
 With many strengths who art mighty and stored,
 To thee I call, Mother and Lord!

Thou who savest, arise and save!
 To her I cry who ever her foemen drave
 Back from plain and sea
 And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
 Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
 Thou the love divine, the awe
 In our hearts that conquers death
 Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
 Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
 Every image made divine
 In our temples is but thine.
 Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,
 With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,

* *Translations* SABCL, Vol 8 pp 309-312

Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother, lend thine ear.
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue, O candid-fair
In thy soul, with jewelled hair
And thy glorious smile divine,
Loveliest of all earthly lands,
Showering wealth from well-stored hands!
Mother, mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee
Mother great and free!

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

A PERSONAL LETTER

YOUR latest letter is a little better in outward form than your earlier ones, though the spirit of Billingsgate has not really departed from the inner side. As usual, I find it wooden-headed in most of the things said. In one or two of them I can't make head (even a wooden one) or tail of your pronouncements. Standing bewildered before these, I shall not touch on them.

In one of the letters in *Life-Poetry-Yoga* I have stated as fully as I could my grounds for believing that the Mother was referring to her own birth again when, as you put it, she “was considering the abandonment of her old body” I know that in one or two places in her talks she has expressed some disgust at having to start life over again in a new birth of her own, but these remarks don't negate the necessity she has seen of doing it. The sole alternative to this necessity is to take possession of some supremely developed body in which, from the physical standpoint, the conditions for transformation would be most serviceable. Somewhere in the *Agenda* there is a reference to it. Your conjuration of her following suit when Sri Aurobindo comes with a supramental body built in the supramental way is very welcome, but you forget that this magic has a logic on which it depends. The capacity to enable supraphysical substance to materialise itself permanently will be possessed only by what the Mother has called “the New Race” or the “Superman” This Yogic-evolutionary race has to precede the advent of the Supramental Race which will not have gone through any evolving process on earth. The Human Supramentalised has to prepare the Supramental Humanised. And that is just the rub! When is the former to be attained?

According to you, it can be attained here and now. That is X's claim too—though you don't believe that he will be the one to attain it. My belief is that in the long run of evolution whatever of the Supermind has manifested in the earth's subtle-physical layer will emerge into the gross-physical and enable the human body to undergo a slow divinisation. Any divinisation here and now—not so much by a spiritual evolution as by the spiritual revolution we call the Integral Yoga—is dependent on two *sine-qua-nons* which are really one. Sri Aurobindo clearly wrote to me that he did not need supramentalisation for himself but he was after it because if it was not done in him it could not be done in others. Furthermore, he wrote to somebody that in the later stages of physical supramentalisation the Guru's bodily presence was indispensable in order to guard the disciple from grave dangers. So to me the presence of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother in a divinised body is absolutely necessary for the spiritual revolution implied by the Integral Yoga to be achieved by people like us. Hence my concurrence with Nolini—who in my opinion had greater insight into occult matters than the outside-based team—when he says that the physical trans-

formation has been postponed

This brings me to the topic of what has not been postponed but is still open to us. I have said that all the splendours and powers of the Overmind are within our reach and I have gone to the extent of saying that even those of the Supermind are accessible short of what would fully divinise the body. You have conveniently forgotten this further statement.

Otherwise too you are dead wrong in trying to denigrate the Overmind True, in comparison to the Supermind the Overmind is a small thing, but in itself it is so great that, according to Sri Aurobindo, no Yogi attaining its magnificence has failed to think that here is the supreme Divine Dynamism. Even Sri Aurobindo was under that impression all throughout the *Arya*. He has admitted that in that journal he took as a subordinate plane of the Supermind what he later came to designate Overmind. Apropos of the last few chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* the question was raised. Only in the post-*Arya* days the sharp distinction was realised. But the distinction does not entitle us to look down our noses at the Overmind. The day which, during all of Sri Aurobindo's life and of the Mother also, was honoured as the Victory Day was concerned with the Overmind's descent in the physical preparing that of the Supermind.

You have brought in some issues that are rather strange and seem mixed up here and there. There were two sides to the question of Supermind *vis-à-vis* earth. One is the universal manifestation (loosely termed descent) which took place on 29 February 1956 in what the Mother called "the earth's atmosphere". The other is the individual descent leading to the body's divinisation by the "revolutionary" process as I have dubbed it. Sri Aurobindo refers to it in the two quotes I have made from him and they show that for it to be accomplished in the disciples the Guru's body was not "replaceable". Nor, in relation to it, can we say that when, as reported by Dr. Sanyal, Sri Aurobindo told the Mother—"You have to fulfil our Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation"—he meant the mission to be, as you suggest, "bound to her as an individual much less than any of us dreamed". Surely, if the divinised body of the Guru is to be present during the divinising process being undergone by the disciple, the mission has to be bound very much to the Mother as an individual, much more indeed than you have dreamed. The Guru's supramentalised body is the pivot of all other supramentalisations.

Of course, once the universal manifestation has been brought about, the transformation of the human individual is *ultimately* assured—"the things that were promised" are essentially "fulfilled". But Sri Aurobindo's focus was on the individual descent in himself and in the Mother for them to serve as centres of a supramentalised family or, more accurately, a family getting supramentalised by the Gurus' direct physical presence. Keeping this in view I doubt whether we can consider the mission accomplished in point of "supramental transformation".

The Mother did express the wish to retire from her body after what had

been done on 29 February 1956 Nirod was there when she announced her wish. He tells me he and the others on the spot were aghast at the idea of her departure. They all pleaded for her to stay back. My surmise is that the travail of submitting her body to the Supermind's tremendous force was such that she hoped it could be avoided. She has said that hers was the first body in all history to be submitted to that force for divinisation and that it was not at all a pleasant job she would like others to undertake: she had undertaken it because Sri Aurobindo had asked her to do so. Some idea of what was going on may be had from some words of hers in *Collected Works*, Vol 11, p. 8:

"And you know, you can arrive very well at an almost absolute freedom with regard to your body, so much so that you can feel nothing, nothing at all. But I no longer have even the right to exteriorise myself, just imagine! Even when I am quite unwell or things are quite difficult or even when I am left a little quiet, that is to say, at night, and I say to myself, 'Oh, to go into my blissfulness'—it is not permitted. I am bound there (*Mother touches her body*). It is there, there that it is to be realised."

I can conceive that she decided to give up her body because her suffering had become excessive. But I can only describe as puerile your supposition that "for the benefit of others, after clearing the path, she chose to step aside in an act of supreme selflessness" This makes no sense to me. The only selflessness I can think of is that she saw how burdensome her ailing body had become to the Ashram and also that she might go on like that for years and that she chose to remove the burden from her children's shoulders. Here may lie the secret of the decision André is said to have reported to a friend, the decision on the Mother's part in September 1973 to leave her body in the near future.

Also childish seems to me your notion that making her eat food constituted the violence she had spoken of as alone capable of arresting the process of transformation going on in her. You completely ignore the precise term in which she characterised the "violence" Her words are. "une mort violente quelconque, par un 'accident'." By no stretch of imagination can we regard as an accident capable of causing a violent death the act of putting a little bit of liquid food into her mouth after asking her to open her mouth when she showed aversion to eating. You have no idea of the emaciated deteriorating condition of her body with her natural functions out of control. Just as her urge to walk was refused by her attendants after they had seen how the last act of walking had nearly killed her—she had gone into a deadly swoon and changed colour—her urge to go foodless was in the same spirit refused. She had put her body wholly in Pranab's charge and he did the best he could for her. Nothing that he did could be stigmatised as an accident which would cause a violent death. Your prejudice against him drives you into this kind of silly exaggeration. Mind you, I am not defending what you call "insolent shouting at the Mother". If I don't condemn it publicly in *Mother India*, it doesn't follow that I condone it. But I must tell you

that the Mother considered Pranab to be loving her intensely and, knowing his temperament, she knew that behind all that he did there was a great love. It is also on private record that she said, to the effect “Were it not for Pranab, I would have left my body a long time back.” You must curb your feverish fancy and not let whom I have called “an outside-based team” to take you astray from sense and truth.

The statement by the Mother to which I have just referred is a fairly puzzling one unless we relate it to the terrible suffering which was her lot as the first body ever submitted without reserve to the Supermind’s gigantic pressure for physical transformation. Having accepted to carry on, it is difficult to credit the report that the Mother had decided in September to leave her body. If the decision had been made then, how do we account for the fact you underline: “until November 17th... the Mother continuing to opt for life, not death, almost until the last moment, although all the while perfectly ready to go”? There would be no point in her practising “on doit se battre”. And why on November 17 should she have given up fighting? The only thing which seems to make sense is my supposition that she came to know what she had declared to have been hidden from her body—namely, whether her body would undergo transformation or not. She came to know that the decision from on high was “No.” The moment she found this out, she stopped fighting for life and transformation and became, as Pranab put it, “completely obedient”. Considering the circumstances I do not find an earlier decision to die acceptable. Unless, I have in my hands a clear-cut testimony that the Mother told André of her decision in September 1973 to die, I would like to stick to my own explanation.

Here we should bear in mind that it is not only a violent death-causing accident which would stand in the way of the Mother’s physical transformation. There is also the getting of the knowledge whether or not her body would be supramentalised. When she said that it was somewhere decided one way or the other but that her body was not allowed to know, she implied that there was something else than the death-causing accident to arrest the inner condition from getting exteriorised in the long run.

One last point. Your supposition that the Mother hinted that the work of transformation would go on “in children born in the last two or so decades, ‘especially among our people’ ” is quite gratuitous. She merely said that the children in question were rather remarkable. Her statement had nothing to do with the problem of physical supramentalisation.

I must stop now. I have written at quite a length. I realise that it is useless. You will never give up your fixed ideas nor your proclivity to rave and rage. However, in spite of everything I have not lost my old habit of signing “yours affectionately”.

(9 4 1991)

K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

RECOLLECTIONS OF SUDHIR KUMAR SARKAR

HIS EARLY ASSOCIATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

[Sudhir Kumar Sarkar as a young revolutionary had come in close contact with Sri Aurobindo during the Nationalist Movement started by him in 1905. Sudhir lived with Sri Aurobindo almost for a year like a family member and later, in 1908-1909, looked after him when they were in Alipore Jail as undertrial prisoners. These recollections, originally recounted in Bengali by Sudhir, are from A Spirit Indomitable edited by Mona Sarkar.]

An Interesting Incident

ONE day a Scotch warder went crazy. Picking up Sri Aurobindo on his shoulders, he started dancing wildly in front of our cells. He had a big carrot-like nose, a heavy jowl and little eyes — a distorted face filled with demoniacal laughter! It was really a bizarre sight! The poor fellow seemed unable to decide what to do in his ecstatic state. But Sri Aurobindo was totally still. There was not a trace of smile or vexation on his face. He did not even try to resist. He was in some other world far from this earth. Only the body, separated from his consciousness, was held on the shoulder of the warder.

I Took Care of Him

Thus a whole year passed for us. When C. R. Das could not get any assistance from Sri Aurobindo, he would stand looking helpless, wipe away his tears in dismay and go away. We would say among ourselves, “Political leaders, when the blows fall hard and mercilessly, either turn into sadhus or else they go mad!” In the afternoon we were given refreshments at the dock in the court — *puris*, *sandesh* and *pan* (betel leaves). Sri Aurobindo would eat them all together — *puri* and betel leaves both! — so I had to help him eat properly. I enjoyed sitting beside him and felt like touching him, but I dared not do so for fear of taunts from friends who had other views. But sometimes I would stealthily put my hands out and touch his soft body and feet. I smelt his head, I fed him, I washed his face.

The Mantra He Gave Me

At the end of one year, after the case had been fully heard, the court assembled to decide the date of pronouncing judgment. We were all present. Sri Aurobindo

opened his mouth and spoke. He was talking about his realisations and Sadhana to Upen Bandyopadhyaya, Ullaskar Dutt and Nolini Kanta Gupta. He said “Vasudev Narayan has spoken to me, saying, ‘I have much work still to be done through you. I will take you out of prison’.” We then, one after another, taking advantage of the opportunity, asked about our future. Vasudev had already told Sri Aurobindo that we would be given sentences, and that Ullas and Barin would not be hanged. Getting this chance I asked, “How will I be able to bear the days in prison at this young age? If I become weak and falter, what should I do?” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Think of me; I shall always be with you.” How deeply touching were these words! Out of jail, whenever in difficulty or danger, whenever in my helplessness I have been able to remember him, always I have seen that the difficulty has become a blessing, or if I have had to face it boldly, someone has always delivered me out of danger.

Later, during our life in exile, whenever the tyranny of the British Government tried to oppress us, we noticed how Sri Aurobindo’s Grace was always there to protect us. In the midst of endless abuse and suffering, a heavenly cheerfulness wrapped us in its warm embrace, shielding us, comforting us.

Mrinalini Devi

In those memorable days of 1907, I have seen Mrinalini Devi take out suits used by Sri Aurobindo during his stay in England and put them on us with her own hands; in this way she would dress us up, when we had occasion to visit subscribers of *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar* for funds.

The Universal Identity

I have heard it said that Sri Aurobindo had realised identity with all things — earth, trees, stones, birds, and beasts — with his own body, more intimately than we tend to feel towards our kith and kin. But this identity in body and soul does not make things dissolve into some undefined and undifferentiated mass. In fact each separate object is given its due place and value, and in that unique realisation its value goes on increasing more and more. The country, the body, everything appears uniquely in its distinct truth. What human beings can only conceive mentally, becomes living fact, as living and true as life and death itself. When we try to assess a person, we form an idea of him by observing his facial expression and his features; we can even have some glimpse of his mentality. But Sri Aurobindo saw things with some other sight: from the gross to the most subtle, all the different planes were revealed to his eye. All our thoughts and aspirations are derived from those subtle planes. But we can give expression to only a small portion of them. All that we receive comes from those planes. The Gods—Agni, Varuna and others—are not imaginary entities, they are beings as

real and existent as we are. We human beings have to depend on those Deities; and they are connected not only with us but with animals. All things are complementary to each other; all that takes place in our world is interlinked with what takes place in those worlds! As the truth of this harmony is revealed to us more and more, all our actions tend towards perfection.

(Sudhir had an interesting way of understanding the happenings of life. He links here a few events in Sri Aurobindo's life, revealing a deeper truth behind them.)

“Yet I will Escape” — Sri Aurobindo

Here are a few instances of how the mighty British Government in India planned to kidnap Sri Aurobindo, but was foiled in its effort every time:

- 1 The Government prosecuted Sri Aurobindo for editing the *Bande Mataram*, but he was acquitted for want of proof.
2. In 1908 a Scotch Sergeant entered Sri Aurobindo's cell in Alipore Jail and said to him “Arvind, now you have been caught!” Sri Aurobindo replied in a mild voice: “Yet I will escape ”
- 3 Naren Goswami turned King's witness and implicated Sri Aurobindo as the Supreme Commander of the All India Revolutionary Party. Kanailal Dutt shot and killed Goswami in Jail. The Judge, for want of corroboration, acquitted Sri Aurobindo from complicity in the Alipore Bomb Case
- 4 In 1908 A. Fraser, the Lt. Governor of Bengal, informed the Governor General Lord Minto that if Sri Aurobindo were left free he would undo everything and that it would, therefore, be better to remove him to a fortress or some other place beyond human reach (*vide* Home Dept. Progs , May 1908, Nos. 104-111.) But the Governor General, instead, set up spy-nets around Sri Aurobindo, as Bengal then was surging in waves of fire because of her partition by the British. Sri Aurobindo continued to publish the two papers *Dharma* and *Karmayogin* upto 1910
5. At repeated insistence from certain quarters, the Government decided to lock Sri Aurobindo up, charging him for seditious writing. But they swooped down on his residence a bit too late. Following an *Adesh*, he had left for Chander-nagore.
- 6 At Pondicherry, a stevedore of a French ship, being an agent of the British, had arranged to kidnap Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's companions suggested that he should shift to another house for safety. Sri Aurobindo said. “I am not going to budge an inch ” It later transpired that the stevedore was shot dead by another sailor for a personal grievance. The sailor later committed suicide.
7. At last, when the British Government in India could not succeed in kid-

napping Sri Aurobindo, they sent an Envoy in a special Railway Saloon to persuade him to go to Darjeeling which, they suggested, would provide a better atmosphere for his Yoga-Ashram Sri Aurobindo rejected the proposal.

8. During the First World War, the British twice approached the French Government to remove Sri Aurobindo to Algeria from Pondicherry, but did not succeed.

Thus Sri Aurobindo's words, "Yet I will escape" resound for ever.

(Concluded)

YOUTHFUL WINGS

SAVE, O heal this earth so precious!
Do not destroy—it is too great a loss!
A desert, an isle, forlorn, forgot—
But rescue the future abode of God!

What can despair, what can tears gain?
My heart, do never yield to pain
With youthful wings fly without fear,
My soul, and sing—for God is near—

Of the joyous change in earthly things
And the harvest that long waiting brings.
Be still, my heart, for God will come,
Paradise on earth will be His home.

RUTH

Ruth's poem was inspired by S.M.'s very lyrical but rather depressing *Broken Wings* which appeared in the March 1996 issue of *Mother India*, p 205 —Editor

RECITATION OF SAVITRI BY SRI AUROBINDO

26.12.1979—10.45 p.m.

I was sleeping in Sri Aurobindo's room. Soon I had a dream.

Sri Aurobindo was reciting *Savitri* in a very sweet and melodious voice. The tune of some musical instrument was also heard. It was something like a flute but not a flute. It was the sound of some musical instrument which I have never heard before. I have had the grace of hearing Sri Aurobindo playing a flute in my dream, several times, but this was such a marvellous and elevating tune and with a voice accompanying it. I could hear Nirod also reciting *Savitri* along with Him. I became very quiet. My whole body became extremely peaceful. I wanted to go and listen to this enchanting voice and music. It was coming from the 'long passage' (as the Mother called it) outside Sri Aurobindo's room where He used to sit on His chair and write and recite *Savitri* and I used to listen in the adjoining 'Meditation Hall'. At last I made a great effort to get up. I jumped and ran to the long passage. But it was dark! I looked at Nirod's place. His light was on and he was standing in the middle of the room. Seeing me running out of Sri Aurobindo's room, he enquired, "What is the matter? You dreamt of something or what?"

I found nothing there and realised that it was all a dream! But it was so concrete and living! I did not answer Nirod. I was not in a condition to say anything at that time. I quietly returned to my bed in Sri Aurobindo's room.

CHAMPAKLAL

(*Visions of Champaklal*, pp. 111-12)

SRI AUROBINDO, THE REAL MAHATMA

A Tribute on his 125th Birth Anniversary

ON the occasion of the celebration of India's Independence Day, August 15, we hear slogans being shouted in honour of our great leaders Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, but not even by a remote chance do we hear someone crying out: 'Sri Aurobindo!'

Can the people of India afford to forget him? Indeed, one can argue that slogan-shouting does not indicate the exact reality, the historical impact that the person in question has made. But Sri Aurobindo has not caught on to the popular ethos, whereas Gandhi, titled "Mahatma" and "the Father of the Nation", has seemed the total embodiment of such a culture. Every aspect of our national life, be it concerned with politics, economics or social existence, has been excessively influenced by Gandhian ideals. Although it is not my intention to state that since there is a clamour about Gandhianism and an ostensible lip-service, ideally all Indians should tread the path carved out by the great leader, yet it may be safely said that India is still in the Gandhi-epoch. It is my effort to show in this essay that we had more a *mahatma* worth the name in Sri Aurobindo than in Gandhi. Indeed, we will find that Sri Aurobindo had a richer, maturer and wider conception of India's role in the world, her cultural and spiritual character. We shall discuss the contrasting views of these two leaders: nationalism, non-cooperation, means adopted in the political struggle and for social reform. It will be my contention at the end of this essay to show that if we had followed Sri Aurobindo in the above-mentioned issues, today we would have been better off facing the national problems arising out of them.

Significance of 15 August

India steps into her golden jubilee year of Independence on 15 August 1997; it is also the year when we celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo who played a pivotal role in the nationalist movement for Independence. In his message of 15 August 1947, the day India gained her Independence from the British rule, he declared:

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began my life, the beginning of its full fruition.'

Indeed, those who believe in Providence are convinced that nothing happens by

chance, everything that happens is according to a divine design and has a definite purpose.

Some of the great heroes of our freedom struggle were not in the limelight as the midnight hour struck to herald a new and independent era for India. Mahatma Gandhi, the hero of the moment, was not even in Delhi; far from basking in the glory of the hour, he was in Calcutta, extremely saddened by the Hindu-Muslim violence that had erupted as a result of the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. Sri Aurobindo, although very confident that India would master her destiny and become a great country in the world, yet was concerned about the lack of unity, the Hindu-Muslim strife and the difficulties she would have to face in the future;

Nationalism

There are no two opinions on how deeply and sincerely both Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo loved their country, however, their political thought differed greatly. While the Mahatma adopted a policy that was docile to the British, the Yogi saw in such an approach the danger of being taken for granted which would be detrimental to the interests of India. Gandhi based his method of Indian freedom struggle on the lines he had adopted in South Africa, that is, be deferential to the law of the land, even if you have to suffer ridicule and punishment. The government would have to give in one day or another out of sheer pity. Adoption of such a method, which Sri Aurobindo called "loyalist", was totally out of context for India. India was not South Africa and the problem of Indians in South Africa was to gain privileges from the government as equal citizens with the rest of the South Africans. The problem of Indians in India was not about privileges, it was much more fundamental than that, it was the total freedom to rule one's own country. It was a struggle against colonialism, a struggle for self-rule or *swaraj*. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1914.

We gain nothing by preaching an unconditional loyalty to the Government, such as is the fashion nowadays, or doing anything which even in appearance strengthens the disposition to an abject and unmanly tone in politics. Gandhi's loyalism is not a pattern for India which is not South Africa, and even Gandhi's loyalism is corrected by passive resistance.²

Gandhi wanted to capture the attention of the Colonial Masters in an evangelical fashion as it was understood by him. He was deeply influenced by the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount being his favourite doctrine. Love your enemies, if your enemy strikes you on one cheek show him the other too, bless those who curse you, .. if one forces you to walk one mile walk two, if one takes your shawl offer him your shirt.³ Gandhi took these admonitions meekly, almost

literally, and tried to form a resistance movement with a motto not to displease the tormentors but show them, in and through self-suffering, that what they as rulers were doing was a gross injustice to the subjects. The colonialists were Christians and they should be able to read their Gospel in the actions of the non-Christians. This cringing subservient mentality was to invoke pity, mercy and compassion in the tormentor and reform him. Hence non-violence, self-suffering, passive protest were instruments of his struggle for freedom.

Sri Aurobindo put his finger right on the spot when he wrote:

An abject tone of servility in politics is not “diplomacy” and is not good politics. It does not deceive or disarm the opponent; it does encourage nevertheless, fear and a cringing cunning in the subject people.⁴

Maybe Gandhi’s model succeeded in South Africa due to the different circumstances prevailing over there. His active participation in Ambulance Corps during the Boer War put him in a spotlight of loyalty and dutiful citizenry. In contrast to this Sri Aurobindo held that our task in India is

... to create a nation of men fit for independence and able to secure and keep it. We have been beaten in the first attempt, like every other nation similarly circumstanced. That is no reason why the whole people should go back to a condition of abject fear, grovelling loyalty and whining complaints.⁵

One cannot beg and beseech for what rightfully belongs to him. One has got to demand what is lawfully his; it is manly and one should be proud of such a deed. But to plead and entreat for what has been always yours is cowardice, devoid of all self-respect. Sri Aurobindo laid his agenda clearly and succinctly in four points:

1. Eventual independence.
2. No co-operation without control.
3. A masculine courage in speech and action.
4. Readiness to accept real concessions and pay their just price and no more. Beyond that, I do not see the necessity of any change. We recognize that immediate independence is not practicable and we are ready to defend the British rule against any foreign nation, for that means defending our own future independence.⁶

Thus Sri Aurobindo rightly perceived that there were no favours to be received from the colonial masters. However, keeping in mind the ground realities, the Indians and the British were to do the needful for the country

mutually, in partnership, with the understanding that the latter had no choice but to leave India in due time. Unfortunately, such clear thinking was not the wont of the Moderates in the Congress Party who were in the majority and were led by the single voice of Mahatma Gandhi; there was constant vacillation in their policies, and subservience to the rulers was the hallmark of their philosophy. Had the Congress relied on the wise counsel of Sri Aurobindo many an unfortunate event would have been avoided, e.g., the split of the Congress Party at the Surat Convention in 1907, the blunders made in the Hindu-Muslim question and the eventual partition of the country.

Questionable Means Adopted for Liberation

Today there is no leader, no intellectual, no journalist, no jurist in this country who is able to say that hunger-strike as a means to get favours from the authorities is wrong. We have hunger-strikes to dismiss and install governments to suit the self-seeking politicians; there are hunger-strikes from workers and government employees; even doctors and nurses resort to it to press their demands. Every group, be it of environmentalists, traders, or teachers, resorts to it as a legitimate means to press demands. All of them have from Mahatma Gandhi the sanction to do it. Is hunger-strike morally right, even if it seems to have been undertaken to secure the independence of a country or to stop bloodshed between two warring communities? Sri Aurobindo has to say the following on this issue:

Hunger-striking to force God or to force anybody or anything else is not the true spiritual means. I do not object to Mr. Gandhi or anyone else following it for quite other than spiritual purposes, but here it is out of place; these things, I repeat, are foreign to the fundamental principle of our Yoga.⁷

The one and only purpose for which one can fast is for his own spiritual *śuddhī* or purification. It is an ancient practice prevalent among the holy men and women of India. They undertook fasts to cleanse themselves from evil thoughts and deeds, to control anger and other base emotions; it was undertaken to help one meditate.

What Gandhi did with the fast, the spiritual instrument, is that he turned it into a political weapon. So, the fast has caught on. Some go to the farcical limits of holding a chain-fast; people take turns to sit in a fasting protest (*dharnā*) after every few hours, that is, until one is ready to go for his meals! If fast, a spiritual tool, was used by Gandhi for political ends, today Indians have gone far ahead of him to use religion itself as a political tool. Today, there is no issue, be it religion, caste, communities, minorities, that is not politicized.

Caste—Social Perspective

Mahatma Gandhi has been hailed as a social reformer *par excellence*. Indeed what he did to highlight the plight of the untouchables is worthy of the highest praise. Yet, his views on caste were obfuscating. For instance, it was a special blessing (*punya*) of Providence that one is born in lower class, that he is entitled to do menial work; for it is by humbling oneself that one becomes great, it is by being the last that one becomes first in the kingdom of God. Therefore, he titled the untouchables *Harijans*, namely, the people of God. However, the change of name did not in any way change the status of these people. The problem with Gandhi was that he wanted to christianize his thoughts on man, see everyone as equal and bestow the same human dignity on all. There is nothing wrong in such an egalitarian philosophy. But then the Indian caste system was not something that one could elevate in order to be great in the eyes of God. The basis of the latter-day caste system and the rationale of the untouchables lay deeply in the religious beliefs of *karma*. Hence, Gandhi did not dissolve caste, he merely wanted to morally elevate it, he did not reject the hierarchy of the caste system, he merely sought a reform of it. For him a *Shudra* and a *Brahmana* were on the same level. In fact, to make his point even more poignant, he proposed that it needed a special *punya* (merit) in order to be born of a lower caste. Sri Aurobindo did not recognize caste in this manner; he recognized man as one with a divine spark.

The Way of Sri Aurobindo

In early 1920 Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple saying that Gandhi had invited him to “come over and help” in the freedom struggle. He declined the offer:

I had to say that I was not ready to join the old politics and had no new programme formed for a more spiritual line of work, and it would be no use my going out till I saw my way.⁸

Later, in the same year, Sri Aurobindo had to authorize a strong reprimand to a newspaper that printed his supposed strong endorsement of the Congress programme and that he was an enthusiastic follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He made his mission clear in the following words.

As you well know, I am identifying myself with only one kind of work or propaganda as regards India, the endeavour to reconstitute her cultural, social and economic life within the larger and freer lines than the past on a spiritual basis.⁹

Sri Aurobindo's programme of freedom for India was different than the one spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. This was as early as 1922. He felt that India had to be ready for freedom in many ways and that Gandhi's programme of non-cooperation movement would not result in "bringing out the genuine freedom and greatness of India, her *Swarajya* and *Samrajya*". There were other pressing problems in the subcontinent than the presence of the British. The total disunity among the Indian rulers and the moral, social and economic deterioration among its populace were of great concern. He saw clearly where the contemporary political movement in the country would lead.

The present trend of politics may end in abortive unrest, but it may also stumble with the aid of external circumstances into some kind of simulacrum of self-government. In either case the whole real work will remain to be done.¹⁰

These words were prophetic. All that happened from then till 1947 was not different in any way from what he had foreseen. One of the "external circumstances" that helped the British consider India for self-rule was the latter's willingness to help the British in World War II; the unrest that Sri Aurobindo foresaw was the violence that occurred, particularly at the partition of the country. If one were to judge truly, it is then clear that our independence was won not primarily because of the various non-cooperative movements that Gandhi led, although they had their impact; it was in a way the willingness to co-operate with the British in the War that made the promise of independence a reality. As we have noted above in the four-point nationalistic agenda of Sri Aurobindo, where he states that we must not co-operate without "control" and that we should accept concessions after paying a "just price" for them, goes to prove that it is seminally his strategy that worked.

The way of Sri Aurobindo was a spiritual way. Man is essentially a spiritual being. If the spiritual aspect is taken care of, then there is no need to worry about the other problems. Human problems, social, political, economic, all are merely the symptoms of something that is gone fundamentally wrong with our nature. Our effort must be to seek the spiritual which will give us a unique power to overcome all our seemingly insurmountable problems. The way of Sri Aurobindo was to show the spiritual path:

My work is not to intervene in social matters within the frame of the present humanity but to bring down a higher spiritual light and power of a higher character which will make a radical change in the earth-consciousness.¹¹

Thus the way of Sri Aurobindo was not a social-reform-oriented one but that of transformation of human nature. It was an evolution of mankind from crass

materialism to a plane of spiritual consciousness, a change that was meant to be radical and complete. In other words, the way of Sri Aurobindo was to deliver ourselves from our lower nature and advance through the awakening of our consciousness to a spiritual power.

It appears that Mahatma Gandhi and many other leaders were accepted by the masses because they purportedly gave solutions to the immediate problems confronting our country. Their mission had a definite temporal purpose; their movement was towards the immediate concerns. They did not have a lasting programme on the lines of the evolution of a worldly man into a spiritual being. It may be said that Sri Aurobindo was far ahead of his times. He showed mankind the way for all the generations to come: there is much more than political and economic freedom ahead, there is much more than self-rule and parliament ahead; ahead there is spiritual fulfilment without which our activity would be a waste, our striving aimless and our life meaningless. Sri Aurobindo who showed us such a way of spiritual perfection is indeed a *mahatma* in its full and true sense

DANIEL ALBUQUERQUE

References

- 1 *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, p 404
- 2 *Supplement*, SABCL, Vol 27, p 463
- 3 See for more Luke 6, 12-49
- 4 *SABCL*, Vol 27, p 463
- 5 *Ibid* , p 464
- 6 *Ibid*
- 7 *Ibid* , pp 479-80
- 8 *Ibid* , p 485
- 9 *Ibid* , p 499
- 10 *SABCL*, Vol 26, p 439.
- 11 *Ibid* , p 151

“THE BEST LACK ALL CONVICTION, WHILE THE WORST ARE FULL OF PASSIONATE INTENSITY”

COLONISED for centuries, we still look to the Occident for role models. And what is the Western scene?—A desperate frenzy for the acquisition of wealth that is economic barbarism in its utterly naked and unashamed form. Exploitation of man and nature for personal appropriation is the goal, all-pervasive rent-seeking behaviour is the manifestation, “having more” is the driving force. Francis Fukuyama describes it thus. “This modern ‘rights’ revolution, in which every individual believes he possesses an ever growing panoply of rights, with few responsibilities.”

The world has rapidly shrunk to a global cybernet-village where, ironically, men are more isolated. It is this social isolation that turns the individual’s dejection into depression. This is inevitable in a society where leisure time is devoted to electronic amusement in isolation, and socialising is practised for developing professional contacts, not to build friendship!

The “having more” syndrome typifying the consumerist society spawns a vicious spiral of exploitative behaviour, because “more having” fails to provide the sense of security and satisfaction sought after. This fuels the frenzied search for possessing yet more, creating further frustration, fatigue, and a steep rise in the incidence of stress-related “top executive” diseases.

Simultaneously, the insatiable desire for possession impels our faculties more and more outwards in a faster and faster centrifugal spin, out of control, away from the stable core of our being, this happens till the danger of flying apart and disintegrating now begins to loom ominously large. By opting *to have* instead of *to be* we necessarily settle for a progressively lower quality of *being*, for the fleeting pleasure of a higher level of consumption that swiftly leaves in its wake a parched tongue and a fevered brow. The tyranny of the pleasure principle relentlessly goads us on for evermore. The desert Eliot describes in the *Rock* stares us in the face and to our consternation we find

The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother .
What life have you if you have not life together? .
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads,
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour .
Nor does the family even move about together.
And the wind shall say: ‘Here were decent godless people.
Their only monument the asphalt road
And a thousand golf balls.’

It was in 1940 that the immortal tramp spoke to the world through his magnificent creation *The Great Dictator* echoing, strangely enough, thoughts that are so foreign to the Western way of life. He spoke of living in mutual harmony and joy, not at the expense of others. Let us listen to Charlie Chaplin, for these are words that we have preferred to forget:

We want to live by each other's happiness, not by each other's misery; we don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. The good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful. But we have lost the way. Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate... We have developed speed but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity, more than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent and all will be lost.... The misery that is upon us is but the passion of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress... these unnatural men, machine men with machine minds and machine hearts. You have the love of humanity in your hearts... The kingdom of God is within man. Not in one man or in a group of men, but in all men... Fight to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance.

50 years later, in the BBC TV serial *Legacy*, Michael Wood emphatically stressed that over the last two centuries Western civilization has changed the balance of nature so permanently that now civilization itself, run on Western values of individualism, competition, acquisitiveness, constantly pushing outwards, has become a central problem of the earth. He voices a growing and profound disquiet that the Western way of life itself is no longer supportable morally or practically because of pollution, environmental destruction and the continuing exploitation of mankind. Wood says:

Usually it is said that the East is hopelessly backward and needs to catch up with the West. But, a consideration of the legacy of these great civilizations suggests that the West has some catching up to do. It needs to learn from the East a way of cultivating its inner space, of accepting limits and desires in an increasingly finite world

Do we need a more obvious signpost indicating the road India should take? Marx had warned that Capitalism's true standards are excess and intemperance, and for this the industrial producer turns to contriving a calculated subservience to inhuman, unnatural and imaginary appetites, pandering to the most deprived

fancies, exciting the most morbid desires. Shall we not heed this warning voiced in 1884 and shake ourselves out of the mesmeric haze of electronic mass media to realise the dangers of following "Create More Desire" as the first commandment? The strategic focus of the cultural inundation coming in the wake of globalisation is on promoting consumerism to expand markets for transnational corporations working in close alliance with multinational banks, using the world-wide web to bypass borders and regulations of nation states. The goal is to maximise the development of consumer instincts in the people, philistinising their consciousness, diverting them from advanced social ideals, ultimately enervating civil society.

As the world runs faster and faster after urbanization, it is instructive to look back at Sumeria, where Eridu, the first city in the world, came into being. Sumerian mythology speaks of the goddess Inanna approaching Enki, the god of wisdom, for the gift of civilization. Enki warned her that civilization was a Pandora's box, veritably a devil's bargain. For, it offered all the joys of life but, along with that, destruction, violence, cruelty, fear. All these, Enki warned Inanna, have to be taken together, none can be refused. And, once taken, they cannot be given back. It is for man to use them with restraint and wisdom. But, then, who is bothered about ancient myths that indeed constitute our roots and contain profound lessons for the present?

Casting a glance over our world what do we see? Despite the proclaimed end of the Cold War and the collapse of the rival power system, in the Balkans, Central America, Russia, Somalia, Rwanda, the Middle East and Cambodia, millions are massacred with weapons supplied by the affluent nations mouthing words of peace on the floor of the United Nations. The sickening dimensions of frenzied ethnic cleansing suggest that mankind's notoriously short memory has consigned the Holocaust to blissful oblivion. The unholy nexus of the amoral working of economic forces, unscrupulous power-brokers and profiteering traders prevails over all humane values. It is not a global village we are living in, but a global graveyard. We seem to have reverted to the welter of confusion Matthew Arnold wrote of 125 years ago in *Dover Beach*

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night

Shall we then turn indiscriminately to the East for a solution? Rutter and Smith's study remarks that Japan appears to have much stronger informal social controls on the behaviour of its youth than other developed countries. Asia's economic strength has its roots in children who defer to parental authority and in parents who stay together and invest their time and money in their children's future. The Philippines is seen as a warning of a U.S. style democracy run

amuck Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore points to the collapse of the Western family structures as the symptom and cause of much of what has gone wrong with Western societies. He says that what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy and stresses the Confucian Little Tradition of harmony, civic duties, family values, hard work, savings, deference to age, authority and hierarchy, paternalistic relations between husband and wife, father and eldest son, elder and younger children.

The dilemma of which path to choose is posed by the changing value system in Asia, in the wake of American cultural hegemonisation that is sweeping across the globe. Yet, it is in Japan that a new beginning is being made. In the Matsushita institute of Government and Management the goal is to provide the Nation with a new type of politician who believes in honesty, teamwork and attending to the needs of ordinary people. The students chant in unison daily: “We will truly love our nation and the people, pursue principles of politics and management based on a new concept of humanity.”

(To be concluded)

PRADEEP BHATTACHARYA

MATRIMANDIR: A VISION (25 AUGUST 1996)

In an inner chamber of the earth
A pristine purity comes to birth;
The Supreme answers its crystal call,
The globe glows golden wall to wall

Twelve gardens surround
This tranquillity profound,
Each one a varied blossom
Of multihued delight—
Earth's secret and silent
Embrace with light.

Silent hearts and love-lit eyes
Commune there with paradise.

VIKAS BAMBA

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—V

ROOPANAGUNTA SUBRAMANYAM PANTULU

ROOPANAGUNTA SUBRAMANYAM PANTULU was known as “Pantulu”, a suffix short, convenient, meaning “teacher” or “school master”, or an honorific title. Subramanyam is another name for Kartikeya, son of Lord Shiva, general of the armies of Heaven, a name befitting Pantulu (as we will see).

Pantulu from afar seemed just an ordinary “Madrasee” He was always clad in a white dhoti (South Indian style) and a shirt. What struck the onlooker first was his great beard Neat, lush and long, it covered his front nearly up to the belly The longish, curly hair of his head was gathered into a neat little knot at the back. A good nose and full enough cheeks A closer, second look struck harder and dazed you with the fire in his eyes. And next what could really floor you, if you happened to be around and the occasion right, was the thunder of his voice Some can yet catch the echoes of it—long after the Thunderer is no more. The overall impression one gathered from the eyes, the beard, the hair-do, the simple attire was one of ancientness. Then, if you knew his ways, views and his works, the impression carried further—that of an ancient Rishi When and if the hair-trigger temper went off and the voice (content and volume) hit like a thunderbolt, the impression only grew stronger and stayed longer—a Durvasa on the move

Pantulu was born in a Brahmin family on 14 June 1887 in the village Anakarlapudi in Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh (no A P. in those days—only Madras Presidency) He was the eldest child. Father Venkatasubbayah and mother Sheshamma, three brothers Chandramouli, Srinivasulu (my father), Venkateswarulu and last, a sister, Tulasi, comprised the family. The family lived and led a village life—teaching or engaged in small time business. Pantulu, after his father’s demise, took up the family burden. It was he who came out and brought out the family from the village life He studied and worked hard, reached Ongole, and then moved to Guntur for his matriculation (English medium). His hard work paid off. He got admission into the Engineering College at Madras It was probably the only such college in the whole of the Madras Presidency Only the best could get admission. There, after three years of diligent work, he passed an exam called “Upper Subordinate”. He got a job as an overseer in Cuddappa District This was the year 1910. He was 23 years old. The family moved to Cuddappa He was now the sole earner, two brothers studying for matriculation, another in class IV—and wife Annapoornadevi (he was married by then), the sister Tulasi and his mother were all his dependents! He worked from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. with just a short lunch break. His reputation slowly built up on solid foundations—his diligence, forthrightness, honesty—all backed by a Vesuvian temper He was like a keg of gunpowder with a short, very

short, fuse. The explosion could and would come at very short notice. The blast could catch anyone—all were equally treated—“Beware all, big or small, peon, boss, friend or foe.” Even the “white sahibs” were not spared. He was not foolhardy. He relied on his sincerity to ward off any retribution.

Time passed. He worked hard—so did his mother. Her heart was larger than their purse. She never turned anyone away without treating them as one of the family. Such open hearts and minds inevitably put a mere overseer under great financial strain. But neither he nor his mother ever let go their principles, nor did they change their minds or shut their hearts. It was at this time that Fate chose to strike, hard and fast. First the youngest brother died. Next, the sister Tulasi, now married two years; then his wife Annapoornadevi passed away—all in quick succession. At this time Pantulu was already a follower and admirer of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. He had shaved clean his head and went about with a large Vivekananda-type turban and attended lectures at Ramakrishna Samaj. When he walked along the streets, children used to shout, “There goes Swami Vivekananda.” Now, after the three deaths he was somewhat depressed and had half a mind to become a Sannyasin. He lost, to some degree, interest in family life.

It was at this time, around 1914 (one family version says 1914, another says 1919) that Pantulu came across the first issue of *Arya*. He fell for it, and through it for its author. He came to Pondicherry as soon as he could and had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. The path was set; henceforth he was a marked man. He never missed a chance to come for a Darshan. In fact he hardly left it to chance. He rarely applied for leave from his office. But on 2 or 3 occasions when he applied for leave to come for Darshan and it was not granted, Pantulu unhesitatingly handed in his resignation and came away. His British superiors were good enough or practical enough to request him to rejoin. It seems he was usually the last to arrive for the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo would remark, “Pantulu has come, now we can close the doors.” Nolini-da recounted to me that Pantulu would somehow make it (for Darshan). If he missed the train, he would catch a goods-train, sit with the guard and reach here. Such was the urge or Force that led Pantulu and his likes here. (Sadly, I overheard much later, in 1971 or 72, when the Mother with great difficulty appeared on the New Balcony—a gentleman, a resident of Pondy, saying, “Oh I could not come for the Darshan. You see my driver was absent!” The gentleman held a valid licence to drive the car!)

Pantulu came and went. He was as yet a widower. Once in the course of a conversation, Sri Aurobindo said to him, “You could remarry.” He set out to do so. His mother was naturally quite happy. The quest was strange, short and successful. At this time there lived in Cuddappa a Tehsildar, Chittamoori Krishnayya. His eldest daughter Meenakshamma was deemed to be of marriageable age—she was 10 years old. Krishnayya consulted an astrologer. The astrologer told Krishnayya not to look too far or too hard. He further said that

someone would soon approach him for the hand of his daughter. The bridegroom, he added, may be somewhat old, but that should not matter. Soon enough, Pantulu, now about 30, and his mother, approached Krishnayya for the hand of 10-year-old Meenakshamma. Krishnayya readily agreed and the marriage was solemnised in 1918. (Incidentally—Meenakshamma had a younger sister named Venkatalakshamma. Pantulu had a younger brother Srinivasulu. Matters were brought to a marital conclusion—they were later married.) They say, opposites attract. Pantulu and his wife were living examples—he was a live volcano and she was a vast cool glacier. What mysterious hand—Fate, Providence or Divine Plan, brought them together? Whatever the mystery it was a happy event for us—the family and others. She was a shield for us, a deflector, and a saviour for some others.

Pantulu then shifted to Madras. He was by now an Assistant Engineer in the PWD. A few incidents would show the stuff the man was made of.

There was a time when Pantulu possessed a walking-stick of rosewood; in its hollow length lay hidden a sword (I hold it now, unused, in my custody). He for a short period went to office in a horse-drawn carriage (Jhatka). One morning, Pantulu got on and the driver started off. The horse took a few steps, then shied and reared up on its hind legs. Reflected rays from a puddle of water had hit its eyes (it had rained the previous night). Pantulu slid back on to the road. No corporal damage. But, the jolt set off the short fuse. He walked into the house. His mother, surprised, asked him, "What's the matter?" He said, "Get me a glass of water to drink." She went in. Pantulu drew out the sword to punish the horse. The driver was horrified and frightened, but stood in his (Pantulu's) way, begging his master to pardon the horse. Pantulu shouted, "Get out of my way!" This delay was enough to bring a reprieve to the condemned horse. His mother appeared, and this strange scenario met her eyes—a frightened driver with folded hands and tearful eyes, confronting an angry master, sword in hand, and fire in his eyes. A horse in the background. She was after and above all his mother. She took in the situation—*Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath)—and stepped in, barring Pantulu's warpath. Pantulu simply said, "I am going to kill the horse." She as simply said, "After me," and stood. What could Pantulu, or anyone, do? He cooled down, sheathed his sword and retreated. Thus was a horse sacrifice averted.

On yet another occasion, a similar eruption nearly ended the life of a cow. The Pantulus like many others had their own milch cows. One of the cows contracted some disease of the milk ducts. When milked, blood spurted out, not milk. Pantulu saw red, shouted for his peons. He ordered them to belabour the cow with sticks. They were unwilling, but fear of Pantulu overcame their better senses and sensibilities. They were about to start their job, when on the scene appeared Mrs. Pantulu. Her concern for the cow roused a cold anger and courage in her. She shouted at the peons, calling them fools who could not

discern a wrong order given in anger from a right one. She ordered, "Get out." The poor blighters—they were waiting and praying for just such an intervention. They dropped their sticks and ran away from the spot.

As the horse, so the cow was saved, both by female forces—Shaktis—only they could counter and douse this fire. One bore him and brought him up, the other married and took him over. (Against the superiority of another there is no remedy but love — Goethe)

Not so fortunate (as the horse and cow) was a Sahib boss who chose to ignore or could not correctly gauge Pantulu. Neither his rank nor colour was enough to save him. Pantulu did not run him through with a sword or have him beaten. It all happened this way. Pantulu was, as mentioned, a follower of Vivekananda. He had a shaven head and an equally clean face. Then a strange occurrence took place. Whenever he shaved he would dream that hair was coming out of his mouth! He stopped shaving and the dreams too stopped. He let his beard and hair grow and did away with shaving. But his boss, the Sahib of the story, did not believe such 'tales'. He pooh-poohed the whole episode and derided the shabby appearance of this subordinate. The fuse was lit—an explosion — Pantulu cursed the man that he would die soon! It so happened that the poor man was gathered up within a month. Pantulu felt sorry. He regretted and promised to himself to be more careful with his words thenceforth.

Pantulu, it would seem, had an intuitive sense of the future. For often, events followed his foretelling them! He did not "tell" in so many explicit words, but we could conclude so by his premonitions and couched warnings to those around. When his mother called him home from a 'camp' for the "thread ceremony" of his youngest brother Venkateswarulu, he asked her not to go through the ceremony. He said, "It is not necessary and moreover I have to come home soon enough." He did not go for the ceremony. His mother performed it. Soon after that the boy met with an accident on the playing field. He died in a few days and Pantulu *had* to rush home—as he had foreseen.

Maybe this "feeling into the future" made him a good astrologer. His old notebook is full of astrological castings, his own and of each one of his family members. There is one even of our late Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. For some here in the Ashram he had foretold some events—eventually proven correct. (I think the late Khoda-bhai was one of them.)

Pantulu himself faced danger often enough. As a PWD engineer he was assigned to various jobs like building bridges, canals, etc. He had to move into quite remote areas, often through jungles. His party moved by bullock cart, beating tin cans and waving torches—if dusk overtook them—to keep away wild animals. Even an encounter with a tiger was very much possible (a distant dream now for animal lovers seeking it). He sometimes lived in a houseboat and travelled up and down canals and rivers. Once, when he was working from a small boat, the boat capsized. Pantulu did not know swimming—not a stroke. He

managed to grab a wire stretched taut across the river and held on for dear life. Some people threw him a rope and hauled him ashore. Even his umbrella and sandals were rescued. These were washed ashore downstream and picked up the next day. What was remarkable was that he had warned his co-workers not to go on the boat. But they had insisted, saying the work was urgent—so he went. The wire too snapped after he was rescued.

(To be continued)

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

IMMORTAL WINGS

FLY on, ye finches of the sky,
To your gentle nest, your waiting brood,
Sing, sweet delights, your hearts' contents,
The evensong of solitude
The day is done, the night is nigh,
A song from the throbbing heart yet springs,
And here I lie, a lonely bird—
Alone, with a pair of broken wings

Born to fly beneath the azure sky,
Over mountain tops and valleys green;
Born to glide through the fragrant air
And sing the songs of rivers serene.
Songs of mirth, of joy and of love
For Nature and all ethereal things;
But here I lie, a lonely bird—
Alone, with a pair of broken wings.

O lift me up from this sordid earth,
O lift me up from this cold dark clod
Lift me up to sail the heavens,
Enamoured of the abode of God
The Golden Dawn of morrow would bring
A greater radiance over the world—
And up I would soar in boundless space
With my golden pair of wings unfurled

D.L

HOMeward

Does the perfume that leaves the lily
Ever yearn to return to it?
And to the wide surging darkness
The flame when once it is lit?

Does the sound that is struck in the tower
Ever yearn to return to its bell?
Does the water you fill in your pitcher
Ever yearn to return to its well?

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

WHEN

When light becomes a face,
When face is changed to a flame,
Timelessnesses embrace
The body of a name.

When rapture becomes a sky
And sky is lost in bliss,
The hound of ceaseless cry
Awakes in the abyss.

When power has become peace
And peace has goldened into might,
Comes down global release—
The noon within the night.

When all becomes the nought
And Zero becomes supreme,
The wideness of the sun is caught
In the gulf of human dream.

When my sod becomes thy whole,
Thy whole becomes my sod;
My earthhood reaches the goal,
Awakes the Peak, awakes God.

21 3 1959

ROMEN

(From the late poet's unpublished diaries)

THE CHILD ETERNAL

SMILES bloom on children's lips
As flowers on trees and plants,
So also shines the Mother's joy,
As stars in the distant sky!

Amidst such joy I shall not keep closed
The doors of my melancholy heart;
I shall sing and dance and exult
With the smiling children of time.

I shall bathe in liquid gold
And put on an argent robe;
My seat will be lotus petals
And bed the green carpet of grass!

During my deep sleep at midnight
The Mother will descend in my dream,
And whisper into my ears
Her secret wisdom, soft and sweet!

At dead of night she will call me aloud,
"How long will you sleep, my child?"
The East is aglow, birds chirp on trees
To invoke the advent of a marvellous day!

"Dear, the aspirant of illumination
Rushes to the blazing peak,
And the young one follows her steps
Drawn by the magic of mother's love.

"The carefree minstrel moves from door to door,
Singing the awakening songs,
And the worshippers in the temple
Tremble with devotion, flowers in their hands!

"Please awake, my beloved,
I shall kindle you with mystic flame,
And adorn the corners of your dreamy eyes
With the resplendent blue of the boundless skies

“The auspicious sound of snow-white conch
 Will greet you at the eternal Altar,
 And the peacock perform the ‘Victory Dance’
 With a clarion’s rhythm from the clouds above!

“By then the Sun-God will appear
 On the crimson brow of Dawn
 To build a bridge of Supernal Light
 Between the Earth and the Heavens.”

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

THE SAINT

A VILLANELLE

I HAD a wordless tryst with him—
 He was a saint immersed in peace;
 His face no brush can ever limn.

He was a breathless sky of calm,
 I flew into its depth of peace,
 Above the earth of raging storm.

A far hamlet of hoary dust,
 With bowing boughs of tall green trees
 I came to, driven by the gust

Of questing passion for the truth,
 That, undefined, does always tease
 The mind into a roving wrath.

Debate could never the puzzle solve,
 Only confusions new would seize
 And round and round once more revolve

Till floating on I came to him.
 Then did my depthless coiling cease,
 Hushed to a bliss of bracing beam.
 His face no brush can ever limn.

G VISWANATHAN

A PRECIOUS GIFT FROM PHYSICS

To describe the great and important gain from physics we could bring into discussion several considerations. But for our immediate purposes let us keep most of these aside. Thus the speculative theories of the universe given to us by the early Greek philosophers have no direct relevance for us, nor should we be occupied by the varying opinions held about them at different times. Similarly, the religious indoctrination that did not allow the free spirit of inquiry to flourish should now be considered as a thing of history. During the dark ages fierce battles were fought, but eventually the new light won for us a gainful method of investigative research and experimentation. It made material nature a respectable object of study. This nature, by its neutrality, also lent itself easily to the procedure of measurements and reproducible observations. We now live in the dignity of undisputed objectivity, a remarkable boon to seek happy harmony of thought and happiness of life's urges. But even this fine recognition of objectivity ought not to distract us while receiving the great and precious gift from physics.

Nor need we get unduly frightened by the enormous destructive power physics has put in our hands. If the discovery of nuclear energy, for instance, is an entry into the occult domain of matter, a discovery made in a scientific manner whose significance science itself may not be able to fully gauge, then we begin to get puzzled as to how indeed could the materialistic principle of approach achieve all that the long toil of religion or alchemy or thaumaturgy or mysticism or even occultism had never been able to accomplish in its worthy aeonic career. We may of course add to this list philosophy and metaphysics and speculative science and other branches of human knowledge and yet not get any clue to the puzzle. But the pertinent question to be asked is: How is it that these disciplines failed to probe and master such secrets of the material world when this other one succeeded almost with an assuring inevitability of the outcome built into its methodology? If these disciplines are supposed to be superior in their content and quality to the discipline of experimentation and observation, then it looks as though values undergo a decisive phase-reversal while coming in contact with material nature. It is quite paradoxical that the gross and rigid should appear to be more penetrating than the subtle and intuitive. That the existential is far profounder and hence enduringly richer than the ideal is the new truth given to us by this hard practitioner of empirical rationalism. Physics has made the physical world more meaningful.

The distinctive features of this hard practitioner are the logical coherency and wholesomeness in the manner of Euclidean formulation, and the definiteness of deductions based on well-conducted observations. Internal self-consistency and verifiability are the two elements that characterise it; it is these which have in a very major way contributed towards its pre-eminently acceptable success. In spite of the restrictive parameters—or perhaps because of them—the

gains have been solid and durable, making the study of matter worthwhile.

Success always gives confidence,—at times perhaps over-assertiveness too. Today science seems to dominate everything. With it our understanding of the physical world has vastly increased; also the technological fall-outs in its wake have completely changed our life-style and our life-thoughts. But nuclear energy and space travel are science's only outward manifestations and what is more relevant and significant is the science of nature *per se*. To put it equivalently: the most valuable gain that we should reckon from these achievements is the means or the method or a new mode of measurement and analysis to explore and handle something that is lying deeply hidden in the bosom of the atom and the star, the mechanism of focusing the telescopic and microscopic vision to see things with the mind's observant eye. We have here to guide us not Revelations of Faith or Arguments of Pure Reason, but Laws of Nature in their operative self-sufficiency. If the phenomenological study has, to our utter surprise, brought out this marvellous truth, the truth discovered entirely by human effort, that there are laws, then we begin to recognise, and appreciate, how fulfilling can human effort, human enterprise itself, be. This is certainly remarkable and we should pretty justifiably take pride in it. Is that not a very precious contribution made by physics to human knowledge and to human dignity?

Indeed, we could possibly say that the faculty of thought combined with the process of experimentation is quite capable of discovering in a fairly detailed way the operating principles of the material world. We now look at this world as something making itself available to sense experience and mental cognition. Which means that, if there are laws governing this world, then the objectivity of this world ensuing from them is going to assure it to be a good subject of study. Of course, if physics is everywhere, this has to be true even in those domains where the laws are of a quantum character.

That the physical world is governed by laws is amply demonstrated by the developments in physics. In fact a working professionalist takes them almost religiously and, in the event of conflict, starts suspecting everything else before questioning their validity. This conviction has led to several astounding results which, in turn, always upheld the truthfulness of material nature's way of working as understood by that professionalist. The faith is well-founded!

Take an example—the law of conservation of energy. In the beta-radio-activity of a given nucleus the measured energy of emitted electrons varies continuously up to a certain maximum value; but if the emission should correspond to the transition from one state to another, then it should be a fixed quantity. The difference between the fixed quantity and the varying energy remains unaccounted for; thus it appears that the law of conservation of energy is violated. There is also in it the problem pertaining to the law of conservation of angular momentum. In order to save these laws Pauli, in 1931, made almost a casual suggestion that the departure from the laws could be taken care of by

postulating a new particle, now called neutrino. While this kept the laws intact, the *ad hoc*-ism of the suggestion had to be removed by confirming the existence of the particle. But the neutrino proved to be quite elusive and it took more than twenty-five years to track it down in the laboratory, and that too after using an apparatus of prodigious size. In the words of Philip Morrison: "Where most experiments of the kind use half a dozen photomultiplier tubes and their associated amplifiers, the neutrino searchers use 500. Where scintillation counters are normally counted big if they use a few gallons of liquid, this experiment uses 10 or 12 tons. The needs of the project have led to a whole complex of ingenious and painstaking developments. The chemical firm producing the scintillating liquid, which used to make it in quart amounts, has been persuaded to manufacture and purify it by the ton. A special tank truck has been built to transport the precious fluid in an inert atmosphere from the factory to the scene of the experiment; it must be kept minutely clean and oxygen-free throughout the long journey. The tank where the experiments are performed must be lined with a special glossy-white coating, to lose next to no light at all. A chemical must be added to the scintillating liquid to give the flashes a color which will be reflected most efficiently by the gleaming tank walls. The flashes that carry all the information for which the neutrino hunters are searching are too faint to be seen by the naked eye, and no effort must be spared to make sure that all of them are detected by the sensitive photomultipliers. Hundreds of the latter are required, and whole banks of other electronic gear. The detector tank itself is encased in lead and buried deep in the building housing the great Savannah River reactor." For the tiny neutrino, that is something mighty indeed! This was the kind of effort put in to verify a casual suggestion of a theoretician. But that only goes to show the conviction a physicist has in his formulation. A whole society appeared to be committed to confirm our faith in the laws of the material world. The secular nature of this sacrosanctity is interesting.

But it seems that the little neutrino has a far more significant role to play in deciding the fate of the universe itself than what we could imagine. This is connected with the question whether the neutrino has a finite non-zero mass. Some experiments tentatively estimate it to be about one-millionth the mass of the electron; but this has not yet been confirmed. If it should turn out to be so, and as the stars are an abundant source of neutrinos, then the total mass of the universe will be so much that the universe, after the present phase of expansion, would start falling upon itself. Thus, if we assume that the other aspects of cosmology are correct, this creature born in 1931 with its parenthood in the laws of physics, possessing no charge and its mass yet unfixed, is going to pronounce on the future course of this universe. Fate is hanging in the balance, but to weigh the neutrino a proper balance has still to be designed and made. In the meanwhile, though the speculators are having a field day, let us keep our faith in the laws of physics firm.

In this context it should be recognised that the laws of physics are actually the truths of physics or the truths of the material world as seen by us. There are laws and there are also formulas expressing the constant order of certain phenomena—there are postulates, hypotheses, principles, suggestions, effects, rules, and what are respectably understood to be theories. But among all these the laws stand out on an entirely different footing, in the manner of supreme realities of the universe of matter. They are the discovered essentials telling us how it operates, the substratum states on which its edifice is built, the governing dynamic forces in the conduct of its working. Naturally, therefore, their objectivity prevails in all the domains, be they classical or quantum or cosmic. Thus, no supposition will be considered valid if it is going to defy the laws of conservation of energy or momentum or charge; equivalence of inertial frames of reference is another connected aspect, as are the epistemological bearings of concepts such as space, time, causality, matter—for the reason that all together constitute the matrix of physics.

If there are such laws, such realities that endure all vicissitudes, then we seem to be safe in the hands of physics! Even the probability behaviour of quantum mechanics is one of its modes and, being so, rules out all subjective talk of the participator's consciousness entering into the decision-making process of the electron and the cat and the housewife. There are rules according to which the physical world moves; but it does not mean that these rules cannot be overruled. After all, the laws are based on observations and just sum up the state-of-the-art of our knowledge. If this experiential basis makes them infallible, it also provides opportunities for their becoming more comprehensive and universal. Newer dimensions of the world of matter open out in which its mysteries come as gifts given to us by physics.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1996)

The Secret of the Veda appeared on 15 August 1914 in the first issue of the monthly magazine *Arya*. The editor of the *Hindu*, an orthodox Pandit, named Sundaram Aiyar, a Professor, found new revolutionary ideas in the article on the Vedas. He found the background of the Upanishads, Brahmanism, in the Rigveda. Doctrine of Brahman, the Vedantic philosophy, opposed the ritualism of Vedantins. So he expressed to this effect his views in the editorial column on the first chapter of the book. Sri Aurobindo replied to it immediately and the letter was published in the *Hindu* on 27 August 1914. It ran:

“While thanking you for the generous appreciation in your review of the *Arya* may I also crave the indulgence of your columns,—if indeed you can spare so much space at such a time when the whole world is absorbed in the gigantic homicidal conflict convulsing Europe, for an answer to your criticisms on my *Secret of the Veda*, or rather to an explanation of my standpoint which the deficiencies of my expression and the brief and summary character of my article in the *Arya* have led you, in some respects, to misconceive?

Surely, I have nowhere said that ‘knowledge of which no origin can be traced to previous sources must necessarily be disregarded or discarded!’ That would indeed be a monstrous proposition. My point was that such knowledge, when it expressed a developed philosophy and psychology, stood in need of historical explanation—a very different matter. If we accept the European idea of an evolving knowledge in humanity,—and it is on that basis that my argument proceeded,—we must find the source of the Brahmanism either in an extraneous origin such as a previous Dravidian culture,—a theory which I cannot admit, since I regard the so-called Aryans and Dravidians as one homogeneous race,—or in a previous development, of which the records have either been lost or are to be found in the Veda itself. I cannot see how this argument involves a *regressus ad infinitum* except in so far as the whole idea of evolution and progressive causality lies open to that objection. As to the origins of the Vedic religion, that is a question which cannot be solved at present for lack of data. It does not follow that it had no origins or in other words that humanity was not prepared by a progressive spiritual experience for the Revelation.

Again, I certainly did not intend to express my own idea in the description of the Upanishads as a revolt of philosophic minds against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas. If I held that view I could not regard the earlier *Sruti* as an inspired scripture or the Upanishads as Vedanta and I would not have troubled myself about the secret of the Veda. It is a view held by European scholars and I accepted it as the logical consequence, if the ordinary interpretations of the

hymns, whether Indian or European, are to be maintained. If the Vedic hymns are, as represented by Western scholarship, the ritualistic compositions of joyous and lusty barbarians the Upanishads have then to be conceived as 'a revolt... against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas' From both premise and conclusion I have dissented and I have finally described, not only the Upanishads, but all later forms, as a development from the Vedic religion and not a revolt against its tenets. An Indian doctrine avoids the difficulty in another way, by interpreting the Veda as a book of ritual hymns and revering it as a book of Knowledge. It puts together two ancient truths without reconciling them effectively. In my view that reconciliation can only be effected by seeing even in the exterior aspect of the hymns not a ritualistic materialism, but a symbolic ritualism. No doubt the Karmakanda was regarded as an indispensable stepping-stone to the knowledge of the Atman. That was an article of religious faith, and as an article of faith I do not dispute its soundness. But it becomes valid for the intellect,—and in an intellectual inquiry I must proceed by intellectual means,—only if the Karmakanda is so interpreted as to show how its performance assists, prepares or brings about the higher knowledge. Otherwise, however much the Veda may be revered in theory, it will be treated in practice as neither indispensable nor helpful and will come in the end to be practically set aside—as has happened

I am aware that some hymns of the Veda are interpreted in a sense other than the ritualistic; even the European scholars admit higher and religious ideas in the "later hymns" of the Vedas. I am aware also that separate texts are quoted in support of the philosophical doctrines. My point was that such exceptional passages do not alter the general tone and purport given to the hymns in the actual interpretations we possess. With those interpretations, we cannot use the Rig-veda as a whole, as the Upanishads can be used as a whole, as the basis of high spiritual philosophy. Now, it is to the interpretation of the Veda as a whole and to its general character that I have addressed myself. I quite acknowledge that there has always been a side-stream of tendency making for the Adhyatmic interpretation of the Veda even as a whole. It would be strange if in a nation so spiritually minded such attempts have been entirely lacking. But still they are side-currents and have not received general recognition. For the Indian intellect in general, there are only two interpretations, Sayana's and the European. Addressing myself to that general opinion, it is with these two that I am practically concerned.

I am still of the opinion that the method and results of the early Vedantins differed entirely from the method and results of Sayana for reasons I shall give in the second and third numbers of the *Arya*. Practically, not in theory, what is the result of Sayana's Commentary? What is the general impression it leaves on the mind? Is it the impression of "Veda", great Revelation, a book of highest knowledge? Is it not rather that which the European scholars received and from

which their theories started, a picture of primitive worshippers praying to friendly gods, friendly but of doubtful temper, gods of fire, rain, wind, dawn, night, earth and sky, for wealth, food, oxen, horses, gold, the slaughter of their enemies, even of their critics, victory in battle, the plunder of the conquered? And if so, how can such hymns be an indispensable preparation of the Brahmanvidya? Unless, indeed, it is a preparation by contraries, by exhaustion or dedication of the most materialistic and egoistic tendencies somewhat as the grim Old Hebrew Pentateuch may be described as a preparation for the mild evangel of Christ. My position is that they were indispensable not by a mechanical virtue in the sacrifice but because the experiences to which they are the key and which were symbolised by the ritual are necessary to an integral knowledge and realisation of Brahman in the universe and prepare the knowledge and realisation of the transcendent Brahman. They are, to paraphrase Shankara's description, mines of all knowledge, knowledge on all the planes of consciousness, and do fix the conditions and relations of the divine, the human and the animal in the being.

I do not claim that mine is the first attempt to give an Adhyatmic interpretation of the Veda. It is an attempt—the first or the hundredth matters little—to give the esoteric and psychological sense of the Veda based throughout on the most modern method of critical research. Its interpretation of the Vedic vocables is based on a re-examination of a large part of the field of comparative Philology and a reconstruction on a new basis which I have some hope will bring us nearer to a true science of language. This I propose to develop in another work, the "Origin of Aryan Speech". I hope also to lead up to a recovery of the sense of the ancient spiritual conceptions of which old symbol and myth give us the indications and which I believe to have been at one time a common culture covering a great part of the globe, with India perhaps as a centre. In its relation to this methodical attempt lies the only originality of the *Secret of the Veda*.”¹

K. D. Sethna, in the preface to his book, *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, has written of the implication of the Rig Veda:

“ . what this implies is: (1) an essentially spiritual expression everywhere in the Rig Veda in symbolic terms mostly connected with the conditions of the time; (2) a presence of Dravido-Aryanism or Aryo-Dravidianism practically native to our subcontinent and perhaps even having a lost common linguistic background in antiquity, instead of an Aryan invasion of a Dravidian country in not too distant an epoch, and (3) a remote past to this racially undivided though multi-featured phenomenon of spirituality in ancient India itself, whose final source cannot be satisfactorily traced. The last point leaves the pre-Rigvedic religious history in the dark but does not necessarily exclude the faint glimmer of

some ultimate habitat from the haze of a semi-mythical memory is the spiritual consciousness which was symbolically expressive.”²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol 10, pp 545-548
- 2 K D Sethna, *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, preface to the First Edition

THE CALL

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

THE MOTHER and Sri Aurobindo ever tried to mitigate the rigour of the spiritual law. But it could only be done by true means which would not compromise or falsify the result. They saw that many divine beings had come on earth and had developed many paths which lead humanity to divinity. But always there have been severe conditions and extremely few are those who could satisfy them. So the world in general goes on in its unhappy state more or less as before.

Ashwapati's cry in *Savitri* to the Divine Mother might well have been theirs (Book III, Canto IV).

Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons!
How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,
We who are vessels of a deathless Force
And builders of the godhead of the race?
Or if it is thy work I do below
Amid the error and waste of human life
In the vague light of man's half-conscious mind,
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?
Ever the centuries and millenniums pass.
Where in the greyness is thy coming's ray?
Where is the thunder of thy victory's wings? .
The aeons ever repeat their changeless round,
The cycles all rebuild and ever aspire,
All we have done is ever still to do.
All breaks and all renews and is the same.
Huge revolutions of life's fruitless gyre,
The new-born ages perish like the old .

And the human complaint to the Height continues.

Too little the strength that now with us is born,
Too faint the light that steals through Nature's lids,
Too scant the joy with which she buys our pain
In a brute world that knows not its own sense,
Thought-racked upon the wheel of birth we live,
The instruments of an impulse not our own
Moved to achieve with our heart's blood for price
Half-knowledge, half-creations that soon tire

A foiled immortal soul in perishing limbs,
 Baffled and beaten back we labour still,
 Annulled, frustrated, spent, we still survive
 In anguish we labour that from us may rise
 A larger-seeing man with nobler heart,
 A golden vessel of the incarnate Truth...

The sequel gives voice to a Vision.

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world,
 The wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the Spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
 Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
 Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
 Feet echoing in the corridors of Time
 High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
 And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face

And a boon is asked for:

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

Linger not long with thy transmuting hand..
 O radiant fountain of the world's delight
 World-free and unattainable above,
 O Bliss who ever dwellest deep hid within
 While men seek thee outside and never find,
 Mystery and Muse with hieratic tongue,
 Incarnate the white passion of thy force,
 Mission to earth some living form of thee

Aswapati had asked for the birth of Savitri. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother asked for the Supramental descent:

"The boon that we have asked from the Supreme is the greatest that the Earth can ask from the Highest.. It is nothing less than the descent of the supreme Truth and Power into Matter, the supramental established in the material plane and consciousness down to the very principle of Matter. Only a supreme Grace can effect this miracle." (*The Hour of God*)

(The Divine praying to the Divine, a problem for human intellect! And yet we see that the great divine beings known in history, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Jesus Christ, etc. have done so. And then, what really is not a problem for the intellect? A robust, thoroughgoing intellect would soon find that nothing is really understood. The fundamental 'why' of everything remains a mystery, apart from the questionable validity of our sense-perceived knowledge. If any Truth is found, it is not through the intellect but through some other faculty in man. The true function of the intellect is limited to that of an organiser and a co-ordinator of things so far found.)

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, no doubt, led a number of their disciples to divinity. A number of their disciples would echo:

"An inner fullness has come in like the coming in of light in dark caves. It fills, it illumines, it vibrates the multiple strings of life; it has found the contact with the forgotten achievements of the past to enable me to start the new ones of the future on the basis of the changing formations of the present. The currents of life well up to meet the descending rays of light from the upper heavens, for transmutation of the base and the dark into the luminous and the true, for transmutation of the ugly and the wrong into the beautiful and the right.

"O Mother of Radiances, you have dawned in the narrow horizons of my mind. Out of its depthless rigidities, in the midst of its walled-up spaces you have created a heart-like something that will live its eternal life. You have revealed to me a chamber alive and warm within the mind's substanceless polar regions and

there I can safely retire and find in you my refuge.

“ . More than what I ignorantly sought for, you have revealed to me. You are intimate and one with me when in truth and law and yet away and far off from me when in error and in falsehood.

“When there are no more darkening shadows about me; when you see me bared of all shams and shows in every part of the being, when you see in every cell of my body an eternal home for you and an eternal temple; when you see me one with you in identity and still worshipping you; .. then, O Mother of Radiances, my aim in life now and hereafter will be fulfilled in the true and right and vast way. Aspiration wakes in me! Achieve in me all that I flame for!”

(*The Hour of God*)

But this was not sufficient for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Their compassion extended to all the beings on earth and they strove to find some way for the upliftment of all. They saw that, ultimately, only if the Divine Himself in His Supramental Consciousness and Power directly took up the working of the world, the world would become what it should be. From the earliest creation the beings had been given freedom to be and to do what they wanted. However, the result has not been at all happy. Therefore now the Divine Himself should directly take up the charge.

They also saw that an individual liberation is not enough. They wanted the whole world divinised because only then could it become a truly joyous divine world, however long, distant or even impossible its prospects might seem to be. In fact, they considered this to be the real goal of creation. Matter was not simply a dull, inanimate clod. Life was not something inherently evil. And mind had higher functions to perform. They were all secretly based on, permeated with and sustained by a Supreme Consciousness, a Para Prakriti, a Divine Nature of which these were the lower derivations and deformations. Therefore along with the soul's liberation they also insisted upon the transformation, the divinisation of mind, life and body.

The following lines from *Savitri* (Cent. Ed., pp. 50-52) beautifully and movingly express the position and the reasons for seeking the earth's salvation.

Along a path of aeons serpentine
In the coiled blackness of her nescient course
The Earth-Goddess toils across the sands of Time.
A Being is in her whom she hopes to know,
A Word speaks to her heart she cannot hear,
A Fate compels whose form she cannot see
In her unconscious orbit through the Void
Out of her mindless depths she strives to rise,
A perilous life her gain, a struggling joy;

A Thought that can conceive but hardly knows
Arises slowly in her and creates
The idea, the speech that labels more than it lights;
A trembling gladness that is less than bliss
Invades from all this beauty that must die.
Alarmed by the sorrow dragging at her feet
And conscious of the high things not yet won,
Ever she nurses in her sleepless breast
An inward urge that takes from her rest and peace.
Ignorant and weary and invincible
She seeks through the soul's war and quivering pain
The pure perfection her marred nature needs,
A breath of Godhead on her stone and mire
A faith she craves that can survive defeat,
The sureness of a love that knows not death,
The radiance of a truth for ever sure.
A light grows in her, she assumes a voice,
Her state she learns to read and the act she has done,
But the one needed truth eludes her grasp,
Herself and all of which she is the sign.
An inarticulate whisper drives her steps
Of which she feels the force but not the sense;
A few rare intimations come as guides,
Immense divining flashes cleave her brain,
And sometimes in her hours of dream and muse
The truth that she has missed looks out on her
As if far off and yet within her soul
A change comes near that flees from her surmise
And, ever postponed, compels attempt and hope,
Yet seems too great for mortal hope to dare.
A vision meets her of supernal Powers
That draw her as if mighty kinsmen lost
Approaching with estranged great luminous gaze.
Then is she moved to all that she is not
And stretches arms to what was never hers
Outstretching arms to the unconscious Void,
Passionate she prays to invisible forms of Gods
Soliciting from dumb Fate and toiling Time
What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,
A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams,
A Will expressive of soul's deity,
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,

A Joy that drags not sorrow as its shade.
 For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:
 Heaven's privilege she claims as her own right.
 Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,
 Clear in a greater light than reason owns:
 Our intuitions are its title-deeds;
 Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.
 Earth's winged chimeras are Truth's steeds in Heaven,
 The impossible God's sign of things to be.

(The Earth-Goddess represents all earthly beings. She has been generally pictured in the Indian mythologies as a patient, all-enduring, long-suffering mother of all earthly beings, only occasionally going up to the Creator to complain when too much oppressed by the Rakshasic forces.)

The minimum Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wanted was the firm beginning of a definite process for the upliftment of the whole world and its solid foundation. This Sri Aurobindo achieved in his own body which shone with a divine lustre for days even after what medical science would call 'death'. And the Mother broke the barrier between the Supramental Consciousness and the earth on 29 February 1956, since when, she has declared, the Supramental Consciousness has started generally permeating the earth's atmosphere. She even said that if there were a sufficiently sensitive instrument it could detect the change in the earth's atmosphere. However, it may perhaps be centuries before it could be perceived or recognised in its happy work all over the world by general humanity. More evolved souls with the divine sight open may recognise it immediately if they look for it.¹

Now we may say something about the process of Transformation of nature and the soul's Liberation

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have written and spoken at great length about it. The basic principle is to surrender to the Mother and to the Mother's Force.

One can come into contact with the Mother by many means. Any sufficiently intense and sincere call for help addressed to her reaches her and she does whatever is necessary in the case. But for the Yoga of Transformation it is imperative to come into conscious contact with the Mother's Force. This happens by the Mother's Grace. Then the person becomes aware that a Force

¹ In this connection it may be interesting to mention a well-known prophecy by a very famous poet-saint, Shri Surdasji, approvingly quoted by Shri Ranchhoddasji Maharaj, himself a highly revered Master-Yogi. It says that in this Kaliyuga itself a period of Satyayuga will start after the 20th century, and that nothing will be able to stop it (*Shri Gurudev ki Sannidhi men*—by Ku Kumudini P Pajavani)

other than his own has come into his field and on this Force he begins to rely more and more ¹ And once a person has been put into contact with the Force it is for good. At any time a slight concentration makes the contact active. It brings health in the body, strength in the vital being and clarity in the mind. It harmonises and integrates the whole being with a new rhythm. Sadhana thereafter consists in being more and more in tune with the Force. Apart from any supernormal experiences and even realisations that may come, the basic factor is the contact and the receiving of this Force in oneself, changing what has to be changed, rejecting what has to be rejected and generally to let it work more and more within oneself. This Force alone, that is actually the Mother herself, carries one through all the difficulties and dangers of sadhana and life and gradually brings about the Transformation² and the Liberation. Once one is able to recognise this Force and its work and has sound experience of it and has developed trust in it, the sadhana becomes a happy pilgrimage.

Now with the Supramental Power already at work in the earth's atmosphere for 40 years it would appear that the whole process of Yoga, conscious, semi-conscious or unconscious, will be much accelerated—but not eliminated. It will be smoother, happier and generally not so much attended with dangers, difficulties and violent upheavals within or without. Its effects will be felt everywhere, whether recognised as such or not. In fact it is likely that mostly it will remain unrecognised. But that does not matter. The basically important fact is the increasingly direct Power and Influence from the One from whom everything originates. Its Influence and Inspiration will subtly and imperceptibly infiltrate egoistic human wills. People will turn more and more towards what they consider to be sacred and divine or just simply good. The orientation will be more towards Spirituality than Religion. (The difference between the two can be likened to the one between the soul, the essence of being, and the mind, life and body. Generally the soul remains unperceived and only the outer man is considered the person. The same holds true for Religion, where the outer forms, rites, rituals, ceremonies and philosophies prevail but the essence remains unperceived. The essence of all religions is one—the Spirit. And everything directly connected with That is Spirituality.) A general upliftment in the consciousness of mankind will come, promoting a sense of truth, goodwill, help

¹ It is most important to be watchful and vigilant so that it is only the Mother's Force that one so receives. There are a number of Asuras and Rakshasic forces which can also enter a person and lead him to disaster. Therefore the greatest care should be taken in the matter. In fact Sri Aurobindo considered the guidance of a Guru imperative and indispensable here.

² In the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's conception, the Transformation includes not only the transformation of normal human consciousness into a Divine Consciousness but, ultimately, the transformation of the physical body, the very matter of the physical body into a divine matter and a divine body. And that too as a normal natural way of being. No wonder the Mother sometimes spoke in terms of thousands of years for its actual more general realisation on earth.

and harmony among all the peoples of the world.¹ With inner goodwill, outer problems become easier of solution. Sri Aurobindo has said that the Supramental will create its own conditions. But, even so, while some may progress fast others may lag far behind and it may perhaps be centuries before a whole race of egoless divine beings with divine capacities comes up, lives a divine life and leads the world towards it. However, the process will continue with an ever-increasing acceleration until the whole world becomes a truly divine world.

(Concluded)

SHANTILAL VIRANI

¹ It is interesting to note that in the fifties and early sixties, the newspapers all over the world were full of the threat of an impending third world war and the consequent annihilation of the whole of humanity. Today it is hardly heard. And the end of the terrible confrontation between the superpowers has been speedily brought about in a manner inconceivable prior to its actual happening.

BIBHUTIBHUSHAN BANDOPADHYAY

The Man and the Writer

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

IN *Aranyak*, written and published in 1937, almost ten years after its conception, Bibhutibhushan narrated the story through Satyacharan, the protagonist of the novel, the representative of the owner, a superintendent of the forest estate. He has faithfully depicted the life and livelihood of the natives who were uncared for, most neglected, kept much away from the caste Hindus and civilised people. Not only did he intimately know the sylva of Lobotulia and the surrounding lands, its human inhabitants, its flora and fauna, but also the sky and the stars above them, each colour of the seasons, the smell of the jungle and its mist. *Aranyak* may be described as the silent communion of the writer with the forest nature. The simplest of men and women come here from distant places in search of food and fodder. They come to give labour and earn bread to survive for a few days. Here Dhavtal Sahu forgets and does not feel concerned about the worm-eaten notes, his once accumulated treasure. Dhaturia and other folk artists perform mainly for self-expression, displaying their artistic capacities in exchange for some comestibles. The writer realises the self of pure artists. Here the people keep their children in heaps of wheat or rice husk during the winter season for want of clothing. Rice is a great luxury for them. Bibhutibhushan does not write about them to paint their poverty or to create sympathy for them. It is his love for their life force. In his view, life is always triumphant, a positive energy even after death. In his famous story *Puin Macha*, the green creeper's beautiful and vigorous growth and its shining appearance in the moonlight signify the unending life force of the girl who has planted it though she herself lives no more. In *Aranyak* we find a perambulating culture, a place where many types of people come but seldom settle. Although there is no central story, no hero in the novel, there emerges a total picture of the forest, expressed through lofty and enchanting language. Towards the end of the novel the touch of the changing times is felt. Satyacharan, out of sympathy, gifts lands to many nomads who settle there. But as a result of the colonial policy of a conquering nation and human greed, zamindars and contractors enter the scene with the idea of gains. The forest is denuded. Satyacharan, lover of the land and an ardent patron of the forest, becomes, by an irony of fate, the agent for its destruction. He realises that man's effort towards urbanisation and civilisation would destroy its pristine culture and beauty and the denudation of forests would do great harm to posterity. Satyacharan feels guilty and utters: "O pristine gods of the forest land, I beg your pardon."

In his foreword to the novel *Green Mansion* by W. H. Hudson, John

Galsworthy wrote. "All Hudson's books breathe this spirit of revolt against our new enslavement by town and machinery..." (As quoted by Saroj Bandyopadhyay in his article *Naakchhabiti hariye gecche; Desh*, 10 September 1994, Calcutta) In comparing the two novelists, Hudson and Bibhutibhushan, critics have pointed out that Bibhutibhushan like the former did not revolt, but felt the situation deeply. He wrote in his diary: "A day may come when people will not see forests, only paddy lands and jute factories and textile mills will remain. Man will come here in this deep heart of the forest as one goes for pilgrimage. Let this forest remain for the man of tomorrow." We may remember that this was said long before the movement of the environmentalists started.

Bibhutibhushan raised many grave issues through his novel *Aranyak* and we can read the mind of the writer through the characters in the novel. At one point Satyacharan goes to the native king Deboru Panna with some gifts in hand. There he meets the king's family and his daughter Bhanumati whom he, once in a romantic vein, thought of marrying, if he could settle there. But the urbane intellectual had to finally retreat, just as it happened in Tagore's story *Postmaster*. In reply to a question Bhanumati, the princess of the bygone kingdom, says that they live in Gaya district but she has not heard the name of Bharatbarsha. "Where is it?" she asks. One of the characters present there with Satyacharan thinks, "The history of India is the history of the Aryan civilisation. Nowhere is written the history of the defeated non-Aryans...." In this connection we may recall the concluding remark of the Negro author Alex Haley in his outstanding novel *Roots*: "The story of our people can help alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners." (p. 728) In the case of India it may not be always the history of physical victory of the Aryans over the non-Aryans but it is the history of winning over the weaker races by a race superior in culture and strength. It was a prolonged unwritten history of the struggle through the centuries.

The writer felt that the sons of the soil were deprived of their rights in their own land and had lost their freedom. How could they feel themselves as belonging to a free nation or a nation struggling for freedom when their own freedom was in jeopardy? We may here trace the seed of many separatist movements throughout the country. Though Bibhutibhushan did not involve himself in politics he sensed the situation, the possibilities, and subtly hinted at them with a sigh.

In his fiction *Drishti Pradip*, Jitu, the main character, has the thirst for true knowledge; what is religion? what is God? what is truth? Jitu confronts a pathetic situation in facing death and helplessness as the author himself faced a similar situation when his sister died.

In *Ichamati*, another major fiction of his, there is again no hero. Ichamati, the ever-flowing river, companion of Apu from his birth in *Pather Panchali*, is present here also and the character Bhabani Banerji, with intense love for his

son, is the portraiture of Bibhutibhushan and his son during the last years of the writer's life in his native village. The river flows, witnesses the changing scenario on both its banks, itself remaining unaffected

His contemporary writers, drenched in the ideologies of Marx and Freud, were shy of directly mentioning God. But Bibhutibhushan was an intense lover of God and Nature and God in Nature. He was ever inquisitive about life and life beyond death. He had read the lives of saints, mythology, the Upanishads and other scriptures and his ideas were embedded in the Indian tradition and culture. He read Sri Aurobindo, particularly *The Life Divine*. We understand that he used to read the book regularly. Quotations from *The Life Divine* were used at the beginning of each chapter of *Devajan*, published in 1944. No wonder Bibhutibhushan wrote an altogether different type of fiction in *Devajan*. All the characters in it are departed beings and they live on different planes of existence, in other worlds. Some other writers also touched upon the subject in their stories but they treated it mostly in a jocular vein, lightly. No one wrote a serious fiction like him. The characters in *Devajan* continue to maintain their old relations as they meet after death. Sometimes they cannot meet as they live on different planes according to their growth. The greedy, lustful, criminal people live as such even in their shadowy life beyond death. We may infer that life is their inferno where they wait to take birth any time again. Higher souls live on higher planes. They rarely come down on earth but some often do so in their bodiless existence and move around their last abodes on earth. Apart from all this, there are innumerable star-like worlds in the universe: vast globular clusters, star-clouds acting in infinite ways.

Bibhutibhushan does not write only of what he has seen but also of what he has not, as he did while writing fictions for children. His mental travel was much more extensive than his actual movement on earth. He was often seen travelling on foot mile after mile with a book in hand, oblivious of his surroundings. Bibhutibhushan's account of life beyond death may not be acceptable to the rationalist but he humbly says, "Heaven and earth exist side by side, a co-extensive universe; but no one of this infinite unending universe keeps any information of the other ones. Because we do not see or understand them, because we do not conceive of them, they do not exist. this is a peculiar argument."

Bibhutibhushan Mukhopadhyay, another contemporary writer from Bihar, said, "In *Pather Panchali* a symphony of two melodies was heard, natural and supernatural; in *Aranyak* the melody of Nature was vast, in *Devajan* it was supernatural." (*Sambarer Chuthi*, November 1950)

Anubartan was another fiction of a different type based on the city-life of Calcutta. Its author was successful in portraying the characters in the novel.

In the 29 years of his literary career Bibhutibhushan wrote, according to a

published list, some 15 novels for adults. During his lifetime 46 books were published which included 12 novels for adults and many short stories. He wrote a number of stories for children. He described children as burning torches and his works abound in children and in elderly people with whom he was equally sympathetic. He wrote many articles, travelogues and miscellaneous pieces including a grammar book for students. He also contributed his share in fictions jointly written with others, as was the vogue during his lifetime. Adaptations for children from his own writings for adults were also his contribution to literature. His memoirs, like the journals of André Gide, written at different times, were part of his literary creation. Quite a number of editions of many of his books as well as his Collected Works have been published, including translations of his works in different languages.

It seems Bibhutibhushan lived as if he had been led by an unseen guide and each turn of his life was a source of new ventures. As the years passed he sought the Divine more and more; he felt a spiritual guidance increasingly even up to his last days.

During the puja vacation in 1950 the writer went to his second house at Ghatshila in Bihar to remain there for a few days with his family and friends, undisturbed. One day he went with a few friends to the nearby Dharagiri hills. They were sitting on a rock at some height surrounded by a beautiful forest. As the evening approached they got up to return. But Bibhutibhushan started climbing up further. Friends asked him to come down but he continued. Finding no other way out, they followed him. After some time there was a shocked cry. They saw the writer standing, covering his eyes with his palms. They were stunned seeing the man who throughout his life, through day and night, moved alone in forests and forsaken lands, braving beasts, braving other risks; he believed that beasts would never harm him as he had in him no such thought,—standing in such a condition. They could not speak. Bibhutibhushan, trembling and sweating, taking their support, descended. Sitting on a rock at the foot of the hill he confided what he had been expecting for some days, but he was now sure that he would have to leave the earth soon. He elaborated, of his own accord, on the subject. As if pulled by some unseen force he had moved up. At a level place he saw a cot and a dead body covered with a white cloth from head to foot and in an earthen pot on the ground there were bananas with vermillion, as it is the custom to keep on such occasions. The writer was as if forced to uncover the face of the corpse and it was his own! The friends also had seen the cot, rather unusual in such a place, with no man or woman around it, under the moonlit sky. But they did not want to believe and pleaded that it must be some hill-tribesman's cadaver. Bibhutibhushan requested his friends not to divulge anything to his wife. He further said that Abraham Lincoln also had the same experience but in a dream, before his death.

Three days later he was gone. He was 56.

The life and works of Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay are, in a sense, unique not only in Bengali literature but also in Indian literature as a whole and his *Aranyak* is a piece to be preserved as a treasure.

(*Concluded*)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

POLITICAL VEDANTISM—ITS CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

CHAPTER II

THE PARTITION OF BENGAL AND THEREAFTER

(Continued)

WE know that before the end of 1906, Bepin Pal who founded the *Bande Mataram* left it and Sri Aurobindo assumed full control of its policy. It was Sri Aurobindo who first openly declared that the aim of political action in India was complete and absolute independence which he persistently reiterated in the pages of the journal “...he was the first politician who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful”²²

The articles appeared in the journal after Sri Aurobindo’s assuming the charge were all in tune with its basic policy and programme which included:

1 To support violence against violence and it was shown that it was indispensable to do so

2 If injustice was not opposed the enthusiasm, perseverance and unity so necessary to win independence would weaken considerably

3. To return blow for blow, to stand up against attack, awaken manhood in the nation. This is very important for an oppressed nation.

4. Treachery and perfidy to the nation if they are not punished do not stop.

5. A nation that wants to be free must be ready to face tyranny and persecution. Oppression is God’s method of preparing a nation “We are iron on His anvil and the blows are showering upon us, not to destroy but to recreate. Without suffering there can be no growth.”²³

The journal also “declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the National Party [which was also run under Sri Aurobindo’s guidance] non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo’s plan”²⁴

Some excerpts from the articles appeared on different dates in the *Bande Mataram* (daily) upto the date of its prosecution (16 August 1907), excepting those which comprised different aspects of the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. They are reproduced below; the questioner may study and detect if there was anything in between the lines which could vindicate the action taken against the journal by the British Administration

a. The Writing on the Wall (8 April 1907)

“The Anglo-Indian Press whenever they find that their arguments are seen through, that what is at the back of their minds is at once discovered, that their professions and protestations are taken at their worth, fall to using threats and throw out dark hints as if the people do not know that they cannot regain their independence without a fearful struggle. The Anglo-Indian Press are really nervous at our getting at the truth about political salvation and their arguments about our weakness and incompetency backed by the opinion of the moderate school of politicians in the country are systematically alternated with the arguments of fire and sword. When they cannot coax us into acquiescing in servitude, they want to argue us into it and failing that too, they brandish the sword. The *London Times*, its namesake in Bombay, the *Pioneer*, the *Englishman*, all tried to win over the Congress suddenly changing their attitude of supreme contempt towards the National Assembly of a quarter of a century’s standing. But as soon as the news that the extremist programme found favour with the 22nd National Congress was flashed across the seas, the “Thunderer” at once cabled to us that India was won by the sword and will in the last resort be held by the sword. Since then these Anglo-Indian Journals are trying both mild and violent ways.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 1, pp. 241-42)

b. Nationalism not Extremism (26 April 1907)

“The new movement is not primarily a protest against bad Government—it is a protest against the continuance of British control; whether that control is used well or ill, justly or unjustly, is a minor and unessential consideration. It is not born of a disappointed expectation of admission to British citizenship,—it is born of a conviction that the time has come when India can, should and will become a great, free and united nation. It is not a negative current of destruction, but a positive, constructive impulse towards the making of modern India. It is not a cry of revolt and despair, but a gospel of national faith and hope. Its true description is not Extremism but Democratic Nationalism.

“.. There are at present not two parties in India, but three,—the Loyalists, the Moderates and the Nationalists. The Loyalists would be satisfied with good Government by British rulers and a limited share in the administration; the Moderates desire self-government within the British Empire, but are willing to wait for it indefinitely; the Nationalists would be satisfied with nothing less than independence whether within the Empire, if that be possible, or outside it; they believe that the nation cannot and ought not to wait, but must bestir itself immediately, if it is not to perish as a nation .. The Loyalist view is that India cannot, should not and will not be a free, great and united nation. The Moderates believe the nation to be too weak and disunited to aim at freedom,

they would welcome independence if it came, but they are not convinced that we have or shall have in the measurable future the means or strength to win it or keep it if won. They therefore put forward Colonial Self-Government as their aim and are unwilling to attempt any methods which presuppose strength and cohesion in the nation. The Moderate view is that India may eventually be united, self-governing within limits and prosperous, but not free and great. The Nationalists hold that Indians are as capable of freedom as any subject nation can be and their defects are the result of servitude and can only be removed by the struggle for freedom, that they have the strength, and, if they get the will, can create the means to win independence. . In brief, they are convinced that India should strive to be free, that she can be free and that she will, by the impulse of her past and present, be inevitably driven to the attempt and the attainment of national self-realisation. The Nationalist creed is a gospel of faith and hope ” (*Ibid.*, pp 297-99)

c. Shall India be Free? Unity and British Rule (2 May 1907)

“It is a common cry in this country that we should effect the unity of its people before we try to be free. There is no cry which is more plausible, none which is more hollow. What is it that we mean when we talk of the necessity of unity? Unity does not mean uniformity and the removal of all differences. There are some people who talk as if unity in religion, for instance, could not be accomplished except by uniformity. But uniformity of religion is a psychical impossibility forbidden by the very nature of the human mind. So long as men differ in intellect, in temperament, in spiritual development, there must be different religions and different sects of the same religion....

“The first question we have to answer is—can this practical unity be accomplished by acquiescence in foreign rule? Certainly, under foreign rule a peculiar kind of uniformity of condition is attained. Brahmin and Sudra, aristocrat and peasant, Hindu and Mahomedan, all are brought to a certain level of equality by equal inferiority to the ruling class. The differences between them are trifling compared with the enormous difference between all of them and the white race at the top. But this uniformity is of no value for the purposes of national unity, except in so far as the sense of a common inferiority excites a common desire to revolt against and get rid of it. If the foreign superiority is acquiesced in, the result is that the mind becomes taken up with the minor differences and instead of getting nearer to unity disunion is exaggerated. This is precisely what has happened in India under British rule. The sentiment of unity has grown, but in practice we are both socially and politically far more disunited and disorganised than before the British occupation...

“This process of political disorganisation is not so much a deliberate policy on the part of the foreign bureaucracy, as an instinctive action which it can no

more help than the sea can help flowing. The dissolution of the subject organisation into a disorganised crowd is the inevitable working of an alien despotism.”(*Ibid* , pp. 314-18)

Now, let us have an overview of what appeared in the *Bande Mataram* on the day before its office was searched (16 July 1907) The title of the article was ‘The Issue’—in which Sri Aurobindo referred to the article published in the *Yugantar* (Bengali daily) for which the journal was prosecuted. Its English version also did appear in the *Bande Mataram* which was one of the causes that prompted the authorities to prosecute the paper on the charge of sedition Sri Aurobindo spoke of this which we will see later

d. The Issue (29 July 1907)

“The bureaucracy as usual has over-reached itself in instituting a case under the sedition clause against the editor of the *Yugantar* The Punjabee prosecution did untold harm to their prestige and helped to shatter the not over-abundant remnants of their moral ascendancy, its work was negative and destructive But the *Yugantar* prosecution has been a positive gain to the national cause; it has begun the positive work of building up the moral ascendancy of the people which is to replace that of the alien and nullify his mere material superiority. This momentous result the editor of the *Yugantar* has brought about by his masterly inactivity. His refusal to plead has been worth many sensational trials. It has produced an enormous effect on the public mind all over India, not only as an individual instance of moral courage and readiness to suffer quietly and simply, without ostentation and self-advertisement, as a matter of course and one’s plain duty to the country, but as the first practical application in the face of persecution of the sheer uncompromising spirit of Swarajism For the first time a man has been found who can say to the power of alien Imperialism, ‘With all thy pomp of empire and splendour and dominion, with all thy boast of invincibility and mastery irresistible, with all thy wealth of men and money and guns and cannon, with all thy strength of the law and strength of the sword, ‘with all thy power to confine, to torture or to slay the body, yet for me, for the spirit, the real man in me, thou art not, thou art only a phase, a phenomenon, a passing illusion, and the only lasting realities are my Mother and my freedom.’

“It is well that we should understand the real issue which is not primarily one of law or of political forms and institutions, but a spiritual issue on which all others depend and from which they arise The question is not whether one Bhupendranath Dutt published matter which he knew to be likely to bring the government established by law, to wit certain mediocrities in Belvedere, Darjeeling, Shillong or Simla who collectively call themselves the Government of Bengal or of India, into contempt or hatred or to encourage a desire to resist

or subvert their lawful authority. If that were all, we might argue the question whether what he did was wise or what he wrote was true or mistaken, legal or illegal. As it is, these things do not matter even to the value of a broken cowrie. The real issue for us Nationalists is something quite different and infinitely more vital. It is this, “Is India free?”—not even “Shall India be free?” but, is India free and am I as an Indian free or a slave bound to the service, the behest or forced guidance of something outside and alien to myself and mine, something which is *anātman*, not myself? Am I, are my people part of humanity, the select and chosen temple of the Brahman, and entitled therefore to grow straight in the strength of our own spirit, free and with head erect before mankind, or are we a herd of cattle to live and work for others? Are we to live our own life or only a life prescribed and circumscribed for us by something outside ourselves? Are we to guide our own destinies or are we to have no destiny at all except nullity, except death? For it is nonsense to talk of other people guiding our destinies, that is only an euphemism for killing our destinies altogether, it is nonsense to talk of others giving us enlightenment, civilisation, political training, for the enlightenment that is given and not acquired brings not light but confusion, the civilisation that is imposed from outside kills a nation instead of invigorating it, and the training which is not acquired by our own experience and effort incapacitates and does not make efficient. The issue of freedom is therefore the only issue. All other issues are merely delusion and Maya, all other talk is the talk of men that sleep or are in intellectual and moral bondage ” (*SABCL*, Vol 1, pp. 490-91)

Now we may come to the question—how and why was the *Bande Mataram* prosecuted?

As in the interest of the Movement Sri Aurobindo had to take care to give no handle in the editorial articles for a prosecution on sedition or any drastic action that might be fatal to its existence, so in the interest of the administration the Government could not remain as a passive spectator of the threatening situation that developed and persisted as an aftermath of the Partition. And therefore, the Governor of Bengal wrote a letter to the Governor General, as we have indicated earlier, requesting the latter to take immediate action to deport Aurobindo Ghosh who as per their information had been the brain behind the Movement. Besides, the Anglo-Indian Press was seen crying desperately for action against the *Bande Mataram*.

As a sequel to this development the *Bande Mataram* office was searched on 30 July 1907 and a prosecution launched for sedition. Sri Aurobindo and Bepin Chandra Pal were among the accused. “A warrant for Sri Aurobindo’s arrest was issued on 16th August; Sri Aurobindo went and surrendered himself at the Police Station but was released on bail. When, however, the case began, Bepin Pal who had been cited as the principal witness refused to give evidence, and for his heroic act the great patriot and devout spiritual seeker had to suffer six

months' imprisonment. The prosecution could not prove what every one knew—that Sri Aurobindo was the editor. And so he was acquitted on 23 September 1907. The Government had to satisfy itself by sentencing Apurba Bose, the printer of the paper, a man who knew no English.. ”²⁵

For more detail we may recall what Sri Aurobindo himself commented on the issue in rectifying certain errors committed by one of his biographers in presenting the *Bande Mataram* Case in his book.

“Sri Aurobindo never brought any rancour into his politics. He never had any hatred for England or the English people, he based his claim for freedom for India on the inherent right to freedom, not on any charge of misgovernment or oppression; if he attacked persons even violently, it was for their views or political action, not from any other motive...:

“..the prosecution was for a letter written by somebody to the Editor [hereunder reproduced] and for the publication of articles included in the *Yugantar* case but not actually used by the prosecution. The *Bande Mataram* was never prosecuted for its editorial articles. The editor of *The Statesman* complained that they were too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language. The Government must have shared this view, for they never ventured to attack the paper for its editorials or other articles, whether Sri Aurobindo's or from the pen of his three editorial colleagues. There is also the fact that Sri Aurobindo never based his case for freedom on racial hatred or charges of tyranny or misgovernment, but always on the inalienable right of the nation to independence. His stand was that even good government could not take the place of national government—independence.”²⁶

Politics for Indians

Calcutta, Thursday, 27 June 1907

“To the editor ‘Bande Mataram’,
Sir,

Nothing has surprised and grieved us more than the Governor's action in warning you to moderate your tone. Truth is said to be always unpalatable and the truths that you have been giving expression to have been too much for them. The pills of your excellent logic in good language have proved too bitter for them to swallow. But the authority should know that if those pills appeared to be too bitter it is because the disease of their mind has taken a bad turn. Time was when no English Jury would have thought of convicting a man for being the author of those articles. But those times have gone by, I fear, for good, and indeed we have no right, humanly speaking, to expect them to continue for ever. Long ago I heard a European gentleman—a veritable Anglo-Indian—say that ‘No true Englishman would be sorry if India governs herself.’ Today Mr. Morley resolves

that the English rule 'must continue' perhaps for ever and no doubt in the autocratic form. The idea is to keep all the machineries of Government within the control of the officials of the ruling race, to work them by a majority of Englishmen so that it would not be possible to overthrow any of them by a combination, however strong, of the children of the soil. It was the favourite dogma of Lord Curzon who made the Calcutta Municipality what it now is, who constituted the universities as they now are. Methinks the time is approaching when the world will refuse to believe that the same race of Englishmen were instructed in the abolition of the Slave trade. At the present day the liberty of the Press and speech in India is mere moonshine, the so called sympathy—a sham and delusion.

Mr. Ashutosh Chowdhury has said that we can have no politics being a subject nation. How then does he propose to manage his industries if the law directly or indirectly puts a stop to them? What guarantee is there that he will (not be) suffered to ruin the merchants of England by his industries? What should he do if his industries be set upon by rowdies backed by the police at the instance of the white merchants which is only another name for the King? No, Mr. Editor, we must have politics as the basis of all organisations. Without politics we would be merely groping in the dark and our policy will be a policy of mendicancy. It is the recognition of these basic facts which distinguishes your paper from most other English papers—native or Anglo-Indian... The former recognising them in a bid to give expression to them with the result that their views can scarcely stand the test of logic. The latter basking in the sunshine of Government favour are so full of the pride of power and so eager to retain that power at any cost, so confident of their reward that they feel that they can safely discard all logic and the teachings of history, at least in the case of this unhappy country and are content to make specious arguments to gloss over the deeds of the bureaucracy."²⁷

(To be continued)

SAMAR BASU

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A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

98. THE BLIND MAN'S PRAYER

THANDI was born blind Yet he had no regrets What if his physical eyes were powerless, when his inner eye was powerful, so much so as to see Lord Siva Himself?

Devoted to the feet of the Lord of Thiruvavur, Thandi was a living epitome of the theory that the inner worship is of greater importance than outer worship, and that one can achieve even the impossible if one's heart is solely placed on the things he loves

It was customary of Thandi to take a holy dip in the temple tank before he went round the sacred shrine all the time uttering the different names of the Lord and praising His devotees

One day he found to his dismay that a particular place in the tank was not deep enough to hold enough water "This place needs to be desilted," he said to himself Wasting not a single minute he plunged into action

He planted a post at the centre of the chosen spot and tied one end of a rope to the post. Holding the other end he dragged the rope along with him as he groped his way out of the tank and tied it to a tree.

He clove the earth with a spade and threw the clay into a basket. Carrying it on his head and guiding himself by the rope, he deposited the silt outside the tank. Every time he did so, he uttered the name of the Lord.

The Jains who had numerous temples of their own to the west of the shrine saw Thandi desilting the tank day after day Envious of the divine worker, a group of monks approached Thandi.

"O ignoramus! Stop doing such an inhuman thing Don't you know that by so digging you are causing injury to small sentient things?"

Hearing the angry words of the Jains, Thandi retorted: "Oh, you Jains with unwashed bodies! Do you know that service to humanity is service to God? Are you not aware that service to God is faultless dharma?"

"Blind fool! You are talking about dharma? Strange!" giggled the Jains.

"Go away Don't obstruct my work Empty words can't be of any service to the Lord."

"You refuse to listen to us, blind fool! We never knew that you were deaf too."

"Sightless eyes, senseless ears and dull intelligence are all that you Jains possess on the earth. Yet you call me blind, when my eyes see nothing but the Lord You call me deaf, when my ears hear nothing but the divine deeds of the Lord "

"Loud-mouthed bat! Stop all your blabberings and go away from here," they kept heckling him. "A blind man like you should not talk too much, for you are at our mercy "

“At your mercy?” Thandi pooh-poohed. “We are all at the mercy of the Lord. Don’t put yourself on a par with Him. You call me blind, eh! Suppose I regain my eyesight and you lose yours by the grace of the Lord, what will you do?”

“If such a miracle happens, we Jains will leave Thiruvarur once and for all. But first of all, pray and get back your eyesight. Till then don’t indulge in desilting this pond,” so saying they pulled out the post and took his spade and basket away.

Angered by the cruel act of the Jains, Thandi cried to God: “What a disgrace these stupid Jains have brought on me and on you, my Lord. It’s time that you put them in their place.”

Sorely troubled in heart, Thandi took the matter to the king. At his request, his majesty sent for the trouble-makers and listened to both versions of the case.

“Well then,” said the king, “if you regain your eyesight as per your challenge, then the Jains will cease to be my subjects. I’ll drive them out.”

Thandi went to the holy tank and had a dip. Standing waist-deep in water and raising both his hands towards the Heavens, he said: “If my devotion to you, O Lord, is faultless and if you have accepted me as your devotee, give then eyes to me and blind all these deceitful Jains who have stopped me from doing my work.”

To the surprise of the king and his anxious courtiers, Thandi got his eyesight. But words would fail to speak of the plight of the Jains. Poor fellows! Thunder followed by lightning had struck all of them blind.

The king prostrated himself before Saint Thandi and praised the all-powerful Lord Siva. The Jains who were asked to run for their lives immediately ran blindly out of Thiruvarur, once and for all.

99. THE MAN WHO STONED GOD

“If the soul is a divine spark, why is it sent into this wretched world? Why does it take a human form? And why does it abandon the body? They say we are born seven times in this world—why is it so? What is the way to put an end to one’s births and deaths?” Sakkiyar asked himself and went in quest of spiritual knowledge.

Finding no answer in the city of his birth, Thirutchangamangai, he moved to a nearby city, Kancheepuram, that housed many spiritual masters and yogis.

Sakkiyar first became acquainted with the Buddhists. Their garb appealed to him and he began to wear it before he started learning their wisdom.

The Buddhists taught him and tried to quench his thirst for knowledge. But all their philosophy failed to answer his last question. And so to satisfy the cravings of his heart, Sakkiyar sought the help of several other schools of thought. But no school impressed him. As a last resort he approached the Saiva

religion and was quite convinced that the path of goodness was the only truth, and the great truth was Lord Siva Himself.

"Hold the feet of God, if you do not want to be reborn " Sakkiyar found the answer to the poser that had been badgering him all those years.

"Do not forget the feet of God Siva, no matter what garb you wear and to what faith you belong." Sakkiyar learnt further. This faith grew strong in him day after day and he made it his daily duty to worship the Sivalingam.

"Preposterous," bellowed the Buddhists when they saw Sakkiyar in his Buddhist garb worshipping Lord Siva. The Saivites too had their own doubts about him. But Sakkiyar cared a straw for them and continued his worship of the Sivalingam.

The Siva temple was a little far from his dwelling place. Yet he made it a point to go all the way to the temple every day and, before he took his food, offer his prayers to the sacred symbol of God.

One day he was surprised to see a Sivalingam in an open place a few yards away from his home. His heart jumped with joy and, without being conscious of what he was doing, he picked up a stone and threw it, as he would throw a flower, at the Lord

The stone that hit the Sivalingam clink-clanked and the sound brought Sakkiyar back to his senses.

"Oh! what have I done? I have stoned the Lord," wept Sakkiyar. But the next moment a sense of calmness pervaded his troubled heart.

Pondering over his action and his heart's reaction to it, he said: "What I did without thought was certainly induced by God, for bouquets and brickbats make no difference to Him. All that matters to Him is true love. The stone too would turn into a flower if it were offered to the Lord with true love."

It took little time for Sakkiyar to realize that God is all and that all acts are His acts and we are nothing more than puppets destined to dance to His tune. Having reached that spiritual state, he continued to throw stones at the Sivalingam

The Lord too was pleased with Sakkiyar's strange way of worship, as a loving father would be at the mischiefs of his beloved little ones.

Every stone that Sakkiyar threw at the Lord fell on Him like a fresh flower. Strange are the ways of the Lord and His devotees!

But the commonfolk took Sakkiyar for a madcap, yet never dared to stand in the way of his worship.

Years passed and Sakkiyar grew old in the service of the Lord.

One day, hunger pinching his stomach, he rushed to the kitchen. Food was ready and, when it was served on the banana leaf kept before him, he greedily mixed the rice with broth and took a handful of the mixture. He was about to shove it into his mouth, when all of a sudden he remembered the Lord.

"My God! What am I doing? How can I ever touch my food before I offer

my prayers to the Lord?" Sakkiyar cried and staggered towards the Sivalingam.

His heart overflowing with love, he took a stone. He aimed it at the Lord, as though he was aiming at his target. He hurled it and this time it made no noise when it hit against the Sivalingam, and fell down like a flower.

Sakkiyar was overjoyed. The Lord was even more overjoyed, so much so that He appeared in the firmament with his consort and showered His grace on the saint.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Down Memory Lane by *Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala* Sri Aurobindo's Action, Pondicherry, 1996, pp. 289 Price Rs 130

ALL autobiographies essentially attempt to capture lost time and map out the growth in selfhood. They serve two primary goals common to the human situation. to underline the uniqueness of the life of each individual and record the story of the individual's conjunction with the larger world.

Thus, while spiritual autobiographies basically focus on the inner world, they also share a common boundary with the world of *real* history. Verifiable history, such as dates and events, thus becomes a necessary backdrop for the enactment of the inner life of the narrator-protagonist.

It goes to the credit of Shyam Sunder that in his *Down Memory Lane*, he uses an autobiographical genre and mode consistent with his purpose. As a seeker with a literary background, he feels the need to define his narrative approach at the outset itself. According to Shyam Sunder:

This is the story of the book. It is neither a coherent life-story, nor a bare collection of memoirs, nor a diary, nor a character portrayal of persons. It is what the title says in its simple sense. (*Foreword*)

Having set his agenda, Shyam Sunder begins his story under the appropriate heading "The Journey Begins". The journey, both physical and spiritual, is to Pondicherry for a new discovery and realisation. With a lawyer's penchant for accuracy and brevity that comes naturally to him since he is himself a lawyer, Shyam Sunder does not waste words in any long introduction. His beginning is matter-of-fact enough. "In 1949 when I decided to go to Pondicherry, things got arranged quite smoothly." Thus, one part of his self, his earlier life, is consciously shut out from purview from himself as well as from the reader. The earlier life is of no significant interest and consequence perhaps to either. It is a conscious decision that the narrator is making in keeping with the Indian spiritual tradition. The theme of initiation or rebirth into a new life is thus established.

Despite his professed lack of a plan for the book, Shyam Sunder is actually very careful with the use of his memory. There are clearly many things that he chooses not to reveal or focus his attention on. His early childhood, upbringing, education, and later, marriage, profession and fatherhood are all consciously kept out. And so also the world of doubts, anxieties and conflicts in the mind. Some of these could have provided a great deal of human interest for the reader and even aided the narrator himself from the spiritual point of self-definition. However, this is what Shyam Sunder chooses not to do and we must respect his

choice; we cannot quarrel with his own chronicle of events or manner of telling his story. He first visited Pondicherry in 1949 at the age of 22 and then regularly for 15 years, later he left his legal practice and commercial interests in Calcutta.

Divided into two parts, *Down Memory Lane*'s first part offers profiles of personalities that Shyam Sunder knew best. Through pen-portraits of individual Sadhaks and Sadhikas such as Rishabchand, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Madhav Pandit, Dilip Kumar Roy, André, Vasudha, Champaklal, Indra Sen, and other personalities such as Indira Gandhi, the narrator offers his sense of events and the meaning he understands of life and relationships. It is not Shyam Sunder's claim that he is offering a non-partisan, sanitized account, though there is certainly an attempt at objectivity. To someone who was in the thick of various actions and events in Pondicherry and Auroville, it would be pretentious to maintain an absolutely neutral position. The account itself is from his own viewpoint. It is his own story. Naturally he has his own favourites. He expresses approval and disapproval of individuals' actions and behaviour. In all these, as is bound to be, his individual self is the point of reference. He is of course not interested in offering an official history of the places and/or the people. His is a more individualized account. That lends honesty and modesty to his narrative efforts and makes them touchingly personal.

Most of the first part of the book, Shyam Sunder tells us, was written during his five-week stay in Germany when he had no agenda and no sight-seeing to do. The little village in Germany where his daughter Manju and her husband Michael live is beautifully called "Niederaltich" or "Under the Old Oak Tree". As Shyam Sunder sat "at the computer desk with the window opening on to the country fields, the short summer of the year turning into autumn eve, came to him" the title "Down Memory Lane" that shaped the structure of the book, giving him the freedom "to write without any plan".

The best part of Shyam Sunder's book is not the so-called 'history' of men and matters. It lies in the welcome attention he pays to the moral and spiritual lessons he learnt in life. Thus we see the value of detachment in Nolini-da who refused to accept money (p. 8) from the sale of his book *The Message of Sri Aurobindo* (which Shyam Sunder translated into Hindi). The total amount went to the Mother. We also see the importance of broad-mindedness and tolerance. We learn of gratitude to the Divine from the example of Dyuman-bhai who said: "The Mother wore out her body for us. What did we, her children, do for her?" (p. 32). Similarly, we see the amazing wisdom of Amrita who when asked "How far is the Divine from you?" went straight to the Mother counting the steps and said, "Three steps, Mother." (p. 36). We are reminded of the use of money power. For instance, when the Tantric Pundit Neelkanth Mahadeo Joshi wanted to establish a Tantric Chakra at the Ashram to bring money, the Mother was against it. (p. 44). And, then, we learn from Counouma's example that "everyone has a right of being heard". (p. 45).

The book has its share of other interesting details too. For instance, there is the account of a fruitful meeting of Shyam Sunder with Nandini Satpathy and Indira Gandhi (pp. 74-75) and the not-so-successful encounter with G. D. Birla. We notice how appropriate is Indira Gandhi's reply to the Mother's message of a great and united India sent by Shyam Sunder. Indira added: "We must be firmly rooted in the soil of India but be ever ready to take and to adopt anything that is good and relevant to us from elsewhere." (p. 76) This was said in 1983, one year before her cruel assassination. Similarly, we see the absurdity of the Indian court cases which go on indefinitely. As Shyam Sunder once wrote to the authorities: "If the cases are seen as just, advise the CBI to accelerate the court proceedings. If the cases are seen as unjust, withdraw the cases." (p. 104) But, as usual, nothing ever happened.

For the spiritual seeker, it is the second part of the book that is of great interest. This is called "Mother Steers Auroville". We are constantly amazed to see the Mother's infinite patience, her sharpness of perception and her great practicality. Her answers are invariably direct and straightforward. To the question, "How can I express my gratitude to the Divine?" the Mother's answer is: "Grow in consciousness and consecration." Elsewhere the Mother says: "Don't think of pleasing others. If you try to please one, some other will be displeased. I also do not try to please." (p. 112)

For those who manage the organisation, the Mother's approach to the running of Auroville on a day-to-day basis seems to be absolutely invaluable. For instance, she shows a sensitive concern for the welfare of the local Tamil villagers, the preservation of their language and culture. We see her total disapproval of centralized authority, her desire to combine firmness with flexibility, her constant advocacy of overcoming our lower nature as an essential condition for using freedom.

Similarly, the following extracts from the diary kept by Shyam Sunder might serve as eye-openers to us:

30.3.72

Mother has said something on no marriage in Auroville. She has also spoken of the soul relationship between man and woman but people choose to read the first part only, then to couple it with their idea of liberty and non-discipline.

The Mother said: "We are trying to be above humanity, but these things are animal things, below humanity."

Tell her that they can be good friends, but for good friendship kissing is not necessary, nor sexual activity." (p. 144)

23.7.72

Constance has been engaged for ten years in research into the ancient Egyptian civilisation. He is able to find neither the nature of his connection with it nor to

that civilization He asks for Mother's help

Mother's reply:

"Ancient Egypt belongs to the past We are here to prepare the future."
(p. 202)

23 7 72

Diane, a visitor from USA, wishes to cut short her stay, return and divorce her husband and remarry another man.

Mother said, "It does not concern me." (p. 203)

6 8 72

Khoday Distilleries Ltd has applied to the Registrar of Trade Marks, Bombay, for registration of the name 'Auroville' for its wine products We have a right to oppose it (p. 208)

9 4 72

The second part of Thomas's letter said, "Divine Mother, one thing more. Would you change my name, as in the Christian culture 'Thomas', I believe, is the 'doubter' and truly I have had enough of him."

Mother had a laugh. She said "Yes," gave the name 'Shraddhalu' and made a name card. (p 159)

13.3.72

The parents of the child born at the Health Centre on 8.3 72 want the name to come from Mother as the child was born in the Mother's city.

Mother gave the name "Auroshe" and wrote the name of the parents. Then she made another copy for the child's parents.

(*All this for an unknown villager's family*) (p. 136)

Down Memory Lane is a very readable memoir. Attractively produced with a beautiful cover photo, this is a welcome addition to the library of those who are in quest of the inner world.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Wounded Roses Sing, by I. H. Rizvi. Published by Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, pp 72. Price. Rs 50.

"How can you write about the things that are not dearest and closest to your heart?" asks the Russian writer Victor Astafiev. He feels that "a writer's work is a constant search, complex, exhausting, and sometimes bringing nothing but

despair ” Dr I. H Rizvi is one such writer, constantly searching his heart and soul to explore means of poetic expression for conveying things that are dearest and closest to them On his onward march, in pursuit of fulfilment of his commitment to poetry, he has brought out this fifth collection titled *Wounded Roses Sing*

Rizvi rejoices in the knowledge that there is a beautiful world around him and that he, as a human being, is a participant in all that is great and alive But his joy is often punctuated with pathos, pity and anger. The titles of his collections *Unfading Bloom*, *Wandering Fragrance*, on the one hand, and *Falling Petals*, *Thirsty Pebbles* and *Wounded Roses Sing* on the other, represent the inherent contradictions of life, at the same time they also represent the poet's two different approaches to seeing life as a union of enigmatic contradictions

The title-poem *Wounded Roses* is the result of heightened poetic imagination, but the poet is not far away from the earth. The very breeze that thrills the roses in full bloom

whispers at their cheeks
The message of approaching doom

The poet admits that “he has been lavishly extolled. And struts around on the printed pages” and, by saying so, he looks back as “The Self Judge” and considers himself “A little educated man” Like any normal human being, he too had expectations and wanted them to materialize overnight; comparing his poems with the best, he aspired to be a ‘classic’ one day.

Any beginning is as fragile as the leaf-bud that cleaves to the earth Beginning with mixed feelings of both disappointment and agony, the poet has grown, to quote his own words like “...a dazzling star on the horizon of fame” Whether he has judged himself aright or not is a different question which Time alone can answer. But he appears to be in earnest

What about Man on the onward march?
Man continues his onward march but
He's tired of the roads he has
Been walking on for centuries .
He thinks now he must build new roads
To herald the twenty-first century;
He has already started gathering
The material for the royal road
Of human dead bodies (The Onward March)

The birds, the singing glory of God, have also flown away with all their music

To distant unknown lands
 Or have they gone into hiding
 And now for breaking fresh grounds wait? (*Birds Flown Away*)

Maybe the birds are tired of man and his cries of discontent and despair. The Law must protect. Is Law acting as protector,/ protector of one and all? The poet sarcastically says:

Everyone is given his due:
 The innocent should meet their doom,
 And people should go on their ways,
 Killers should not be brought to law
 And death should not be mourned
 Protective laws now need
 A genial atmosphere.
 Is this the height we have attained? (*Protection*)

Here, emotion grows into an ironic comment. The poet begins dispassionately but slowly becomes intensely passionate in his appeal to the man of today. Protection means protection of the guilty, the rich and the power-wielders. It is because 'Our garments are full of holes'

We say one thing when we are here
 And may go the other way
 When we are out of this conference
 'Peace' we may preach here but may fight
 To end, or watch our brothers slain
 At Beirut, Kabul or Teheran. (*The Summit*)

So he advises you not to waste your precious time on non-aligned summits and high-level conferences. No wonder, his heart is wounded and it sings of the forbidden dreams. The music is melancholic, doleful but a mirror-image of what is going on now everywhere. But within him "The greatest treasures of the heart/ Build mansions of a myriad hues/ With inborn chasms of love." The poet has wish-laden dreams and is full of hope for a brighter and better tomorrow. Alas!

But dreams are sometimes chained
 In caverns of eyelids. (*Forbidden Dreams*)

The poem *Stopping* symbolically means stopping of all tall talk about certain (foolishly) well-guarded traditions that do not fit in the present context. Traditions, no doubt, are to be respected but they should be dispensed with when

we are faced with harsh realities. A wife “ . leaves with heaps of vows/ To let no one else touch her frame”, but the very same wife is squeezed among ‘gentlemen’ in a bus or a tram while going to the office. Should we blame the wife or should we realise that we are standing at crossroads to redefine the tradition of ‘touchability’?

The Garden of Eden witnessed woman’s power to conquer man. The power seems to be increasing through the ages. The poet is quite convinced

When woman’s out to conquer man,
Who can on earth resist?
Not even a Vishwamitra (The Fall)

A Western concept, ‘The Fall’ is orientally contextualized. It is a kind of Indianization. The name Vishwamitra opens up the vast world of Indian myths and legends. The ‘fall’ of Vishwamitra and that of Adam are two different manifestations of the same archetype which will be perpetuated for generations to come. Political and social grabbing is part of Indian culture and waiting is its corollary. Announcements come and go with the announcers.

The waiting continued but nothing came
And nobody showed his face (Let Us Wait)

Let us wait for a “Wreath to come/ For the dowryless bride” and “for our son to come/ Home from places best known to him.” Rizvi willingly acts as the spokesman of the majority of Indians.

Religious hypocrisy comes in handy to Indians. Here is an ugly paradox: philanthropists pour money into the man-size ‘hundis’ but refuse to drop a morsel of food into a starved stomach. The devotees include “ . robbers, thieves, smugglers/ In milk-white dresses, holy robes,/ In borrowed caps ”

The Lord watches silently
While the money goes back
To the sources from which it came. (Cycle)

Sycophants is a companion piece of *Cycle* and describes sycophancy as an essential part of humankind. The selfish world is so tyrannous to him that he makes a desperate bid to escape from the grating sound among mankind. He thinks aloud agonizingly:

Each night my mind is a haunt of ghosts,
And each day bites me like a wasp
(O Selfish World! O Selfish World)

In another poem, *Shadowing*, the poet continues to play the note of disillusionment:

I wish my heart were like stone,
And like a glacier cold,
And like the ocean's bottom dumb—
For feelings flow into this pond
And are like fish caught in the bait
At every sorrow-laden sight.

The world is too much with him As a man of experience, he knows the worth of money and its magical spell With money,

All evils are at my command,
All virtues are my slaves...
I need no force for my defence,
My treasure guard the snakes,
And people, if they were free
To say, they'll call me God (*Money*)

The Wordsworthian influence is visible in the lines:

How may I warble songs,
When all the wrongs,
The world has done, are heaped on me?
(*How I may Warble Songs?*)

O tension-tortured man! You need 'satisfaction' Seek the poet's advice.

In yourself lies the word.
Or else the world is short enough
To quench your thirst. . (*Seeking*)

'Hope' is another word we need today. A leper, a beggar, an AIDS patient all live in hope since

Hope is a dying man's only bread,
A leper's life, a beggar's dream,
All men, though bound with weakest thread,
Wish to have till rays of hope gleam. (*A Leper*)

The pleasant side of Rizvi's poetry is his romanticism. His romantic spirit drenches the poem *Heat*:

As night advances, it grows cool
 And trees prepare to take a nap
 In the arms of the moonlit night

The same spirit runs through the poems *Just After the Rain*, *A World of Birds*, *Haikus* and *Glow-worm*. The Greek myths of Orpheus and Thisbe take the reader back to the classical period and love-triggered tensions of the ancestors. *Farewell*, *Beaten Sands*, *Repentance*, *Time*, etc., are philosophical outpourings. The poet bemoans man's bitter fate as he laments the death of his first cousin who died young. The poet wonders at the irony of life:

He's dead while people old
 Enough to die a hundred years
 Before him drag on their existence
(At the Death of Cousin Absar)

The description of the last rites moves one to tears. Imagery, both conventional and non-conventional, flashes across the entire body of the collection. Two of his choicest passages serve as illustrative examples:

And dusty clouds hang on the blue
 As on tent roof of poverty. (*The Coral Fish*)

Wings of light
 Sailing from bars of heaven
 Striving to pierce the world's atmosphere
 Have to dodge past clouds of darkness
 Shooting from human actions (*Wings of Light*)

The flow of the thought-content in this collection is generally smooth and unobtrusive, though it occasionally has checks of laboured imaginings. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, says Shakespeare. In Rizvi, a rose, even if it is wounded by all the ironies of life, would sing as well. Finally, a word of appreciation for the neat print with a picturesque appeal on every page. It enhances the pleasure of reading the poems.

D. GNANASEKARAN

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Eighty-first Seminar

21 April 1996

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S VISION

Speech by Arvind Akki

(Continued from the issue of January 1997)

ANOTHER thing lacking in our schools is the moral and religious teaching. Since it is a thing of the heart, it is useless to try to make a student moral and religious through textbooks. In dealing with man's nature we have to consider three things: "The emotions, the *samskaras* or formed habits and associations, and the *swabhava* or nature."¹ The best way to educate the heart is to encourage the student in his own tendency of development. "The first rule of moral training," says Sri Aurobindo, "is to suggest and invite, not command or impose. The best method of suggestion is by personal example, daily converse and the books read from day to day."² Every student should be made aware that "the essence of religion, to live for God, for humanity, for country, for others and for oneself in these, must be made the ideal in every school which calls itself national. It is this spirit of Hinduism pervading our schools which—far more than the teaching of Indian subjects, the use of Indian methods or formal instruction in Hindu beliefs and Hindu scriptures—should be the essence of Nationalism in our schools distinguishing them from all others."³

One of the major drawbacks of our modern methods of training is the practice of teaching in bits of information. The young student therefore does not know how to chew and digest; he only knows how to swallow the small parcels of knowledge with the result that he becomes sickly and cultivates a dislike for learning. He simply turns into a carrier of sandalwood, without knowing the value of the sandalwood he is carrying. In Sri Aurobindo's words: "Teaching by snippets must be relegated to the lumber-room of dead sorrows."⁴

According to Sri Aurobindo, the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue of the children. He says, "Every child is a lover of interesting narrative, a hero-worshipper and a patriot. Appeal to these qualities in him and through them let him master without knowing it the living and human parts of his nation's history."⁵ Only when one has sound knowledge and mastery of one's

mother tongue can one proceed to other languages; it then becomes easier to master them.

According to ancient Indian philosophy, without Brahmacharya the mind cannot be fully controlled. Brahmacharya is the retention of energy and its sublimation into spirituality. This fills our body, mind and life with inexhaustible energy. Thus we can channelise energy for a greater and nobler use of things.

The importance of physical culture in the completeness of education cannot be overlooked. An English proverb says: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." According to Sri Aurobindo sports are not only for amusement and entertainment in their superficial sense; in their deeper sense "they are or can be much more than that. they are also fields for the development of habits, capacities and qualities which are greatly needed and of the utmost service to a people in war or in peace, and in its political and social activities, in most indeed of the provinces of a combined human endeavour"⁶ Besides, they can develop co-ordination, teamwork, courage, quick reflexes, anticipation, organisation, right judgement and observation which are also useful in the fields of practical life. Another supreme value of physical culture, says Sri Aurobindo, is the development of "the essential instinctive body consciousness which can see and do what is necessary without any indication from mental thought and which is equivalent in the body to swift insight in the mind and spontaneous and rapid decision in the will."⁷

Now I would like to draw your attention to a portion of the message given by Sri Aurobindo to Andhra University in 1948. It is a message meant not only for Andhra University, but for all universities and educational institutions which call themselves national. Here are his inspiring words: "Your University can take its high position as a centre of light and learning, knowledge and culture which can train the youth of Andhra to be worthy of their forefathers: the great past should lead to a future as great or even greater. Not only Science but Art, not only book-knowledge and information but growth in culture and character are parts of a true education, to help the individual to develop his capacities, to help in the forming of thinkers and creators and men of vision and action of the future, this is a part of its work. Moreover, the life of the regional people must not be shut up in itself; its youths have also to contact the life of the other similar peoples of India interacting with them in industry and commerce and the other practical fields of life but also in the things of the mind and spirit. Also, they have to learn not only to be citizens of Andhra but to be citizens of India; the life of the nation is their life."⁸

So far whatever I have dealt with has been mainly regarding the principles of National Education. However, now I would like to add one very important point. It is a general practice in all traditional Yogas to neglect the phenomenal or external spheres of knowledge and aim directly at the spiritual knowledge. But Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga does not neglect or reject life's varied

activities, for it embraces both external and spiritual knowledge. In the words of Sri Aurobindo “Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge of the workings of God through Nature and through life At first it is the workings of life and forms of Nature which occupy us, but as we go deeper and deeper and get a completer view and experience, each of these lines brings us face to face with God ”⁹

Our International Centre of Education has a special role to play in this respect. The Mother in her inaugural message to the Centre declared it to be “one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the élite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life ”¹⁰

In conclusion, I quote an inspiring passage from Sri Aurobindo’s speech on National Education He says: “Let us bear in mind that we have a debt to discharge not only towards our ancestors but also to our posterity. If such a noble ideal is kept before our mental vision, we shall see that our nation will give birth to great philosophers, statesmen and generals.”¹¹

(Concluded)

References

- 1 *A System of National Education*, SABCL, Vol 17, p 209
- 2 *Ibid* , p 210
- 3 *Ibid* , p 212
- 4 *Ibid* , p 215
- 5 *Ibid*
- 6 *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, SABCL, Vol 16, p 1
- 7 *Ibid* , p 2
- 8 *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol 26, p 411
- 9 *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol 20, p 492
- 10 *On Education*, CWM, Vol 12, p 112
- 11 *Supplement*, SABCL, Vol 27, p 67