

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THEN SUDDENLY THERE CAME ON HER THE CHANGE

So was she left alone in the huge wood,  
Surrounded by a dim unthinking world,  
Her husband's corpse on her forsaken breast.  
She measured not her loss with helpless thoughts,  
Nor rent with tears the marble seals of pain:  
She rose not yet to face the dreadful god.  
Over the body she loved her soul leaned out  
In a great stillness without stir or voice,  
As if her mind had died with Satyavan.  
But still the human heart in her beat on.  
Aware still of his being near to hers,  
Closely she clasped to her the mute lifeless form  
As though to guard the oneness they had been  
And keep the spirit still within the frame.  
Then suddenly there came on her the change  
Which in tremendous moments of our lives  
Can overtake sometimes the human soul  
And hold it up towards its luminous source....  
A new sight comes, new voices in us form  
A body of the music of the gods.  
Immortal yearnings without name leap down,  
Large quiverings of godhead seeking run  
And weave upon a puissant field of calm  
A high and lonely ecstasy of will.  
This in a moment's depths was born in her.  
Now to the limitless gaze disclosed that sees  
Things barred from human thinking's earthly lids,  
The Spirit who had hidden in Nature soared  
Out of his luminous nest within the worlds.  
Like a vast fire it climbed the skies of night.  
Thus were the cords of self-oblivion torn:  
Like one who looks up to far heights she saw,  
Ancient and strong as on a windless summit  
Above her where she had worked in her lone mind  
Labouring apart in a sole tower of self,  
The source of all which she had seemed or wrought,  
A power projected into cosmic space,  
A slow embodiment of the aeonic will,  
A starry fragment of the eternal Truth,  
The passionate instrument of an unmoved Power.

A Presence was there that filled the listening world,  
 A central All assumed her boundless life.  
 A sovereignty, a silence and a swiftness,  
 One brooded over abysses who was she.  
 As in a choric robe of unheard sounds  
 A force descended trailing endless lights;  
 Linking Time's seconds to Infinity,  
 Illimitably it girt the earth and her:  
 It sank into her soul and she was changed.  
 Then like a thought fulfilled by some great word  
 That mightiness assumed a symbol form;  
 Her being's spaces quivered with its touch,  
 It covered her as with immortal wings;  
 On its lips the curve of the unuttered Truth,  
 A halo of Wisdom's lightnings for its crown,  
 It entered the mystic lotus in her head,  
 A thousand-petalled home of power and light.  
 Immortal leader of her mortality,  
 Doer of her works and fountain of her words,  
 Invulnerable by Time, omnipotent,  
 It stood above her calm, immobile, mute.  
 All in her mated with that mighty hour,  
 As if the last remnant had been slain by Death  
 Of the humanity that once was hers.  
 Assuming a spiritual wide control,  
 Making life's sea a mirror of heaven's sky,  
 The young divinity in her earthly limbs  
 Filled with celestial strength her mortal part.  
 Over was the haunted pain, the rending fear:  
 Her grief had passed away, her mind was still,  
 Her heart beat quietly with a sovereign force.  
 There came a freedom from the heart-strings' clutch,  
 Now all her acts sprang from a godhead's calm.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 571-73)

## HINDUISM AND THE MISSION OF INDIA\*

[That] which is permanent in the Hindu religion, must form the basis on which the world will increasingly take its stand in dealing with spiritual experience and religious truth. Hinduism, in my sense of the word, is not modern Brahmanism. Modern Brahmanism developed into existence at a definite period in history. It is now developing out of existence; its mission is done, its capacities exhausted, the Truth which, like other religions, it defended, honoured, preserved, cherished, misused and disfigured, is about to take to itself new forms and dispense with all other screens or defenders than its own immortal beauty, grandeur, truth and effectiveness. It is this unchanging undying Truth which has to be discovered and placed in its native light before humanity. *Tad etat satyam.*

There are many defenders and discoverers of truth now active among us. They are all busy defending, modifying, attacking, sapping or bolstering current Hinduism. I am not eager to disparage but neither do I find myself satisfied with any of them. If I were, there would be no need for any speculation of my own. There are the orthodox who are busy recovering and applying old texts or any interpretations, new or old, of these texts, which will support the existing order,—and ignoring all that go against it. Their learning is praiseworthy and useful; it brings to notice many great and helpful things which were in danger of being misprized, lost or flung away as worthless; but they do not seem to me to go to the heart of the matter. There are the heterodox who are busy giving new interpretations to old texts and institutions in order to get rid of all such features as the modern world finds it hard to assimilate. Their brainwork can hardly be too highly praised; it is bringing to light or to a half light many luminous realities and possibilities which, if they cannot all be accepted, yet invigorate and sharpen the habit of original thinking and help to remove that blind adherence to traditions which is truth's greatest obstacle. Still they too do not seem to me to have the right grasp and discernment. Then there are the ascetics mystical or rationalistic who call men to disgust with the world and point to the temple, the monastery or the mountain-top as the best, if not the only place for finding God, and most of whom, in order to honour the Maker, slight and denounce His works. Their position and temperament is so lofty and noble and their solvent force on the gross impurities of a materialised humanity has been so invaluable that it is with some reluctance one finds oneself obliged to put them on one side and pass onward. But it seems to me that we must pass onward if we would know and possess God in His entirety and not merely in a side or aspect. There is a story in the Jewish Scriptures which relates that when God wished to show himself to Moses, he could only, owing to the spiritual imperfections of the Jewish prophet, reveal safely to him His hinder parts. Moses would have died if he had seen the front of God; he had not the *dhāraṇam*, the soul-power to support that tremendous vision. The story well illuminates the character of materialism generally and to its aggressive modern form, European thought and civilisation, it applies with a quite overwhelming appositeness. But it seems to me that the average Vedantist, too, has

\* A fragmentary essay written by Sri Aurobindo about the period 1910-12; the first part is missing.

only seen, for his part, the crown of the Lord's head and the average bhakta only the Kaustubh-stone over His heart or the Srivatsa mark upon it. On the other hand, there are those rationalists who are by no means ascetical in their views or temperament and their name is legion; they insist on our putting religion and God aside or keeping Him only for ornamental uses in spare moments; leave that, they say, and devote yourselves to practical work for mankind. That rationalism is necessary too if only to balance the error of the ascetics who would make of God's world a mistake and of its Maker an Almighty blunderer or an inscrutable eccentric or an indefinable Something inhabiting a chaos or a mirage. Nevertheless, from materialism least of all, however philanthropic or patriotic, can our future salvation be expected. Finally, there are the mystics who are not ascetics,—the Theosophists. From one point of view I cannot find praise warm enough to do justice to the work of Theosophy; from another I cannot find condemnation strong enough to denounce it. It has forced on the notice of an unwilling world truths to which orthodoxy is blind and of which heterodoxy is afraid or incredulous. It has shown a colossal courage in facing ridicule, trampling on prejudice and slander, persisting in faith in spite of disillusionment, scandal and a continual shifting of knowledge. They have kept the flag of a past and future science flying against enormous difficulties. On the other hand by bringing to the investigation of that science—not its discovery, for to the Hindu Yogin it is known already—the traditional European methods, the methods of the market-place and the forum, it has brought on the truths themselves much doubt and discredit, and by importing into them the forms, jugglery and jargon of European mystics, their romanticism, their unbridled imagination, their galloping impatience, their haste, bragging and loudness, their susceptibility to dupery, trickery, obstinate error and greedy self-deception, Theosophists have strengthened doubt and discredit and driven many an earnest seeker to bewilderment, to angry suspicion or to final renunciation of the search for truth. They have scattered the path of the conscientious investigators, the severe scientists of Yoga who must appear in the future, with the thorns and sharp flints of a well-justified incredulity and suspicion. I admit the truths that Theosophy seeks to unveil; but I do not think they can be reached if we fall into bondage, even to the most inspiring table talk of Mahatmas or to the confused anathemas and vaticinations hurled from their platform tripods by modern Pythonesses of the type of Mrs. Annie Besant, that great, capacious but bewildered and darkened intellect, now stumbling with a loud and confident blindness through those worlds of twilight and glamour, of distorted inspirations, perverted communications and misunderstood or half-understood perceptions which are so painfully familiar to the student and seeker.

If these things do not satisfy me, what then do I seek? I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that

shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man's history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, "Be blind, O man, and see!" In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda — the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijñāte sarvam vijñātam*. I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism,—but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.

In these articles<sup>1</sup> I shall not try to announce truth, but merely to inquire what are those things in Hinduism by following which we may arrive at the truth. I shall try to indicate some of my reasons—as far as within these limits it can be done—for my faith in my guides and the manner in which I think they should be followed. I am impelled to this labour by the necessity of turning the mind of young India to our true riches, our real sources of power, purification and hope for the future and of safeguarding it in the course of its search both from false lights and from the raucous challenges and confident discouragements cast at us by the frail modern spirit of denial. I write, not for the orthodox, nor for those who have discovered a new orthodoxy, Samaj or Panth, nor for the unbeliever. I write for those who acknowledge reason but do not identify reason with Western materialism; who are sceptics but not unbelievers; who, admitting the claims of modern thought, still believe in India, her mission, her gospel, her immortal life and her eternal rebirth.

SRI AUROBINDO

1. It is not known for certain what articles Sri Aurobindo is referring to here.

## SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

*Sometimes I remember certain slokas and they revolve in my mind for a long time. I want to know whether slokas of a sensual type have a wrong atmosphere around them.*

YES, obviously, slokas of a sensual type, if repeated in the mind, would help to keep up wrong vibrations. If they recur, they should be rejected altogether.

*I want to reject the memory or imagination of any sensual experience, be it the taste of food, the sight or touch of women, or sensual sounds. As usual, make your reply a categorical imperative for me, so that as soon as such a thing tries to peep in, I can remember your "will" and call down help and light.*

To let the memory or imagination dwell on things that excite the sex desire is unhealthy for the sadhana and an obstacle to the development of the Yogic consciousness. Discourage these imaginations and memories when they come.

*I want the quantitative aspect of my diet to be fixed by you, so that the body also may have a sense of obedience, surrender and aspiration. I want the lowest diet possible for me without inconvenience, so please do not make any concessions at all. I will follow it for years and decades, as you wish.*

What is the actual diet that you are taking now?

9 February 1933

*Here is the diet I take:*

*Morning — 3 to 5 slices of bread, with phoscao and 1 banana.*

*Midday — 2 slices with 1/2 bowl of rice, 1 banana, curds and vegetable.*

*Evening — 1, 2 or sometimes 3 slices, milk and vegetable.*

*I propose reduction in as many items as possible.*

It does not seem to me at all excessive.

10 February 1933

*In the morning I got unusually angry with the workmen, which I displayed only in my expression and speech. I want the reverse of anger in my vital and physical.*



Yes. To be angry and speak harshly to the workmen injures both the work and the sadhana.

*Yesterday there was very little work for me; in the afternoon I felt lethargic so I took a nap for two or three minutes in between rounds. Is this allowable?*

It would be better to ask more work so as to avoid the lethargy at that time.

*After the last inner struggle I find that I am perhaps over-imaginative about hostile beings. I imagine what methods they may adopt, how they may find my weak points, where they may try to gain entrance, and then I try to find out solutions. For example, I have been thinking for three or four days that they may attack my physical, which is not well-surrendered. Is this all right or should I not think of hostile possibilities at all?*

You must be vigilant, but not thinking always or too much about it.

*At present how should I act in regard to the following:*

*1. Reading novels.*

It is better to avoid it.

*2. Newspaper.*

It is perhaps not advisable, as people get excited about politics and bring in the lower movements.

*3. Speaking in the dining hall.*

Too much gossip there — that is not good.

10 February 1933

*Whenever you fix my diet, I have a small wish that I should send the first dish to the Mother to bless it and partake from it as she will.*

I did not think it necessary to diminish the diet; but if you like to send the meal once for the Mother's blessing, you may do so.

10 February 1933

*The mental overactivity and restlessness appear to have diminished much. This morning I felt that the whole centre of will and thought was brought down to the*

*chest region. I felt that I was using the will from there in work, watching vigilantly any vital impulse and directing everything quietly. Is this the psychic will?*

In the cardiac it might be the higher vital — the position is not enough to indicate whether it is the psychic or not. But from the description (the quiet control) it may be the psychic.

*Today in dream I saw several bullocks running here and there, but they were soon controlled and tied up to posts. Still, I was afraid of making my way through them, so near were they tied together. Is it the vital energies that tried to run away and were then brought under control? Did the psychic or the higher mind find it difficult to make its way through them?*

Yes, but it is not the psychic that finds the difficulty, it is the mind.

11 February 1933

*What is the attitude I should have with respect to my co-sadhaks? Should there be anything like friendship or intimacy? What to do when hostile ideas are presented by somebody while talking? How long should the intellect go on working like this? If the intellect method is tried, it gives entrance to a lot of possibilities.*

It is no use trying to decide the things of the Spirit by the power and in the light of the intellect. The intellect can only reason and infer and its reasonings are partial and its inferences vitiated by error. One has to awaken the divination in the soul, the psychic being, and wait for a higher knowledge which comes from above.

It is not safe to listen to or be influenced by the mental of other sadhaks. The Yoga aims at union with the Divine which will bring a spiritual oneness with other sadhaks, but a oneness in the Divine, in the Truth, not in the ignorance of the mind and the vital.

*(To be continued)*

SRI AUROBINDO

## TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO APROPOS OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

NIRODBARAN: In an old essay in a now defunct periodical named *Orient* Amal wrote that because you were embittered and disillusioned you gave up poetry and politics.<sup>1</sup>

SRI AUROBINDO: Nonsense. I gave it up and took to the spiritual life because I wanted force for my action. People make the mistake that whatever a poet writes must be of his personal experience. I can write of universal experience. I can feel the experience in me and write about it.

NIRODBARAN: Gandhi will now have to consider the door closed, after Hoare's speech.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, not only closed but jammed and he must be prepared to expect the worst.

NIRODBARAN: When Hoare was made the Government Speaker, it was —

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it was a foregone conclusion.

NIRODBARAN: He has also indicated the line the Government should pursue, saying "with strength and justice".

SRI AUROBINDO: That is the Hitlerian euphemism for repression, almost the same tone as of Ribbentrop. The Under-secretary, O'Neil, tried to cool it down but with no effect.

\*

PURANI: Have you seen Jinnah's statement? After this Congress should have nothing to do with him.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, the more they approach him the more insolent he becomes. Is it a fact that the Momins, the section to which Jinnah belongs, constitute half the number of Muslims in India? That is what is being said.

PURANI: I don't know exactly.

When Sri Aurobindo was lying down, Purani showed him some photos of X's "mad disciples".

SRI AUROBINDO: They don't look like liberated souls! (*Laughter*)

\*

PURANI (*after the sponging was over*): At least one member of the Muslim League Executive doesn't agree with Jinnah's statement yesterday that December 2 should be observed by all Muslims and even the other minorities as a date of liberation from Congress regime.

SRI AUROBINDO: Who is that? What's his name?

1. Amal changed his opinion and dropped these words from his book, *Sri Aurobindo — The Poet*.

PURANI: I have forgotten it. *The Hindu* makes the joke that now we understand why it is said that people should retire after 60. Jinnah is more than 60 now.

NIRODBARAN: Congress should combine with these Momins and try to come to some agreement with them.

SATYEN: It can't do that now, because it is too moral.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is too moral.

PURANI: Kher has asked Jinnah to specify his charges against Congress.

SRI AUROBINDO: Jinnah won't do that; he will only make general statements.

NIRODBARAN: Abul Kalam has also objected to having a Nationalist Muslim Conference at present. He says the time is not favourable.

SRI AUROBINDO: I don't see why it is not favourable. Politically the best thing to do is to combine the Nationalist Muslims—not only those belonging to Congress — and then try to carry the Muslim mass with them. That is the only way to check Jinnah. Even in the Muslim League there are some dissatisfied elements.

NIRODBARAN (*after some time*): In yesterday's paper Russia was said to be designing to attack India. Is there any truth in it?

SRI AUROBINDO: India? I think it was Asia. I have always considered it a possibility that Stalinist Russia might attack India. It may begin with Mohammedan Asia and then come to India. If the Allies are at war with Russia, this is quite possible. Have you heard the Radio news? I don't know why Daladier has made such a fiery speech today against Russia.

NIRODBARAN: It is rather inopportune because it will provoke Russia.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes; Daladier has enough trouble on his hands. But he is just like that. He is a weak man, and weak men go into unnecessary violence at times.

PURANI: But France can't directly help Finland.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, she can't, unless Sweden joins in and Norway too. Then not only France but also England can help effectively.

NIRODBARAN: I wonder what Jinnah and his Indian Muslims will do when Russia attacks Mohammedan Asia.

SRI AUROBINDO: He will hold meetings and shout or he will blame Congress for it.

PURANI: He will blame Nehru perhaps because of his socialistic tendencies and say that he has invited Russia.

(*To be continued*)

(Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, pp. 246-47, 296-98.)

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

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

मन्द्रस्य कवेर्दिव्यस्य वह्नेर्विप्रमन्मनो वचनस्य मध्वः।  
अपा नस्तस्य सचनस्य देवेषो युवस्व गृणते गो अग्राः ॥

(Rigveda, 6.39.1)

Of this divine and rapturous seer (Soma), bearer of the sacrifice, this honeyed speaker with the illumined thought, O god, join to us, to the speaker of the word the impulsions that are led by the cows of light (*iṣo go agrāḥ*). (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 222)

अयमुशानः पर्यद्रिमुष्मा ऋतधीतिभिर्ऋतयुग्युजानः।  
रुजदरुगं वि वलस्य सानुं पणौर्वचोभिरभि योधदिन्द्रः ॥

(Rigveda, 6.39.2)

He it was who desired the shining ones (the cows, *usrāḥ*) all about the hill, truth-yoked, yoking his car with the thoughts of the Truth, *ṛtadhītibhir ṛtayug yujānaḥ*; (then) Indra broke the unbroken hill-level of Vala, by the words he fought against the Panis. (SABCL, Vol. 10, pp. 222-23)

अयं द्योतयदद्युतो व्यऽक्तून् दोषा वस्तोः शरद इन्दुरिन्द्र।  
इमं केतुमदधुनू चिदह्नां शुचिजन्मन उषसश्चकार ॥

(Rigveda, 6.39.3)

He it was (Soma) who as the Moon-Power (Indu) day and night and through the years made the lightless nights to shine out, and they held the vision of the days; he created the dawns pure in their birth. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 223)

अयं रोचयदरुचो रुचानोऽयं वासयद् वयृतेन पूर्वीः।  
अयमीयत ऋतयुग्भिरश्वैः स्वर्विदा नाभिना चर्षणिप्राः ॥

(Rigveda, 6.39.4)

He it was becoming luminous who made full of light the lightless ones; he made the many (dawns) shine by the Truth, he went with horses yoked by the Truth, with the wheel that finds Swar, satisfying (with the wealth) the doer of works. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 223)

एतायामोष गव्यन्त इन्द्रमस्माकं सु प्रमतिं वावृधाति ।  
अनामृणः कुविदादस्य रायो गवां केतं परमावर्जते नः ॥

(Rigveda, 1.33.1)

Come, let us go seeking the cows to Indra; for it is he that increases the thought in us; invincible is he and complete are his felicities, he releases for us (separates from the darkness) the supreme knowledge-vision of the luminous cows, *gavām ketam param āvarjate naḥ*. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 227)

उपेदहं धनदामप्रतीतं जुष्टां न श्येनो वसतिं पतामि ।  
इन्द्रं नमस्यन्नुपमेभिरकैर्यः स्तोतृभ्यो हव्यो अस्ति यामन् ॥

(Rigveda, 1.33.2)

I fly to the unassailable giver of riches like a bird to its beloved nest, bowing down to Indra with the supreme words of light, to him to whom his affirmers must call in their journey. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 227)

नि सर्वसेन इषुर्धौरसक्त समर्यो गा अजति यस्य वष्टि ।  
चोष्कूयमाण इन्द्र भूरि वामं मा पणिर्भूरस्मदधि प्रवृद्ध ॥

(Rigveda, 1.33.3)

He comes with all his armies and has fastened firmly his quivers; he is the fighter (the Aryan) who brings the cows to whomsoever he desires. O Indra who hast increased (by our word), hold not back for thyself thy much delight, become not in us the Pani. (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 227)

(To be continued)

(Compiled by Sampadananda Mishra)

## EXPERIENCE ON THE NIGHT OF 12 APRIL 1962

*(After several weeks of grave illness which threatened the Mother's life.)*

SUDDENLY in the night I woke with the full awareness of what we could call the Yoga of the World. The Supreme Love was manifesting through big pulsations, and each pulsation was bringing the world further in its manifestation. It was the formidable pulsations of the eternal stupendous Love, only Love. Each pulsation of the Love was carrying the universe further in its manifestation.

And there was the certitude that what is to be done is done and that the Supramental Manifestation is realised.

Everything was personal, nothing was individual.

This was going on and on and on and on.

The certitude that what is to be done is *done*.

All the results of the falsehood had disappeared: death was an illusion, sickness was an illusion, ignorance was an illusion—something that had no reality, no existence. Only Love and Love and Love and Love—immense, formidable, stupendous, carrying everything.

And how to express it in the world? It was like an impossibility, because of the contradiction. But then it came: “You have accepted that the world should know the Supramental Truth... and it will be expressed totally, integrally.” Yes, yes....

And the thing is *done*.

*(Long silence)*

The individual consciousness came back: just the sense of a limitation, a limitation of pain; without that, no individual.

And we set out again on the way, sure of Victory.

The skies are full of the songs of Victory.

The Truth alone exists; it alone shall be manifested. Forward!

Glory to Thee, Lord, Supreme Triumpher!

*(Silence)*

Now, to the work.

Patience, endurance, perfect equality, and an absolute faith.

*(Silence)*

What I am saying is nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing but words if I compare it to the experience.

And our consciousness is the same, absolutely the same as that of the Lord. There

was no difference, no difference.

We are That, we are That, we are That.

*(Silence)*

Later I shall explain better. The instrument is not yet ready. This is only the beginning.

*(Afterwards Mother added:)*

The experience lasted for at least four hours.

There are many things which I shall say later.

THE MOTHER

*(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 411-12)*



## SRI AUROBINDO AND THE RIGVEDA

I CANNOT help being highly gratified to find our most distinguished archaeologist, Dr. H. D. Sankalia, reviewing at good length my book, *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, in the *Sunday Review* (September 13). He has picked out some significant points for comment — and what he has to say is always informative. I should like to stress one of them which is vital to my thesis.

He says that “much harm has been done by the view based on insufficient or no evidence that the Aryans came from outside, or that the Dravidians were once the original inhabitants of India”. A clear statement like that, coming from so knowledgeable a researcher and field-worker, is naturally encouraging to me whose contentions he summarizes as “(i) the Rigveda is pre-Harappan, and (ii) the Harappan civilisation contains several elements derivable from the Rigveda.” If indeed we have hardly any ground to posit the hostile entry of Aryans into a Dravidian India in c. 1500 B.C., the field is thrown wide open for the possibility of making them pre-Harappan and deriving from the Rigveda quite a number of elements of the Harappan civilisation.

Only two major obstacles relevant to archaeology would have to be surmounted. Did the Harappans (2500-1500 B.C.) have the domesticated horse whose presence is undeniably shown in the Rigveda? Did they possess the spoked chariot-wheel of which the Rigveda frequently speaks? On the evidence of Surkotada and Lothal, Sankalia’s own answer to the first question is “Yes”. His answer to the second is not equally assured, but it is far from being any kind of “No”. For he admits that Rupar and Banawali “show the existence of the spoked wheel in 1700 B.C.-1500 B.C.”

No doubt, Sankalia does not seem quite prepared to go the whole length with me everywhere, but I am appreciative of whatever favourable observations he makes. Only when he writes apropos of Sri Aurobindo I feel obliged to draw attention to some inadequacies or misunderstandings on his part.

For instance he writes: “Sethna supports his conclusions by citing the views of Sri Aurobindo expressed 50 years ago when the Harappan civilisation had not been discovered.” The suggestion appears to be that Sri Aurobindo’s views may be invalidated — at least partly — because of a number of factors brought up by the Harappan civilisation of which he knew nothing at the time he wrote in his monthly journal the *Arya*, from 1914 to 1921. But he lived long enough — up to the end of 1950 — to take stock of this civilisation and yet he did not modify his views. The reason simply is that his views had nothing to do with it. Let me briefly indicate the points at which my thesis touches his views.

Sri Aurobindo holds, first, that the Rigveda provides no assessable sign that an Aryan invasion of India took place anywhere near the period of its composition. Secondly, the Rigveda’s distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan is cultural and religious, not racial or anthropological. Thirdly, its narrations have basically a symbolic sense: they have essentially a mystic-spiritual and not a naturalistic or historical bearing, so that the non-Aryan is not a Dravidian of the Punjab but a demon of a supernatural domain. Fourthly, to Sri Aurobindo, the popular separation of so-called Aryans from so-called Dravidians is

false: India, in the majority of her population, is a single homogeneous though multi-aspected nation and all alleged anthropological dissimilarities are superficial. Fifthly, even as regards language, Sri Aurobindo's studies convinced him that a South-Indian language like Tamil is much closer than generally believed to not only Sanskrit but also other speeches called Indo-European. The interrelation of all of them is such that Sanskrit and Tamil may very well be derivatives from a common lost language. Face to face with this fivefold stand of Sri Aurobindo we may legitimately ask how the appearance of the Harappan civilisation on the archaeological horizon could make any difference to his views.

If these views are well founded — and I have tried in my book to prove them to be so — they can be used to help my thesis in several respects, but I have also other strings to my bow and have attempted at all places to meet my possible critics — historians, archaeologists, linguists — in their own fields.

In a small compass Sankalia has given a fairly good glimpse of Sri Aurobindo's symbolic interpretation of the Rigveda. However, at one point a badly garbled quotation presents him in rather a confused light, leading to a misconstruction. Here is the passage as Sri Aurobindo wrote it and as I reproduced it in my book:

“We may, if we like, suppose that there was a struggle between two different cults in India and that the Rishis took their images from the physical struggle between the human representatives of these cults and applied them to the spiritual conflict, just as they employed the other details of their physical life to symbolise the spiritual sacrifice, the spiritual wealth, the spiritual battle and journey. But it is perfectly certain that in the Rigveda at least it is the spiritual conflict and victory, not the physical battle and plunder of which they are speaking.”

In Sankalia's quotation all the words from “just as they employed” right on to “it is the spiritual conflict” — forty words — are omitted and Sri Aurobindo's radical position vis-a-vis the nature of the Rigveda completely obscured.

Modern Indian historians are badly infected with the over-pragmatic mentality of Western scholars and would be loth to accept Sri Aurobindo's reading. Sankalia, who describes himself as not only “an archaeologist” but also “one of the devotees of Sri Aurobindo” and, as such, has not lost the Indian mind's natural insight into things of the Spirit, refrains from passing any negative judgment. He even goes out of his way to note that some European scholars themselves — Keith and Macdonell, Roth and Siten Konov — concede the aptness of taking words like *Dasa*, *Dasyu*, *Pani*, *Asura* in the Rigveda to connote non-human opponents from a supraphysical plane. He is correct there, at least as regards many verses of the Hymns. But in his role of archaeologist he feels obliged to ask about Sri Aurobindo's interpretation: “how does it help students like Sethna and myself who look for more objective evidence to solve the Aryan problem?” He is not wrong in coupling me with his own turn of temperament. Though eager for “objective evidence” I would deny that Sri Aurobindo has proceeded subjectively in the ordinary sense of that term. In my special chapter on his interpretation I have sketched the meticulous, methodical, analytic, whole-seeing, reasoned-out treatment of the Rigveda by Sri Aurobindo.

And, without hesitation, I can venture to answer Sankalia's question.

The Rigveda, as ordinarily read, conveys a tale as of physical war by Aryans on irreligious predators and conjures up numerous walled towns (purah) which are stormed and destroyed with the help of the thunder-god Indra and the fire-god Agni. The query must arise: "Whom did the Rigvedics fight and which were the walled towns they attacked and laid low?" But, as Sankalia himself admits, the usual theory of an invasion hangs in the air. He has also added in his review: "There was no Aryan problem 200 years ago, for it had never been suggested or pointed at in any Indian literature or tradition that the seers of the Rigveda had come from outside India." Nor is there corroborative evidence for any kind of actual conflict involving the Aryans who composed the Rigveda. At one time the enemies were supposed to be the Harappans with their several fortified cities, but at present neither Sankalia nor any other responsible archaeologist or historian backs Wheeler's supposition. How then are we to identify the foes and the strongholds? Whatever the period to which we may assign the Rigveda we confront a regular riddle.

The riddle can be solved only by means of the Aurobindonian interpretation — that the Rigvedic war was an inner occult spiritual adventure of mystics and initiates and that the walled towns symbolised the dense concentrations of dark, demoniac forces of subtle worlds encompassing and withholding the sought-for spiritual light. The very absence here of what Sankalia terms "objective evidence" in relation to "the Aryan problem" should make us realise the immense "help" Sri Aurobindo can give to puzzled archaeologists and historians.

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Courtesy: *Times of India*, 11 October 1981)

# THE BALLAD OF SAVITRI

*(Continued from the issue of January 2002)*

## PART V

As consciousness came slowly back  
He recognised his loving wife—  
“Who was it, Love, through regions black  
Where hardly seemed a sign of life  
Carried me bound? Methinks I view  
The dark face yet—a noble face,  
He had a robe of scarlet hue,  
And ruby crown; far, far through space  
He bore me, on and on, but now,” —  
“Thou hast been sleeping, but the man  
With glory on his kingly brow,  
Is gone, thou seest, Satyavan!

O my beloved,—thou art free!  
Sleep which had bound thee fast, hath left  
Thine eyelids. Try thyself to be!  
For late of every sense bereft  
Thou seemedst in a rigid trance;  
And if thou canst, my love, arise,  
Regard the night, the dark expanse  
Spread out before us, and the skies.”  
Supported by her, looked he long  
Upon the landscape dim outspread,  
And like some old remembered song  
The past came back,—a tangled thread.

“I had a pain, as if an asp  
Gnawed in my brain, and there I lay  
Silent, for oh! I could but gasp,  
Till someone came that bore away  
My spirit into lands unknown:  
Thou, dear, who watchedst beside me,—say  
Was it a dream from elfland blown,  
Or very truth,—my doubts to stay.”  
“O Love, look round,—how strange and dread  
The shadows of the high trees fall,

Homeward our path now let us tread,  
To-morrow I shall tell thee all.

Arise! Be strong! Gird up thy loins!  
Think of our parents, dearest friend!  
The solemn darkness haste enjoins,  
Not likely is it soon to end.  
Hark! Jackals still at distance howl,  
The day, long, long will not appear,  
Lo, wild fierce eyes through bushes scowl,  
Summon thy courage, lest I fear.  
Was that the tiger's sullen growl?  
What means this rush of many feet?  
Can creatures wild so near us prow!  
Rise up, and hasten homewards, sweet!"

He rose, but could not find the track,  
And then, too well, Savitri knew  
His wonted force had not come back,  
She made a fire, and from the dew  
Essayed to shelter him. At last  
He nearly was himself again,—  
Then vividly rose all the past,  
And with the past, new fear and pain,  
"What anguish must my parents feel  
Who wait for me the livelong hours!  
Their sore wound let us haste to heal  
Before it festers, past our powers:

For broken-hearted, they may die!  
Oh hasten, dear,—now I am strong,  
No more I suffer, let us fly,  
Ah me! each minute seems so long.  
They told me once, they could not live  
Without me, in their feeble age,  
Their food and water I must give  
And help them in the last sad stage  
Of earthly life, and that Beyond  
In which a son can help by rites.  
Oh what a love is theirs—how fond!  
Whom now Despair, perhaps, benights.

Infirm herself, my mother dear  
 Now guides, methinks, the tottering feet  
 Of my blind father, for they hear  
 And hasten eagerly to meet  
 Our fancied steps. O faithful wife  
 Let us on wings fly back again,  
 Upon their safety hangs my life!"  
 He tried his feelings to restrain,  
 But like some river swelling high  
 They swept their barriers weak and vain,  
 Sudden there burst a fearful cry,  
 Then followed tears,—like autumn rain.

Hush! Hark, a sweet voice rises clear!  
 A voice of earnestness intense,  
 "If I have worshipped Thee in fear  
 And duly paid with reverence  
 The solemn sacrifices,—hear!  
 Send consolation, and thy peace  
 Eternal, to our parents dear,  
 That their anxieties may cease.  
 Oh, ever hath I loved Thy truth,  
 Therefore on Thee I dare to call,  
 Help us, this night, and them, for sooth  
 Without thy help, we perish all."

She took in hers Satyavan's hand,  
 She gently wiped his falling tears,  
 "This weakness, Love, I understand!  
 Courage!" She smiled away his fears.  
 "Now we shall go, for thou art strong."  
 She helped him rise up by her side  
 And led him like a child along,  
 He, wistfully the basket eyed  
 Laden with fruit and flowers. "Not now,  
 To-morrow we shall fetch it hence."  
 And so, she hung it on a bough,  
 "I'll bear thy saw for our defence."

In one fair hand the saw she took,  
 The other with a charming grace  
 She twined around him, and her look

She turned upwards to his face.  
 Thus aiding him she felt anew  
 His bosom beat against her own—  
 More firm his step, more clear his view,  
 More self-possessed his words and tone  
 Became, as swift the minutes past,  
 And now the pathway he discerns,  
 And 'neath the trees, they hurry fast,  
 For Hope's fair light before them burns.

Under the faint beams of the stars  
 How beautiful appeared the flowers,  
 Light scarlet, flecked with golden bars  
 Of the palasas,<sup>1</sup> in the bowers  
 That Nature there herself had made  
 Without the aid of man. At times  
 Trees on their path cast densest shade,  
 And nightingales sang mystic rhymes  
 Their fears and sorrows to assuage.  
 Where two paths met, the north they chose,  
 As leading to the hermitage,  
 And soon before them, dim it rose.

Here let us end. For all may guess  
 The blind old king received his sight,  
 And ruled again with gentleness  
 The country that was his by right;  
 And that Savitri's royal sire  
 Was blest with many sons,—a race  
 Whom poets praised for martial fire,  
 And every peaceful gift and grace.  
 As for Savitri, to this day  
 Her name is named, when couples wed,  
 And to the bride the parents say,  
 Be thou like her, in heart and head.

*(Concluded)*

TORU DUTT

1. Butea Frondosa.

## TWO SPECIAL DARSHANS OF THE MOTHER

This is the account of two unique Darshans that Mother gave to me (and others), experiences that will live for ever in my soul.

### The Ashram Choir

IN 1961 I made my first journey to the Ashram. Jyotipriya had written the Mother sending Her my photograph and a sample of my handwriting. The Mother replied: "He may come and stay as long as he likes." I arrived on November 23, the evening before Darshan. In the weeks to come I had my first interview with the Mother and She arranged for me to teach music in the Ashram school. Since my love for music had been strongly influenced by the choral tradition, I soon began a choir.

There were many good singers among the young men and women who joined, yet even more important, an enthusiastic willingness to rehearse and a joy in singing that infused each work we sang. Having sufficient sheet music for a cappella choir, primarily from the religious repertoire, we soon built a program of choral music from many centuries.

Everyone had an aspiration to learn the scores and to blend their voices, individually and by section, one of the great challenges to all choirs. After numerous rehearsals I can say that the choir had developed into a finely honed ensemble. Most of the singers were in their late teens and early to mid twenties and we all expressed an aspiration to sing for the Mother. I wrote the Mother of our wish to sing for Her but received no reply.

During this time I was seeing Marilyn Widman regularly and she, in her role as an elder sister, encouraged me to write the Mother again. I did so and once more there was no reply. I felt that the Mother was too involved in Her work to be able to devote the time to listen to our choir. Being a callow youth I was deeply influenced by Marilyn who insisted that I write the Mother again since She may not have received my letter or was too busy to answer. Marilyn instructed me to write the Mother that we would sing for Her under Her balcony on a fixed date and hour. This time the Mother replied, fixing the date and time, and saying that it would be better if we would stand by the Samadhi. She would come down the stairs and sit by the window overlooking the Samadhi.

Although at times I have been deeply pained that I troubled the Mother and disturbed Her work, I also realise what an extraordinary blessing She gave us. We were all shocked when we entered the ashram courtyard and found that it was almost completely filled with disciples, for little did we realise how quickly the word had spread that there would be a special darshan.

A place was made for the choir on the east side of the Samadhi looking up towards the window where the Mother was seated. Suddenly, all was silent and it was time to begin our choral offering. The choir was facing the Mother and since I was conducting I faced the Samadhi. All was silent as I gave the tones to the various voice parts. I brought my hands up, gave the downbeat and the most awful cacophony resounded through the



Ashram courtyard!

The first piece was a total disaster! It was so completely out of tune that it was painful. I realized then that we had a serious problem. We had not previously rehearsed out-of-doors and the wind was playing havoc preventing the different sections from hearing each other! And there were still six or more works to sing.

At this point I turned around and lifting my eyes to the window where the Mother sat, I prayed simply: "Mother, we are singing for You, please help us." The remainder of the concert was perfect, not a missed note, everyone in perfect harmony, a blend of voices that would make the angels proud. As we concluded, we all looked to the Mother in gratitude and today, nearly forty years later, I can remember the joy amongst all of us for this very special Darshan.

As everyone began to leave the courtyard I met Dimitri who told me that after our out-of-tune rendition of the first piece on the program, each composition thereafter was indeed perfectly sung.

*(To be concluded)*

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## REMINISCENCES OF THE MOTHER\*

As the Mother said, “We have all been together before.” And I feel convinced that it was She who called me here. For it was on the most auspicious day of February 21<sup>st</sup> in 1946, that I touched the sacred soil of India.

My father, when he was in India during the war, had time to read books on spirituality: books of Vivekananda, Ramakrishna. He came across *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo. Later, in 1943 he had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo on August 15<sup>th</sup> and was so impressed that he decided to settle in the Ashram after the war was over.

So, when my mother asked me if I wanted to go to India, I jumped at the idea. It was arranged for me to travel with Norman Dowsett’s family and we came by ship to Bombay, where my father received me.

It was on the train from Bombay to Madras that my father showed me the photos of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and said: “We are going to the place where these two great persons live.”

On arrival we were given an appointment to meet the Mother. After breakfast, Udar took us and the Dowsett family to Pavitra’s room. My father told me to say: “Bonjour, Douce Mère”, with folded hands and to touch Her feet.

As we were waiting, a dog called Goldie suddenly entered the room and as quickly went out. At that very moment, the Mother swept into the room like a gust of strong wind, saying, “Good Morning, everybody” and shook each one’s hand in a true English way. She asked us if we had a pleasant journey, a nice breakfast and whether we were comfortable where we were staying. I was so much taken by surprise by all that happened that I forgot to say or do what I was supposed to. I was only eleven.

I would like to tell you my impressions of the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. We had a three-day holiday from the school: the day before the Darshan, the Darshan day and the day after, when the Mother would distribute the garlands received on the Darshan Day. Our line on the Darshan day started in the Meditation Hall.

When we entered the Darshan Room, I felt something like a solid peace, as in a dense forest. Even on the steps of the staircase, one could feel it. As one came nearer, one could see Sri Aurobindo sitting majestic but impassive, and the Mother sitting next to Him seemed so regal and radiant. But when She was in trance, Sri Aurobindo looked gracious and smiling, one felt always an atmosphere of peace and light so tangible and yet inexpressible.

The Darshan days were quite different from other days. One felt serenity in the atmosphere and came away with a feeling of warmth and sweetness that lasted for quite some time.

The Mother said that Darshan is a culmination and a fulfilment of a great deal of work done. One had to prepare oneself to receive Their blessings. It is the inner preparation that makes Darshan so special.

\* A talk given in the Hall of Harmony on the 11th May 2001.

The very next day after my arrival in the Ashram, I joined the school. The day began with a prayer: "Douce Mère, permets que nous soyons, dès maintenant et pour toujours, simplement tes petits enfants."

I did not know French. My first teacher did not insist on my learning. So, the first year went by without paying much attention to the subject. The following year, suddenly I became so fascinated by the language, especially because the Mother spoke French, that I began to catch anybody who spoke French well. The life in the Ashram was so different from the life I had lived. I felt at home with everybody, young or old. The atmosphere was so informal and friendly! Everything was centred around the Mother.

Once when I was taken to Champaklal's room where Moti-ba stays now, I saw that there were so many beautiful things, but I was surprised to find that nobody was staying there. When I asked, I was told that it was Champaklal's room, but he was totally occupied with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Isn't it the most beautiful way of living? In each sadhak's room one felt the Mother's Presence in a different way. Since the doors were always open, one felt welcome.

I learned many things from Udar and his family with whom I stayed, even from their dog Beauty and the donkey Baudet, as well as from sitting on the terrace facing the sea. This, I felt, was the most wonderful way of the Mother's teaching. One was allowed to grow spontaneously.

The other person I learned from was Ambu. He taught me among other things the Asanas, how to wash my clothes, how to keep things neat and tidy. Wilfy taught me how to put on a dhoti.

When my father came, the Mother gave him a room and I stayed with him. He worked in the beginning with Nripen-da. He used to prepare breakfast for Nirod-da and Nripen-da and we all sat together. Later, when the University centre began, he taught English.

One of my first mentors and friend was Sunil-da, who taught me botany and later maths, I picked up some knowledge of astronomy too from him. He was very important to me in my intellectual and emotional growth. I used to spend my evenings after the Playground with him, Gauri-di and Chhobi-di.

From the point of view of physical education, it was Biren-da who introduced me to boxing and encouraged by his example the qualities of courage, strength, righteousness and endurance. He also took us out to the red hills, the lake or the riverside. This cultivated my love for Nature.

Here, I would like to share with you the Mother's answers to certain questions which have guided me.

Question: How can maths, history and science help me to find You?

Answer: "They can help in several ways.

1. To be able to receive and support the light of the Truth the mind must be strengthened, widened and made supple. These studies are a very good means to achieve it.

2. Science, if you study it deeply, will help you to learn that the appearances are illusory, and will thus lead you to the spiritual reality.

3. The study of all the aspects of the movements of Physical Nature will put you in contact with the Universal Mother and thus you will be nearer to me."

As far as my studies were concerned, I was interested in botany under Sunil-da. And I wanted to serve the Mother by teaching botany. I tried to do better and better in my studies, and even got a double promotion. And in 1950, I was given by the Mother the Prix d'honneur for studies, whereas Manoj got it for both studies and sports.

My father suggested that if I studied in England I would be able to master the subject and teach better in the Ashram. So, I wrote to the Mother after a year of studying all the subjects in English besides my studies at the school. I asked Her if I could go to England for my studies. However, I wanted to know what She felt about it and whether it was good for my growth towards Her.

She replied: "I intended to let you go for your studies in England without telling you anything about it, because each one must be free to follow the path he has chosen. But after what you have written, I feel compelled to write to you. No doubt, from the exterior point of view, you will find in England all that you want for learning what human beings generally call Knowledge, but from the point of view of Truth and Consciousness, you can find nowhere the atmosphere in which you are living here. Elsewhere you can meet with a religious or a philosophic spirit, but true spirituality, direct contact with the Divine, constant aspiration to realise Him in life, mind and action are in the world realised only by scattered individuals and not as a living fact behind any university teaching, however advanced it may be.

"Physically, as far as you are concerned, there will be a great risk of drifting away from the experience you have realised. And then, you cannot know what will happen to you. That's all that I wanted to say. Now, it is left to you to choose and decide."

When I replied to Her concern for me, saying that I chose not to go, She was very happy and asked me to meet Her in Her room in the playground. She told me that She had informed Medhananda and I could go to the library at any time for my studies. And She told me that since I had decided to stay here, She would give me a responsibility of teaching English in the school. In those days, to be given a responsibility was a great honour, and a great privilege.

In the beginning, I found teaching very difficult since I was not much older than they and the children were unruly. So, I asked the Mother how to control the class. She told me that I should control them by a look and not by shouting, or getting angry or by beating.

Another interesting remark given by the Mother to me was that I should judge the answer of a student by its content rather than by the student who was answering.

It seemed easy to follow it when the Mother told me but difficult to apply at all times.

The Mother knew about my interest in Natural Science and my interest in collecting

seeds and beautiful objects in Nature. The Mother told me that She would give me a room in the new laboratory when it was ready. However, I began working in the physics and chemistry laboratory that had started in the playground. I was helping Joshibhai and Jugal-da.

In 1955 the Mother stopped my English classes and asked me to continue with the Natural History and Geology classes. It was in 1955 that the Mother gave me the new Prix d'honneur that had started in 1954 when Batti was the first to receive it. With the Mother, every detail was important. The Mother was particular about giving me a fair copy of what She had read out at the prize distribution. And though the card of Prix d'honneur was given along with the badge on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December, the very next day, She took the trouble of writing to me as follows:

“This year it has been decided to give the Prix d'honneur to Richard who has particularly shown a persistent and regular effort in realising as integrally as possible the Ideal that is put before us.”

I would like to mention the two or three letters concerning the outings, since my way of teaching Natural Science was not only in the class or the laboratory but also out in Nature.

So I asked the Mother for permission to teach geology in the Red Hills where Auroville is situated now. I concluded, praying to Her to make our studies a means of coming into constant contact with Her. She replied: “Very good for the outing to Auroville and for the aspiration.”

On another occasion, when I was taking children to the backwaters, near the new sports complex, which was called the Military Ground, She wrote: “Very good, provided the children are at least twelve years old and the number is less than ten.”

Lastly, when I wrote to Her asking if I could try out an experiment with a group of twelve children in order to see how we could break the framework of separate subjects, the Mother replied: “It is good, but for the experiment to be useful, the students should have a clear and well-organised mind to avoid all confusion.”

Side by side with studying, teaching and physical exercises, the Mother chose me for several plays. The Mother often chose the part of a villain for me. And I enjoyed playing the part of Polydaon the wicked priest in *Perseus the Deliverer*. An interesting anecdote of the play was that Jugal-da was chosen to play Perseus. We were not impressed with his Bengali accent. Now, on the Dress Rehearsal Day, it was raining. One could hear the sound of rain beating down on the corrugated roof and on the tarpaulin hanging over the Mother's chair. At the end of the play, the Mother remarked to Jugal-da: “I could hear every single word.” We were stunned. But that was the Mother's way of appreciation and encouragement.

The Mother always looked forward. I remember when *The Spiritual Destiny of India*, which She had directed, had its Dress Rehearsal only, She asked: “What shall we do next year?” This was the longest performance, lasting several hours and we thought it the best we could do. The final performance was not yet over. And yet, She was looking forward to the next year's performance.

In 1963, the Mother chose the long passage from Book XI, Canto 1, beginning with “Choose Spirit, thy supreme choice not given again.”. As we sat before the Mother and She prepared to start reading, She first said to us: “Let us read to Sri Aurobindo.” This is the passage with which we are all familiar and is often played in the Playground. She later gave us each a flower of Divine Grace after the reading was over.

We had once an exhibition on Evolution, which was arranged by Madelaine. She referred to the Mother for the smallest details and sought Her guidance. With the Mother’s permission I helped her most actively along with my friends. As we were preparing scientific charts on what science calls Evolution, Madelaine showed these to the Mother. The Mother exclaimed: “Evolution is nothing like that.” She told her to begin with the arrival of Consciousness, saying, “When first Consciousness was there, I was there.” As regards the animal evolution, She indicated that the birds were created by the angels and the insects were a creation of the Asuras. Yet She said the butterflies aspire towards the Light. I suddenly found that I did not have any use for science in the usual sense and the quotations could be selected from Sri Aurobindo’s works. My contribution to the exhibition was the painting of a flower, my first venture. The culmination of the exhibition was to be a surprise that only the Mother and Vishwanath-da knew about. Only when the Mother came to see the exhibition did we see the small but beautiful portrait of Sri Aurobindo etched on a shell and illuminated from behind—a soft orange light.

My father, after he left the Ashram, was invited to build a school by Himatsingka and then by Tara’s father at the Delhi Ashram. Finally, in 1962 he started a school with Hero’s family in Bangalore where he invited me to join him. I asked the Mother. The Mother’s reply was categorical. She wrote:

Richard, my dear child

I have absolutely no intention of letting you leave from here. We have need of you and your excellent work. I consider you as my son. And I have a great confidence in your future from the point of view of Yoga.

Blessings

After this, it was clear that my place and my work were here.

*(To be concluded )*

RICHARD PEARSON

## UNCERTAINTY

A DEPTH of despair or a crest of hope,  
A gloom unknown or a paeon of Muse,  
A distant call of restless sweetness —  
An endless meandering to go where?  
A journey's end or but a beginning still  
Will ever a finale arrive, or,  
The lull will zoom thus for ever —  
In this ever boding uncertainty?  
Aye, why should there be an end and a firm finale  
But not a pregnant vacuum or a brimming void?  
For, the poles are similar, the zenith and the nadir,  
Never reaching but never abandoning, an endless commingling,  
An illusion of work, a claim of ambition as achievement!  
Why not dive in this dance eternal—  
A dulcet rhythm and a boundless bloom?  
A lasting illusion of a forsaken doom?  
Am I free to choose or be but a flotsam?  
Is this freedom or an illusion or a settled truth?  
Is this all the fate or the very haven on earth?  
Unknown, being alien; unsung, being unsensed?  
Who can tell you, aye, who can illumine?  
But why bother and why weep aimlessly?  
Why not swim with wave and waft over so high?  
For, this is all you see, no matter what you try.

K. H. KRISHNAMURTHY

# SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI: A LEGEND AND A SYMBOL

## A Sadhak's Perspective

I HAVE always felt and experienced that as much as *Savitri* provides the illumination to the inquiring mind, enlightenment to the spirit in quest of Divine guidance, and nurtures the soul seeking harmony, truth, and bliss, it also leaves something unsaid explicitly for the truth of it to be discovered, recognized, and realised by the seeker. The oneness with truth is to be experienced by us, if our pursuit is truly spiritual and not merely intellectual.

"To be, that's perfect" and "Knowledge through identity" were two of the simplest and the most helpful messages of the Mother and how very relevant they are here!

The Mother guided us in reading *Savitri* the right way: "But you must not read it as you read other books or newspapers. You must read with an empty head, a blank and vacant mind, without there being any other thought; you must concentrate much, remain empty, calm and open; then the words, rhythms, vibrations will penetrate directly to this white page, will put their stamp upon the brain, will explain themselves without your making any effort."<sup>1</sup>

I believe that Sri Aurobindo never meant *Savitri* to be a recipe book to prepare "Rajbhog"—grand banquet for any philosophical, intellectual or literary indulgence and debate; for he considered, "Yoga is not a thing of ideas but of inner spiritual experience." The Mother provided the significance of linkage in pursuing Integral Yoga and reading *Savitri* to Mona Sarkar: "*Savitri* is his whole Yoga of Transformation, and this Yoga appears now for the first time in the earth consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had made it clear that: "*Savitri* is the record of a seeing, of an experience which is not of the common kind and often very far from what the general human mind sees and experiences."<sup>3</sup>

One might also believe that Sri Aurobindo never meant *Savitri* to be a management manual to successfully complete the assignment of creation of a pre-designed perfect world. As such a scheme would imply precluding the unison of multiplicity of purpose seeking to manifest diverse truth expressions as the essential elements of spontaneity of bliss and harmony. Furthermore, it would not foster mechanical self-determination as evolutionary innate motivation in the scheme of things.

Among other things, *Savitri* is a record of ascension of consciousness to the highest level and revelation of the Supreme's unfathomable will. In a letter to Amal Kiran Sri Aurobindo had stated: "What I am trying to do everywhere in the poem (*Savitri*) is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced..."<sup>4</sup>

This ascension of consciousness was not devoid of the elements of human existence. In fact, the ascension categorically engaged in the issues surrounding them and offered us enlightenment on topics like Nature, love, thought, life, mysterious plan, sunlit space, Void and Self. This is one of the reasons why *Savitri* is a symbol besides being a



legend. How reassuring and enchanting these gems of expression embodied in *Savitri* are for us to calm our turbulent minds and enthrall our spirits!

#### Nature

A consciousness of beauty and of bliss,  
A knowledge which became what it perceived,  
Replaced the separated sense and heart  
And drew all Nature into its embrace.  
The mind leaned out to meet the hidden worlds.<sup>5</sup>

#### Love

And love is a yearning of the One for the One,  
And beauty is a sweet difference of the Same  
And oneness is the soul of multitude.  
There all the truths unite in a single truth,  
And all ideas rejoin Reality.<sup>6</sup>

#### Thought

A dream of seeking thought wandering through space...<sup>7</sup>

#### Life

Life now became a sure approach to God...<sup>8</sup>

#### Mysterious Plan

Then shall the Spirit and Nature be at one.  
Two are the ends of the mysterious plan.<sup>9</sup>

#### Sunlit Space

In the sunlit space where all is for ever known.<sup>10</sup>

#### Void

In the Void he saw throned the Omniscience supreme.<sup>11</sup>

#### Self

He is the Self above Nature, above Fate.<sup>12</sup>

As I understand, *Savitri* is the most remarkably written document with multiple dimensions of purpose. One of the elements of *Savitri* is that it is indeed a record of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's unified mission, undertaking, experiences, and attainments along with their vision of the Supramental world to manifest on evolutionary earth by their sadhana. A small sample of expressions from *Savitri* amply demonstrates the basis for such an understanding.<sup>13</sup>

A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,  
 Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power....  
 At last the traveller in the paths of Time  
 Arrives on the frontiers of eternity....  
 In him that high transition laid its base....  
 The bounded mind became a boundless light,  
 The finite self mated with Infinity.  
 His march now soared into an eagle's flight....  
 She brought immortal words to mortal men....  
 He made great dreams a mould for coming things...  
 His walk through Time outstripped the human stride....  
 He sees the secret things no words can speak  
 And knows the goal of the unconscious world  
 And the heart of the mystery of the journeying years....  
 The Earth-Goddess toils across the sands of Time....  
 A voyager upon uncharted routes  
 Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown,  
 Adventuring across enormous realms,  
 He broke into another Space and Time....  
 Alone he moved watched by the infinity  
 Around him and the Unknowable above....  
 All, even pain, was the soul's pleasure here;  
 Here all experience was a single plan,...  
 A spirit dreamed in the crude cosmic whirl,  
 Mind flowed unknowing in the sap of life  
 And Matter's breasts suckled the divine Idea.  
 A miracle of the Absolute was born,  
 Infinity put on a finite soul,  
 All ocean lived within a wandering drop,  
 A time-made body housed the Illimitable.  
 To live this Mystery out our souls came here....  
 His call had reached the Traveller in Time.  
 Apart in an unfathomed loneliness,  
 He travelled in his mute and single strength  
 Bearing the burden of the world's desire....  
 He mounted towards an indiscernible end  
 On the bare summit of created things....  
 The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,  
 One who is in us as our secret self,...  
 Our life is a paradox with God for key.

As portrayed in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's undertaking was to enable

the full spectrum of evolution on earth. Descent of the Divine, the superconscious on earth and the evolutionary transformation of the inconscient to make the earth, which is the only evolutionary place in the Universe, a place for the divine life. These are interrelated and concurrent undertakings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. These may reflect apparently different foci of their individual undertaking, however it was their unified Avataric undertaking with no distinction between them as to their involvement or their spiritual attainments.

R. Y. Deshpande's elucidation about *Savitri* in his "The Descent into Night"<sup>14</sup>, is very insightful and reinforces the same belief: "If we wish to see the autobiographical—rather the aurobiographical—account in the ancient tale of Savitri, then there should not be any difficulty in associating the Mother with Savitri and Sri Aurobindo with Aswapati himself. This is true not only in the sense of its legendary bearings but also in terms of its symbolic contents. The one-to-one correspondence that is likely to come in the first is enlarged in its spiritual context by the other aspect. It is the great visionary power of the legend that luminously supports the revealing possibilities of the symbol. In a certain sense they actually enrich each other."

The Mother in her infinite wisdom and boundless compassion did communicate to all her disciples about their dual Avataric undertaking described in *Savitri* through Mona Sarkar: "All this is His own experience, and what is most surprising is that it is my own experience also. It is my sadhana which He has worked out. Each object, each event, each realisation, all the descriptions, even the colours are exactly what I saw and the words, phrases are also exactly what I heard."<sup>15</sup>

In their Avataric role, they paved the sun-lit path for the followers of the Integral Yoga—the Yoga of Evolutionary Transformation based on the Supramental Truth. Of that Sri Aurobindo gave us a clear indication through his poem *Evolution*:

All is not finished in the Unseen's decree!  
A mind beyond our mind demands our ken;  
A life of unimagined harmony  
Awaits, concealed, the grasp of unborn men....<sup>16</sup>

As Avatars, they became human and experienced all, endured all, and overcame all that was needed in the universal scheme of the things according to the Will of the Supreme for the ultimate manifestation of the divine life on earth with the Supramental Truth Consciousness. How can any sadhak ever overlook Sri Aurobindo's *A God's Labour*?

He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay  
And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way....

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one  
 And the Titan kings assail,  
 But I cannot rest till my task is done  
 And wrought the eternal will....

He who I am was with me still;  
 All veils are breaking now.  
 I have heard His voice and borne His will  
 On my vast untroubled brow....

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,  
 For in a raiment of gold and blue  
 There shall move on the earth embodied and fair  
 The living truth of you.<sup>17</sup>

In the toil of my life and in its journey of self-discovery and actualization, I have come to recognize one of the remarkable aspects of *Savitri*. It is indeed a guiding grace for the soul to journey to the Infinite, discover the truth of its being, find its own mission, progress along the mystic myriad paths of spiritual longing as an individual self or for the world according to one's own calling. They have left their physical sheaths; however to many sadhaks like me they are occultly ever present and are participating through their subtle bodies to carry on their evolutionary work. It is a matter of personal experience to feel their guiding light and uplifting arms which are not unique to me but in fact many would be in a position to provide testimony to it. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo had indicated subtly of their ongoing participation:

Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.  
 The great World-Mother by her sacrifice  
 Has made her soul the body of our state;  
 Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness  
 Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove  
 The many-patterned ground of all we are.<sup>18</sup>

Whether anyone shares my view is of little importance and it is inconsequential. However, the inevitability of the ultimate outcome of the Supramental Life on earth was decreed in *Savitri*:

The truth-light capture Nature by surprise, ...  
 In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow, ...  
 Our will a force of the Eternal's power,  
 And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.

A few shall see what none yet understands;  
 God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;  
 For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
 And belief shall be not till the work is done.<sup>19</sup>

Their blessings, grace and guidance can be experienced in experiencing and internalizing *Savitri* with sincere prayers. After all, we are given the golden key to the great beyond by Sri Aurobindo:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea...<sup>20</sup>

ARUN VAIDYA

### References

1. Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother—Harmonies of Light*, pp. 26-27.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Editor R. Y. Deshpande, *Perspectives of Savitri* (Aurobharati Trust, August 2000), Volume 1, p. 13: *Sri Aurobindo's Three Letters on Savitri*.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Savitri*, p. 28.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-102.
14. Editor R. Y. Deshpande, *Perspectives of Savitri*, Volume 2, pp. xxviii-xxxv.
15. Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother—Harmonies of Light*, pp. 26-27.
16. *SABCL*, Vol. 5, p. 164.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-102.
18. *Savitri*, p. 99.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

## NOT JUST FOR ONE LIFE...

Not just for one life was *Savitri* born,  
She continues in us.  
“The seed cast by the superhuman”  
Will not be in vain,  
For we know our inheritance  
And seek it with faith.  
Bow we will not but persist  
Till we see Her smiling Presence  
Without veil, in all its glory  
In our heart.

One day  
The Supreme through His garb of inconscience  
Shall smile seeing Her radiance  
In our face.

DINKAR PALANDE

A comment by Amal Kiran:  
Very appealing and very evocative.

## THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

### The Symbolism of Night in “The Symbol Dawn”

#### 4

BEFORE we trace further the composition of the opening of *Savitri*, our study of the “huge foreboding mind of Night” must be completed by a comment on the sense of pessimism implied by “foreboding”. The significance of the replacement of “spirit of Night” by “mind of Night” in Sri Aurobindo’s final revision of this line must also be brought out more fully.

This third line of *Savitri* conveys, as we have seen, with a concentrated rhythmic force the entire opposition to any transfiguration of darkness into light in the difficult field of earthly life. In the action of the poem, Death and Fate are the guises under which this opposition appears to Savitri, the aspects of cosmic being with which she struggles and over which she triumphs in the end by virtue of the divine Power she embodies in a human form. In the last two instalments, it has been suggested that the huge “mind of Night” in the third line corresponds to the “cosmic mind” of Death that confronts Savitri later on, and that the forebodings of this mind are its ominous musings on the dark map of the future which it presents to our experience as Fate.

Savitri’s finding of her soul, we have noted, brought her glimpses of a future quite different from the fate that had been foretold by Narad. However, this psychic change was an individual victory that was insufficient by itself for the work she had come to do. The strength for a decisive conquest over Death and Fate could come only by rising to a greater spiritual consciousness such as is described in the last cantos of “The Book of Yoga”. To compel Savitri to undergo this transformation, her treading of the “Golden Path” was interrupted by a devastating experience. Invaded by a “formless Dread”, she was plunged into the “shadow of the negating Absolute”:

It seemed her very being to forbid,  
Abolishing all by which her nature lived,...  
An ocean of terror and of sovereign might,  
A person and a black infinity.  
It seemed to cry to her without thought or word  
The message of its dark eternity....  
It left behind her inner world laid waste:...  
Her kingdom of delight was there no more;  
Only her soul remained, its emptied stage....<sup>1</sup>

This “denser darkness than the Night could bear” reminds us of the “absolute supernatu-

ral darkness” which in the second canto of *Savitri* is said to fall sometimes on man when he draws near to God, causing all his nature’s means to fail and forcing him to “be the ungarbed entity within”.<sup>2</sup> This spiritual phenomenon is mentioned only a few pages after the account of the darkness before dawn that begins the poem. These passages must be related in some way, whatever the differences between them.

In the first canto the darkness is cosmic; in Canto Two it is individual. In Book Seven, Canto Six, it is likewise an individual experience that is represented, although *Savitri* becomes aware of the darkness as pervading the world. In the opening passage, the symbolism of Night is developed with the profundity demanded by its place at the head of the poem, suggesting multiple levels of interpretation. But what we might call the “symbol night”, which precedes the “symbol dawn” and sets the scene for the whole action of the epic, has an element in common with other less complex uses of the natural psychological connotations of night and darkness, both in *Savitri* and in Sri Aurobindo’s other writings. A glance at this common element could reveal a level of meaning in the prologue to *Savitri* that might otherwise be missed.

The darkness of night before the dawn is a recurrent image in Sri Aurobindo’s letters written in the 1930s and 1940s. It refers at times to a stage in individual sadhana, at times to a general condition of things. Sometimes it is applicable collectively as well as individually, as when the underlying principle of the relation of night to dawn is stated from the spiritual point of view:

It is the darkest nights that prepare the greatest dawns—and it is so because it is into the deepest inconscience of material life that we have to bring, not an intermediate glimmer, but the full play of the divine Light.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to individual sadhana, Sri Aurobindo writes in another letter of “the period of darkest night before the dawn which comes to every or almost every spiritual aspirant”. He explains why this happens:

It is due to a plunge one has to take into the sheer physical consciousness unsupported by any true mental light or by any vital joy in life, for these usually withdraw behind the veil, though they are not, as they seem to be, permanently lost. It is a period when doubt, denial, dryness, greyiness and all kindred things come up with a great force and often reign completely for a time. It is after this stage has been successfully crossed that the true light begins to come, the light which is not of the mind but of the spirit.

After clarifying that it “is not by one’s own fault that one falls into this state, it can come when one is trying one’s best to advance”, Sri Aurobindo acknowledges:

It is difficult to explain these things because the psychological necessity is difficult for the ordinary human reason to understand or to accept.<sup>4</sup>

But if the inner necessity of such periods is not easy for the individual to understand, the difficulty is multiplied when it is a collective phenomenon. In a letter dictated in 1947, Sri Aurobindo commented on a state of mind that was becoming “general in the Ashram as well as in the outside world”. The first group of symptoms seems to pertain particularly to the sadhaks of the yoga:

Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm



for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty.

Sri Aurobindo explained this condition as being due to the yoga having come down against the bed-rock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading toward that victory.

But in the next sentence he goes on to speak of a widespread pessimism and disillusionment, as if the world as a whole was following a downward curve related to the movement of the yoga:

In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure, to the exclusion of higher things, and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world.

This graphic description, which seems more applicable today than when it was written more than half a century ago, brings us back to the “foreboding mind of Night”. For the “expectation of worse and worse things” is the very definition of pessimism and gloomy foreboding. No doubt, Sri Aurobindo was deliberately presenting only one side of the picture. The continuation of the letter discloses what lies behind and beyond this dismal state of affairs:

All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming.<sup>5</sup>

That this is connected with at least one strand in the meaning of “The Symbol Dawn” is suggested by Sri Aurobindo’s own explanation, written the year before the letter quoted above, of his intention in the opening passage of *Savitri*:

I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal.<sup>6</sup>

These two letters are linked by the word “temporary” referring to the darkness and what it symbolises. The letter on *Savitri* seems to support the interpretation of “the hour before the Gods awake” as referring to the present evolutionary crisis, when the higher powers still asleep in humanity are preparing to emerge and play an open part. The reading of the passage as a symbolic account of the beginning of creation, as it is often understood, is not excluded by the interpretation proposed here. The two readings are consistent with each other, since that which is caught in the Night, as Sri Aurobindo says, feels the Night to be eternal. This sense is strongly expressed in the opening lines, so that through “a temporary feeling” the obscure origin of things is glimpsed.

Sri Aurobindo’s acquaintance with the aspect of “the workings of the world-energy” which had prepared him for “this worst” is evidenced as early as 1909. In “The Process of Evolution”, an essay published in the *Karmayogin* in September of that year,

he wrote:

The end of a stage of evolution is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution.

In 1918, in *The Psychology of Social Development* (later revised and published as *The Human Cycle*), Sri Aurobindo wrote of the way in which “God works all his miracles by an evolution of secret possibilities... and in the end by a rapid bringing of all to a head”:

Often the change is preceded by an apparent emphasising and raising to their extreme of things which seem the very denial, the most uncompromising opposite of the new principle and the new creation.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter he dictated in 1948, Sri Aurobindo went so far as to say:

Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible—and anything, however paradoxical, seems possible in the present perturbed world.

But because he saw this situation as a passing phase and knew the purpose it served, his view of it was anything but pessimistic:

The best thing... is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of, if a new and better world was at all to come into being: it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is, as in yoga, where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose.

Those who are lamenting the present state of things, he continued, “can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable.”<sup>8</sup>

The antidote Sri Aurobindo prescribed for the depression that tends to prevail during such periods was simple:

Faith, more faith! Faith in your possibilities, faith in the Power that is at work behind the veil, faith in the work that is to be done....

While there is no need to delude oneself “with too bright an outlook”, he wrote in the same letter, neither should “you always lay stress too much on the shadows and by so doing thicken them and obstruct your outlets of escape into the Light.”<sup>9</sup>

Sri Aurobindo regarded even an “excessive optimism” as “more helpful than excessive pessimism”, though he did not insist on a “Couéistic optimism” which may tend “to cover up difficulties”.<sup>10</sup> He wrote in another letter:

Neither optimism nor pessimism is the truth: they are only modes of the mind or modes of the temperament.<sup>11</sup>

Yet there can be no doubt about which of these attitudes is more productive:

You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana—progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.<sup>12</sup>

The Mother distinguished a conscious and voluntary from an ignorant and involuntary optimism.<sup>13</sup> She recommended:

Check pessimism in your thoughts as much as you can and become a voluntary optimist.<sup>14</sup>

All this pertains to the pessimistic thoughts in the mind and depression of the vital forces that can result from sinking into the obscure physical consciousness into which the Light has to be brought down—the “dull gravitation” mentioned in *Savitri*, which “draws the unwilling spirit from the heights” and drags it down to “the blind driven inertia of our base”.<sup>15</sup> But mental or vital pessimism, however debilitating, is merely a shadow of a pessimism that poses a more fundamental challenge, because it is closer to the very root of the problem of our existence.

The Mother spoke of the tremendous difficulty she encountered in her work on the body due to “the weight of thousands of years of bad habits which may be called pessimistic, that is to say, expecting decline, expecting catastrophe”:

It is this which is the great, great obstacle, this kind of feeling of the inevitable decline.

Naturally, from the mental point of view, the whole earthly atmosphere is like that, but in the mind it has very little importance: a ray of light and it is swept away.

This is evidently the first step towards a solution, to bring a ray of light into the mind and free it from all pessimism and thoughts of doubt, discouragement, depression or despair. Then the crux of the problem reveals itself:

But it is there *within* (*Mother points to her body*), it is this habit—this catastrophic habit—which is formidable, formidable to counteract. And it is *indispensable* that it should disappear so that the other may instal itself.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Notes on the Way*, the Mother indicated more specifically what part of the being clings to this disastrous habit of pessimism:

The big difficulty in Matter is that the material consciousness (that is to say, the mind in Matter) has been formed under the pressure of difficulties—difficulties, obstacles, sufferings, struggles.

The stamp of pessimism, of defeatism that has thus been left upon this mind in Matter is, the Mother said, “certainly the greatest obstacle”. Elaborating further on the negativity of the “most material mind” and the way to convert it, she said:

And then, so far as it imagines, it imagines always difficulty, always the obstacle or always the opposition, and that slows down the movement terribly. Very concrete, very tangible and *often repeated* experiences are needed to convince it that behind all its difficulties there is a Grace, behind all its failures there is the Victory, behind all its pains, its sufferings, its contradictions, there is Ananda.<sup>17</sup>

(*To be continued*)

RICHARD HARTZ

*Notes and References*

1. *Savitri* (1993), pp. 534-36.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
3. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 35.
4. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1426.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 1611.
6. *Savitri*, p. 736.
7. Arya, 15 January 1918, p. 358. Sri Aurobindo revised “change” to “decisive turn” before *The Human Cycle* was published in book-form in 1949. Cf. *The Human Cycle* (1998), p. 183.
8. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, pp. 1611-12.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 1686.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 166.
12. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1632.
13. See *Prayers and Meditations* (March 23, 1914), CWM, Vol. 1, p. 107. The expressions translated as “unwitting optimist” and “willing optimist” are, in the French, “optimiste involontaire” and “optimiste volontaire”.
14. *On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 141.
15. *Savitri*, p. 34.
16. *Notes on the Way*, CWM, Vol. 11, pp. 73-74.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

## THE INTIMATE TOUCH

PEACE in the heart of peacock feather,  
A touch of rare lightness in the weather!  
A breeze that raised all the planes higher,  
A gentle ripple of Plenitude is mightier.  
A conscious force runs through tissue and cell  
Down the memory, even as it casts a spell.  
What the faint image the eye saw,—  
O at that then the frozen heart thawed.  
Forsaken life felt an intimacy,  
In some luminous privacy.  
The captive mind quivered to welcome  
The heralded new millennium.  
This emerging consciousness,  
Something that leaps in suddenness  
Faster than the past and the present,  
As if born in a momentous event,  
It holds in its living reality  
A growing presence of wondrous divinity.  
In this world, within, secret, dear,  
Was the Truth-beauteous so clear,  
That Time, Space, Chance, Circumstance  
All seemed only the waves of the sea;  
A presence beneath hid a mystic key.

The gulf belched out inconscience  
And to the sense and touch of the ultimate  
Recovered was the great Self,—  
Of self, by self, for self, from self,  
To blossom into flower of Love.  
In the heart of the inert Earth  
Now is kindled the sentient hearth.  
Truth from below, around, above,  
To receive, to absorb, to accommodate,  
To be full,—O the infinite's victory,  
Which IS to be  
Conscious, Conscious and Conscious!  
To be Conscious!

SHAKUNTALA MANAY

## OVERMAN — THE TRANSITIONAL BEING BETWEEN MAN AND SUPERMAN

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

**“There are some ...”**

DISCUSSING the constitution of the supramental being, the Mother said on 30 September 1966: “This would be a transformation that is infinitely greater than that from the animal into man: this would be a change from man into a being no longer built in the same way, no longer functioning in the same way, being as it were a condensation or concretisation of something ... Up to the present, this corresponds to nothing we have yet seen physically, unless the scientists have found something I do not know of ... It is the leap, you see, that seems so enormous to me. I conceive without difficulty of a being that could, by spiritual power, the power of its inner being, absorb the necessary forces, renew itself and remain always young. One conceives this without any difficulty, even that some suppleness can be given to change the form if need be. But the total disappearance of this system of construction [of the body] all at once—all at once, from one [being] to the other? ... It seems to require stages”.<sup>1</sup>

She continued to reflect on this. “How long would it take to do away with the necessity – let us consider this problem only—of the skeleton? This seems to me still very far away in the future.” The physical substance required for the functioning of the supramental body would have to be of a kind “that I do not know. It is not the substance as we know it now, and it is surely not the [bodily] construction that we know now ... It seems to me that between what exists at present, the way we are, and that other form of life, many intermediary stages will be needed ... It is something I feel more and more: the necessity of intermediary periods. It is quite obvious that something is happening, but it is not the ‘something’ that was seen and foreseen, and that will be the final accomplishment [i.e. the supramental being]. It is one of the [intermediary] stages that is going to happen, it is not the final accomplishment”.<sup>2</sup>

Then, on the first day of the year 1969 something “new” happened. “During the night it was coming slowly, and on waking up in the morning there was as it were a golden dawn, and the atmosphere was very light. The body<sup>3</sup> felt: ‘Hey, this is really, really new’. A golden light, imponderous and benevolent—benevolent in the sense of a certitude, a harmonious certitude. It was new. *Voilà*. And when I say ‘*bonne année*’ to the people, it is that that I pass on to them. And this morning I have spent my time like this, spontaneously, saying: ‘*Bonne année, bonne année ...*’”

The Mother never mentally dissected her experiences immediately after they had happened. She let them develop and take their complete shape so that she could be sure of their meaning, of their portent. We will follow the process in this case. On 4 January, she said: “On the 1st something really strange happened. And I was not the only one to feel it,

several other persons felt it too. It was just after midnight [i.e. the beginning of the new year], but I felt it at two o'clock and others felt it at four o'clock in the morning. Last time I spoke to you about it in passing, but what is surprising is that it had absolutely nothing to do with anything I was expecting—I was expecting nothing—or with other things which I had felt [coming] ...

"My impression was that of an immense personality. Immense! By this I mean that, compared to it, the earth was small, small like this [*gesture as if holding a small ball in the palm of her hand*], like a ball. An immense personality, very, very benevolent, that came in order to—[*Mother does as if she gently lifts up a small ball in the palm of her hand*]. The impression was of a personal godhead ... who comes to help. And so strong, so strong and at the same time so gentle, so comprehending ...

"It was luminous, smiling, and so benevolent *because of its power*. By this I mean that, generally speaking, benevolence in the human being is something rather weak, in the sense that it does not like combat, it does not like fighting. This is nothing of the sort! [It is] a benevolence that imposes itself [*Mother brings her fists down upon the armrests of her chair*] ... What is it? ... Since its coming, the feeling of the body is of a kind of certitude, a certitude as if now it no longer has the anxiety or uncertainty of needing to know: 'How will it be like? What will the Supramental be like—*physically*, what will it be like physically?' That was what the body asked itself. Now it does not think of that any more, it is satisfied ...

"I have the feeling that it is the formation that is going to enter, that is going to express itself—to enter and express itself—in what will be the bodies of the Supramental. Or perhaps ... perhaps the overman [*le surhomme*],<sup>4</sup> I don't know. The intermediary between the two [between man and superman]. Perhaps the overman. It was very human, but human with divine proportions, you see. Human without weaknesses and without shadows: it was all light, all light and smiling, and sweetness at the same time. Yes, perhaps the overman."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, on 8 January, she identified the new Consciousness: "It is the descent of the consciousness of the overman [*le surhomme*]. I had the assurance afterwards. It was 1 January, after midnight. I woke up at two in the morning, surrounded by a consciousness, so concrete and so *new*, by which I mean that I had never felt that before. And it lasted, absolutely concrete, *there*, for two or three hours. And afterwards it spread out and went in search of all the people who were able to receive it. And I knew that it was the consciousness of the overman, that is to say: the intermediary between man and the supramental being. This has given to the body a kind of assurance, of confidence. It is as if this experience stabilised it [the body], and, if it keeps the right attitude, as if every support is there to help it".<sup>6</sup>

Ten days later, on 18 January, the Mother had become quite familiar with the new Consciousness: "Well, it is very consciously active. It is like a projection of power. And it has now become habitual. There is a consciousness in it – something *very* precious—that gives lessons to the body, teaching it what it must do, that is to say, which attitude it must take, which reaction it must have. I had told you many times that it is very difficult to find

the process of transformation when there is nobody to give you any indications. Well, it is as if this were the reply. It comes and tells the body: 'Take this attitude, do this, do that in that way'. And so the body is content, it is completely reassured, it can no longer be mistaken. It is very interesting. It came as a mentor—*practical*, completely practical ... In one of the former *entretiens*, when I spoke there at the Playground, I said: 'No doubt, the overman will be in the first place a being of power, so that he may defend himself'. Well, this is it, it is that experience. It came back as an experience. And it is because it came back as an experience that I remember having said it."<sup>7</sup>

We may draw some conclusions from these words with their far-reaching implications. Overman is the intermediary being between man and superman, and his job is to make the supramental being possible, to find the means of producing the supramental body that will be the crown of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Yoga—and of the Yoga of all those who work towards the same aim, who are "looking in the same direction" as the Mother put it. This, however, does not mean that the Consciousness of the overman is less than the supramental Consciousness. The latter having been established in the atmosphere of the earth in 1956, it would make no sense for a lesser consciousness to become active in the ongoing process of supramentalisation. The Consciousness of the overman is an *aspect* of the supramental Consciousness: it *is* the supramental Consciousness that emanates itself in a certain way in order to accomplish a certain task, namely the formation of the overman.

Two facts make this very clear. Firstly, the consciousness of the intermediary being that is overman is a supramental consciousness, called by Sri Aurobindo "the Mind of Light". The fact that he defined it as the lowest degree of the Supermind does not diminish its importance. *Any* degree of the Supermind is supramental; anything supramental is divine; anything divine is worlds above our human status. Secondly, in 1969 the Mother was already far advanced in the realisation of the supramental body within her gross material body. Therefore the fact that she was so plainly content with the presence and guidance of the Consciousness of the overman, acting as her mentor, is a sure indication of its supramental status.

The presence of the Consciousness of the overman in the atmosphere of the earth is a permanent fact, whether it is known or not. Its means that overmen and overwomen are coming into existence and are already there, now, unnoticed, in the common mass of humanity. The Mother herself has pointed this out when she said in April 1972: "The change from the human into the supramental being is being achieved ... through the overman. It may be that there will be some overmen—*there are some*—who will make the transition possible".<sup>8</sup>

Another relevant reference in this connection is found in one of the very last *entretiens* which is dated fourteen years earlier: "All those who make an effort to overcome their ordinary nature, all those who try to realise materially the profound experience that has brought them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning to the Hereafter or the On-high, try to realise physically, externally, the change of consciousness they have realised within themselves—all those are apprentice-overmen [*des*



*apprentis-surhommes*]. Among them, there are countless variations according to the success of their efforts. Each time we try not to be an ordinary man, not to live the ordinary life, to express in our movements, our actions and reactions the divine Truth, when we are governed by that Truth instead of being governed by the general ignorance, we are apprentice-overmen, and according to the success of our efforts we are, well, more or less good apprentices, more or less advanced on the way”.<sup>9</sup>

The Mother would continue her sometimes ecstatic, often gruesome, but always glorious Yoga of the body till the end on 17 November 1973, at the time of writing exactly twenty-seven years ago. Gradually the prototype of the supramental body took shape in her in a series of extraordinary experiences. She saw her new body in May 1970, and *ce n'était pas surhumain*, it was not a body of the overman but of the superman. In March 1972 the formation of the supramental body was complete: she was like that, she said, she “had a totally new body”. But this is outside the compass of this essay and has been narrated elsewhere.

The twentieth century has seen such a storm of upheaval that the learned have run out of explanations. Our world, our planet is going through an unprecedented crisis; all are agreed that something singular is happening, but nobody has any notion what that something might be. This is not unusual: mankind has never known the deeper rationale of the throes it was subject to, except *post factum*, and the exceptional beings who did know have never been believed. Why should it be otherwise this time? “Most people are blind”, said the Mother, “they will go till the end without seeing anything. But those who have their eyes open will see”.<sup>10</sup> In order to see, however, there is a condition: that we change from a blind species into a species which has its inner sight activated—that the darkness of our mind changes into a Mind of Light. All remains literature and fantasy stuff unless we become apprentice-overmen and apprentice-overwomen.

“There are some ...”

(Concluded)

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

### *Notes and References*

1. The Mother: *Notes on the Way*, pp. 46-47.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 55 ff.
3. Since the great experience of April 1962, the Mother considered her body as *a* body that she had taken up to continue the Work.
4. Here again *surhomme* has each time been translated by ‘superman’.
5. The Mother: *Notes on the Way*, pp. 149 ff.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 153 (emphasis in the text).
7. The Mother: *Notes on the Way*, pp. 154-55 (emphasis in the text).
8. *Mother's Agenda*, 15 April 1972.
9. The Mother: *Questions and Answers 1957-58*, p. 411.
10. *Mother's Agenda*, 18 May 1968.

# THE ASCENT OF SIGHT IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of January 2001)

Part Three (contd.)

## 5. The Divine's Cosmic Vision:

The manifestation begins; the worlds are created. The passive Sachchidananda is now in his role of all-watching, all-governing Cosmic Purusha. To quote Sri Aurobindo: "The Brahman-consciousness [in this case]... is not the Absolute withdrawn into itself, but that Absolute in its outlook on the relative; it is the Lord, the Master-Soul, the governing Transcendent and All..." (SABCL, Vol. 12, p. 198) He is the *samam brahma*, "the Brahman with unbounded equal vision" of the Gita. Here are some *Savitri* verses which strikingly bring out this impartial all-governing vision of the Divine in his dealing with the cosmos:

- (1) "Heaven's fixed regard beholds him from above" (336)
- (2) "Impartial fell its gaze on evil and good" (283)
- (3) "All things he sees with calm indifferent gaze" (646)
- (4) "He is the one infinite Person seeing this world" (656)
- (5) "... Cosmic Being at his task" (416)
- (6) "Calm eyes divine regard the human scene" (482)
- (7) "A wide unshaken look at Time's unrest" (36)
- (8) "Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,  
Impartial witness to our joy and bale" (5)

## 6. The Vision of the One in the Many:

This one is a vision every Sadhaka on the Integral Path aspires after and seeks to acquire as the sure and secure *point d'appui* in the ups and downs of his long tortuous journey of Yoga. Indeed, the progressive elevation and enlargement of the divided and limited egoistic sight will lead the sadhaka to a harmonising vision of the One in All and of All in the One. The Sadhaka is then able to see that all becoming without exception, irrespective of the plane in which it manifests, is born in the Being of Sachchidananda who himself, of course, transcends all becomings and is always their Lord, *Prajapati*. Here is a passage from *The Synthesis of Yoga* where Sri Aurobindo speaks of the capital importance of this momentous vision of the One in All:

"The one secure and all-reconciling truth which is the very foundation of the universe is this that life is the manifestation of an uncreated Self and Spirit, and the key to

life's hidden secret is the true relation of this Spirit with its own created existences. There is behind all this life the look of an eternal Being upon its multitudinous becomings; there is around and everywhere in it the envelopment and penetration of a manifestation in time by an unmanifested timeless Eternal." (pp. 106-07)

Here is a passage, rather long, from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* which pin-points in sublime verses the essential character of this vision:

"A cosmic vision, a spiritual sense  
 Feels all the Infinite lodged in finite form  
 And seen through a quivering ecstasy of light  
 Discovers the bright face of the Bodiless.  
 In the truth of a moment, in the moment's soul  
 Can sip the honey-wine of Eternity.  
 A spirit who is no one and innumerable,  
 The one mystic infinite Person of his world  
 Multiplies his myriad personality,  
 On all his bodies seals his divinity's stamp  
 And sits in each immortal and unique.  
 The Immobile stands behind each daily act,  
 A background of the movement and the scene,  
 Upholding creation on its might and calm  
 And change on the Immutable's deathless poise.  
 The Timeless looks out from the travelling hours;  
 The Ineffable puts on a robe of speech..." (662)

## 7. The Vision of the Universal Spirit:

This vision does not limit itself to that of the One in the All; it extends itself to cover the integral perception of the All as the One. This universe in its entirety is the very Supreme Self figured in cosmic existence. The vision of the universal Purusha offers the Sadhaka a concrete living sight, in vivid images, of the visible greatness of the invisible Divine. The Sadhaka can then see the whole world related and unified in the very Body of the Divine. The soul admitted to this awe-inspiring vision beholds all things in one view, not with a divided, partial, and therefore bewildered seeing of the mental consciousness but with the all-embracing and therefore all-reconciling courageous vision of the heroic spirit. For the happy consequence of this vision of the Universal Spirit we may read with interest the following passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*:

"It is this vision that ... liberates, justifies, explains all that is and was and shall be. Once seen and held it lays the shining axe of God at the root of all doubts and perplexities and annihilates all denials and oppositions. It is the vision that reconciles and unifies. If

the soul can arrive at unity with the Godhead in this vision, ... all even that is terrible in the world loses its terror.” (p. 364)

Now let us take a joyous dip into some verses of *Savitri* wherein Sri Aurobindo is describing how the Divine intimately manifests himself through all that is in the cosmos:

“The universe writing its tremendous sense  
In the inexhaustible meaning of a word.  
In him the architect of the visible world,  
At once the art and artist of his works,  
Spirit and seer and thinker of things seen,  
Virât, who lights his camp-fires in the suns  
And the star-entangled ether is his hold,  
Expressed himself with Matter for his speech  
Objects are his letters, forces are his words,  
Events are the crowded history of his life,  
And sea and land are the pages of his tale,  
Matter is his means and his spiritual sign...  
His is the dumb will of atom and of clod;  
A Will that without sense or motive acts,  
An intelligence needing not to think or plan,  
The world creates itself invincibly;  
For its body is the body of the Lord  
And in its heart stands Virât, King of kings.” (680-81)

We now propose to enter the “forbidden land”, for we are daring to speak about the vision of the Supreme Form of the supreme Divine. But does the Divine have any form? Is he not *arūpa* or “formless” as the monistic Vedantin would affirm?

But before attempting to discuss these tricky questions it will be better if we first clearly bring out the nature of the evolving relationship between “form” and “sight”; for, that will incidentally throw some light on the question of whether the Supreme possesses a Supreme Form of his own and, if yes, whether this Form can at all be the object of any sight whatsoever.

## 8. On Form and Sight:

The very first point we have to note carefully is “that not only are the properties of form, even the most obvious such as colour, light, etc. merely operations of Force, but form itself is only an operation of Force. This Force again proves to be self-power of conscious-being in a state of energy and activity. Practically, therefore, all form is only an operation of consciousness impressing itself with presentations of its own workings.” (*SABCL*, Vol. 12, p. 195)

Thus the form is the last derivative of an action of the consciousness. A momentous implication follows from this basic fact. Supposing there is an object X with its fundamental essential reality unknown and hidden. Now a subject, a viewer, looking at the object X will clothe this X with a form which will vary depending on the level of consciousness the seer employs while seeing the object. We cannot but recall here a very interesting passage of Sri Aurobindo so beautifully formulated:

“Of all that we know we know only the outside; even when we imagine that we have intimately seized the innermost thing, we have touched only an inner external. It is still a sheath of the covering, only it is a second or third or even a seventh sheath, [and] not the most outward and visible.” (Essays Divine and Human, pp. 197-98)

Thus the forms seen by a particular seer may not be the ordinary vision of man:

- (1) “Forms he descried our mortal eyes see not” (44)
- (2) “Aware of forms to which our eyes are closed” (356)
- (3) “A sight opened upon the invisible

And sensed the shapes that mortal eyes see not” (540)

But forms of whatever subtlety and elevation need not always remain an inseparable accompaniment of vision; shapes need not bind the sight always:

- (1) “Into a vision that surpasses forms” (32)
- (2) “My vision saw unbounded by her forms” (401)
- (3) “Shape the convention bound no more her sight” (695)

But sight has the inherent tendency to clothe itself with images, images not surely gross and physical in all cases but however subtle and sublime and elevated these images may be, they stand as a bar to the ungarbed vision of the truth. Hence a point is reached when the vision in its aspiration after the bare body of the truth seeks to distance itself from the pursuit of the imaged sight:

“Here vision fled back from the sight alarmed...” (604)

But even if it is not an “imaged form”, some form there must be in every act of vision and sight. Indeed, there are, as we have hinted before, forms and forms of an ever ascending order reaching up to the extreme border of manifestation. For forms are manifestations in Time and Space of something real, not arbitrary inventions out of nothing. Therefore the essentials of form carry always in them secret values and significances of an unseen reality made visible and sensible. In Sri Aurobindo's words, “Form may be said to be the innate body, the inevitable self-revelation of the formless, and this is true not only of external shapes, but of the unseen formations of mind and life which we seize only by our thought and those sensible forms of which only the subtle grasp of the inner consciousness can become aware.” (*The Life Divine*, pp. 337-38)

But still there has to be a limiting finis to this ascending march of vision and therefore of shapes and forms. When one reaches the horizons of manifestation, standing on

the dividing line of separation between manifestation and non-manifestation, one seems to discover that sight and form cannot cross the line and one is left with a pure perception alone and if this ends, the whole *nāmarūpātmakam jagat*, the world of names and forms, will vanish into nothingness.

Let us pause for a moment at this critical juncture of the ascension and savour instead the beauty of the description given by Sri Aurobindo in his *Savitri*:

- (1) "His soul abandoned the blind star-field, Space.  
Afar from all that makes the measured world,  
Plunging to hidden eternities it withdrew  
Back from mind's foaming surface to the Vasts  
Voiceless within us in omniscient sleep.  
Above the imperfect reach of word and thought,  
Beyond the sight, the last support of form,  
Lost in deep tracts of superconscious Light" (320)
- (2) "A pure perception was the only power  
That stood behind her action and her sight.  
If that retired, all objects would be extinct,  
Her private universe would cease to be" (546)
- (3) "Yet something was there behind the fading scene;  
Wherever she turned, at whatsoever she looked,  
It was perceived, yet hid from mind and sight.  
The One only real shut itself from Space  
And stood aloof from the idea of Time.  
Its truth escaped from shape and line and hue.  
All else grew unsubstantial, self-annulled,  
This only everlasting seemed and true,  
Yet nowhere dwelt, it was outside the hours.  
This only could justify the labour of sight,  
But sight could not define for it a form" (547)

Have we then at last reached the end of the ascent of sight which has been the running theme of our essay? Is there indeed no form, no sight in the transcendent Absolute? Yet it is a fact that Sri Aurobindo speaks at times of "deathless forms", of "forms in the Eternal's gaze" and of "self-born shapes":

- (1) "Vision reposed on a safety of deathless forms" (329)
- (2) "Formless Creator and immortal forms" (681)
- (3) "... self-born shapes  
That live for ever in the Eternal's gaze." (109)

(4) “He met the forms that divinise the sight” (235)

So in puzzlement we ask ourselves the question: Is the Absolute Reality absolutely formless? Can there not be a supreme Form of the supreme Divine? A human eye, it is well understood, cannot ever hope to vision this Form but is there not a divine Eye, *divya cakṣu*, to which this supreme Form may reveal itself? Our next section will be devoted to the discussion of this point.

*(To be concluded)*

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

## THE DRAGONS

ON the edge of the twilit ocean  
The baby dragons innocently play—  
Their curving bodies formed of spray  
Zip  
This way, that way  
Splash and crash across the bay  
Leapfrogging on their way  
The foamy fingers of the nymphs who tirelessly push  
The wrinkling ripples one by one to shore.

Further out and deeper down  
In palaces of coral and shell  
The dragon-mothers gather  
Sipping seaweed tea,  
Showing off their burnished scales  
Dripping emeralds and pearls;  
As they play mah-jong, their elegant tails  
Flip  
This way, that way  
Sending great waves into the bay  
Where their dragon children boisterously play.

In the profoundest gulf of all  
The Father of all Dragons sleeps  
His silver whiskers on his paws  
Smoke curling gently from his jaws  
His massive jewelled tail around him curled.  
Beneath his scaly claws he keeps  
The fabled treasures of the deeps.  
When in his sleep he stirs  
Here there are storms and wars;  
When that mighty monster wakes  
The abyss heaves and quakes.  
If he should rise in fury—  
Lash and roar and rampage—  
The gulfs might burst apart and  
Rip  
This way, that way  
Amidst the gigantic surges of his rage  
Spilling those unimagined riches out



Onto this tranquil shore  
 Where we so lazily sit about  
 Not at all expecting  
 The ending of an Age.

SHRADDHAVAN

(Kovalam, September, 2001)

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## THE NEW MILLENNIUM

A WORLD lies in the hollow of our palm—small and cracked in its glass shell.

We look at the pieces—and try to put them together, whichever old way! And the pieces don't fit—they just remain as pieces. We juggle with them, we play with them, but nothing really happens.

And, sometimes, we wonder if there isn't another way—because this one doesn't work.

Quite as simple as that.

As this millennium prepares to move into the next one, some glimpses of that other way come to us. We sense 'another' world, throbbing and palpable to the touch, warm and lightly golden in hue—not just waiting 'to be' but already there. Beneath the cracked surface...

A world that is 'whole'. Not to be constructed with pieces—but self-existent as a 'whole'. A contained unity, that radiates its glow in soft rays all around it.

It is another 'texture' of matter, of a way 'to be'—malleable, with a soft, pliable consistency. Not density as we know it.

Another 'quality' of substance.

This already exists—it is THERE.

In our being itself—behind the world that lies cracked in the hollow of the hand.

To sense this 'substance'—and to create afresh a new being of man, another form and raiment of him...another world.

Not the old 'put together' is the way of the future. But to receive the impress of the new...

ASTER

## THE GOLCONDE

A WORLD all its own in Pondy's life entwined;  
A soft peace enshrines this mini whole;  
The sunshine laps each lily leaf  
That whispers around in tongues of gold.

It's a tale they tell of frogs and fairies  
That dance in moonshine, becoming bold;  
Elves hide in nooks playing music sweet,  
And frogs don't sleep till their stories are told.

Bold lines streak up the gulmohar great,  
Drawing patterns right up to its fingers green,  
It stands astride, flexing muscles at the sky,  
While cuddling baby nests in between.

Dappled sunlight plays with grass and rock;  
Shifting patterns, a delightful Nature's dance;  
Birds and insects intent upon their daily toil,  
A sudden, catch Mother's smiling glance.

Subtlety reigns in every line and design,  
Sleek objects speak of Mother's Plan;  
Every turn leads to some place new,  
Revealing beauty beyond the capacity of man.

I feel Her tread dim corridors long  
Her very Presence solidifies in my room;  
She pours in Her radiant Light  
Through shutters, driving away the gloom.

She fills my being as I sit to write,  
The crows outside raise raucous chants;  
Over the spotlight of my lamp, I bend,  
As the velvet night her footsteps plants.

I sit, I be, I forget the little me,  
My pores open out to fill in the Light,  
Mother's arms enfold me to Her breast,  
My little self expands into Her might.

Is it Joy, Bliss or Peace, words cannot say.  
I am with That, 'tis all I know;  
I am still, still as the night beyond.  
Ma, keep me in Thee, don't let me go.

The night sucks away my wakefulness,  
Sometime, somewhere I drift into sleep;  
The cocoon of darkness casts a shroud o'er me,  
I'm drawn through space-time far and deep.

I hurtle along meeting strange sights;  
It's pretty, it's funny, senseless to a T,  
An unguided tour of meaningless scenes  
Passing by, strangely not affecting me.

Long my soul spins through ups and downs,  
Past, present and future, all rolled into one,  
My will is gone, control there is none,  
Surrendered I am, to the only One.

I wake of a sudden, the gloom is still there,  
My body trembles, I call Her nigh.  
I know She had never really left me alone,  
She has carried me back to where I lie.

The rays of the sun come threading their way in,  
Tying up the night to a brand new day,  
Adding one more bright bead to a chain of golden ones,  
Another great creation, is all I can say.

VEERA DASTOOR

## “REMEMBER WHY THOU CAM’ST”

*(Continued from the issue of January 2002)*

*Q: Sri Aurobindo has also said that the first condition for sadhana is to cut yourself off from other things; then only you will be able to tread the real path of yoga and not otherwise. If you have other obligations, social, material or other, then you may be a well-wisher but not a real seeker of this path. Therefore, complete all the obligations you have in the world, or cut them off, and then be here. Then the sadhana begins, then you are entitled to be an Ashramite and not otherwise.*

WELL, most of us householders wish to turn to God and take up the spiritual life when we have fulfilled our worldly obligations. But for many of us that day of emancipation does not come, because the more you give yourself to this worldly life, the more it wants of you. At what point do you stop? You have settled all your sons and daughters in life. Is that enough? What about your grandchildren? Don't you love them just as dearly? So you go on and on.

In one sense, your time to turn to God comes when you have heard his call. When the inner call came, the Buddha left his young wife and infant child and his ageing parents and went into the wilderness, never to come back again. But we are not all Buddhas. For most of us, when the call first comes, it is not strong enough; the awakening to the necessity of a life totally devoted to the Divine is still feeble. We are not yet ready to regard yoga as the only aim to be pursued in life. In such a situation, many things can hold us back, and one of them is this awareness of our responsibility to those who are dependent on us. This does not hold back all people. Some people sincerely feel: "After all, God looks after the whole world, so He will find ways of looking after my people when I relinquish this responsibility to them." On the other hand, turning to the spiritual life should not be an act of irresponsibility, of cowardice. When you can't cope with the problems you face in life, you may be tempted to take an easy escape route. You may think that if you turn to God and take up a spiritual life, nobody will expect you to discharge your worldly responsibilities. It does not usually happen like that. Still, in some cases even this may prove to be the beginning of a genuine turning towards God. So in the spiritual life, each case is different and you can't make a general rule that applies to all.

Even after the call comes, most people need a preparatory time before they can take the irrevocable decision. During that preparatory period, they remain in life and live their daily life in the spirit of sadhana. They try to discharge all their obligations in the attitude of a yogin. This itself prepares them for a spiritual life.

Really speaking in Sri Aurobindo's yoga, there is no separation between secular life and spiritual life. Whether you are negotiating a business deal, countering a competitor in your trade, settling the marriage of your son or daughter, or handling your neighbours or relatives, some of whom may be nasty, you should be able to take up each of these

activities in the spirit of sadhana. If you are capable of doing this, there is no need for you to turn your face from life. Then you don’t have to wait until all your family responsibilities have been discharged. You are already living the life of a yogi.

Those who have joined the Ashram belong to a different category. They have already made their choice and for them the Divine is the only purpose in life. They have consecrated all of themselves to the Divine. For them there are no social obligations and duties to discharge.

*Q: And the third question which arose in my mind is this: Immortality means death at one’s will. Do you think it is like the death of Bhishma?\**

Bhishma’s was a unique case; he could die when it pleased him; death could not take him by surprise. But he got this as a boon. What Sri Aurobindo means by the word is somewhat different. For him immortality is a sign of our total mastery over every part of our being such that nothing is left at the mercy of the Inconscient.

Sri Aurobindo has reiterated what the Gita said: that death is a process of life, as are birth, childhood and age. Death is a natural process in the sense that when the body cannot keep pace with the inner development, one needs to change and take up a new, more suitable body. But until now death has struck us as the terrifying end of life. This is because it comes when it pleases, even when we feel we are not ready for it.

When death comes, it snaps the continuity of our consciousness and drags us like a beast of prey into the abyss of inconscience. This is why we need to be able to conquer death. Our primary aim is not to be able to live four hundred years or four thousand years in the same body. Our aim is to conquer death as a sign of the victory of our consciousness over every part of our being, including the body. The present pathetic condition of man is partly because his body is made of a substance which is still very close to the Inconscient. Now if that material can be made finer and finer, then the body will be able to respond to the needs of the inner growth. So what Sri Aurobindo is saying is: We need to conquer death not because death is in itself evil, but because in its present form it is totally unacceptable: it comes without consulting us, it sweeps over us and destroys everything; we are pushed back to the Inconscient, we don’t know when we are coming back or where we are coming back; we are lost in the great abyss of the Inconscient. That is why death has to be rejected. But once the body becomes capable of responding to the inner being, death in its present form will not be necessary. For this to happen, man has to acquire a new level of consciousness—what Sri Aurobindo called the Supramental Consciousness.

Now immortality looks very attractive to us because we all are trapped in death. But suppose that our mortality were taken away suddenly and we became immortal as we are, would we opt for it? As Savitri says, with our present imperfect consciousness, immortality would be a hell, not a heaven. So first of all we need to realise the immorta-

\* Bhishma, one of the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, received the boon of choosing his own time of death.

lity of our soul. Once we have realised the immortality within, then we need to transform our body such that it becomes flexible, transparent, strong, energetic and can adapt itself to the needs of the soul. This would be the victory of our consciousness over our physical being. And this is the immortality that Sri Aurobindo's yoga is aiming at.

*(Concluded)*

MANGESH NADKARNI

## CAN THERE BE AN INDIAN SCIENCE?

(Continued from the issue of January 2002)

### After-effects and Evils

THE effects of science and technology come in many sizes and shapes. In contrast to the happy colours of a virtual life that we live in the cyber world, there are also greyer and dimmer shades that can cause suffocation in us. Common man has always been a helpless wheel in the machinery of the society, but today he has become a willing participator in this enterprise of disaster. He is not even aware of what he is lending himself to. William Blake (1757-1827) spoke of the “dark satanic mills” which arose in the wake of industrial monstrosity. The tall chimneys belching out black smoke was the ugliness that would repel holiness treading the inner spaces of our life. This has grown manifold since then, not only in the country of its origin but throughout the world. We are living in a constant danger of being wiped out from the surface of the earth. America is a big,—and also an arrogant,—leader in this respect and nothing seems to matter as long as her way of life, with all its frivolous pleasures, all the indulgences and gratifications, are assured. Richness has brought higher technologies,—and all the associated evils likewise. World monopoly has corresponding responsibilities too. The good atomic work done during the Second World War has now become a nightmare for society and culture. The pile of nuclear weapons is so huge that it can destroy the entire world ten times. In this situation balance and sobriety of the American public may prevent the disaster; but the same cannot be said about the fundamentalist dementia that has no sense of responsibility. But let us look at the subtler dangers to which our sanity of thinking must attend.

“In December 1942 humanity’s relationship changed with nature and it changed for all time. Working in a secret underground military laboratory in Chicago, an émigré Italian physicist named Enrico Fermi assembled enough uranium to cause a nuclear fission reaction. He split the atom, releasing the inherent energy that binds all matter together. Fermi’s discovery almost immediately transformed warfare, eventually revolutionised medicine, and created hopes of electricity ‘too cheap to meter’. But his experiment also generated a small packet of radioactive waste materials that will persist in a form hazardous to human health for hundreds of thousands of years.” This is what Nicholas Lenssen writes about the nuclear waste being produced by us. (*State of the World* 1992)

Waste handling has always been a low priority job in nuclear establishments. Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs released one million Curies of radiation in 1945 and the Chernobyl accident 30 million in 1986. Irradiated uranium fuel from commercial nuclear power plants is among the most dangerous radioactive waste. For 1% of electricity obtained from nuclear plants there is 95% of waste. It is estimated that the total accumulation of irradiated fuel is about 200,000 metric tons. This indicates enormous proportions in terms of their disposal. The concern is that there are no methods to handle these

dangerous levels of activity which remain there over long periods of time.

The consequences are well summarised by François Chenevier, Director of the French Nuclear Waste Agency. He says: "It would be irresponsible for us to benefit from nuclear power and leave it to later generations to deal with the waste." A fundamental change in approach is urgently called for. But we do not know how it is to come. "The nuclear waste issue is a hostage to the overall debate on nuclear power." The nuclear age will continue for a long time with its sinister ramifications even if there is no nuclear power generation. The greed of industrial nations at the cost of others is one factor, the other being the demands of defence against the stupidity of man in the self-assertive world of declining values. Forces of technology have brought us to this sorry state of affairs.

Relating to the *Pugwash Workshop on Nuclear Stability and Missile Defense* that was convened in Sigtuna, Sweden, just before the American election held in November 2000, John B. Rhinelanders writes as follows. President Bush during the election campaign had made two objectives clear. One was sharp reduction in the U.S. strategic offensive nuclear systems, unilaterally if driven to do so; the second was deployment of effective Ballistic Missile Defense systems capable of defending the U.S., its forces abroad, and its allies. The Russians would have to accept necessary amendments to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, otherwise President Bush would exercise the right to withdraw from it.

A common theme of the Workshop was the importance of the ABM Treaty. This must be seen in the background of the historical factors that preceded it. President Bush's BMD quest will be the fifth attempt to defend the United States against nuclear attack. The first consisted of the NIKE missiles, armed with high explosive or nuclear warheads. The second was the proposed Sentinel nuclear-armed ABM system of President Johnson in the late 1960s. The third effort was President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or Star Wars, in 1983. The fourth announced by former President Bush in January 1991 was the Global Protection Against Limited Strikes, whatever the source. This scheme was abandoned by President Clinton after a "bottom up review" in favour of multiple theater missile defence (TMD). The fifth attempt, the renewed focus on National Missile Defense (NMD) started by President Clinton is continued by the new Bush Administration. But no NMD system can be deployed and made operational during a first Bush term which will end January 2005.

The ABM Treaty of 1972 was a U.S. initiative in response to the Soviet deployment in the late 1960s of the first ABM site with 100 nuclear-armed missiles and which remains in operation around Moscow today. In view of recent developments after the gruesome terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 there has been some rethinking about these matters. The entire calculus of international politics has now undergone a sea-change.

In a certain sense all nations have relegated these issues to a secondary position in the awareness of a greater danger haunting the world. But let us also look into the fall-outs of Big Science which shall harass us for a long time to come. Nuclear power is undeniably the most dangerous environmental threat. However, that is not all. "We witness the awful effect of the planet's degradation in terms of human health. Young children in thousands have respiratory problems in the Los Angeles area due to polluted air. 300,000



Soviet citizens are treated for radiation sickness. Depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere will increase skin cancer fatalities. Soil erosion and deforestation will adversely affect agriculture. Ecological disasters have wiped out civilisations, e.g. the Mayan culture.” We ought to become more and more concerned with the evil we have created with our own hand in our laboratories and mass-produced in our factories.

While looking at the uninterrupted economic progress brought by World War II, Lester R. Brown writes with reservation about the enterprise. The remarkable accomplishment should imply a cause for celebration. But there is also present an uneasy sense of illusion. The ecological factors themselves make one nervous when one scrutinises the harmful effects that have also come in its wake. Loss of topsoil, loss of tropical rain forests, of tens of thousands of plants and animal species should be a matter of disquiet to everybody. Resource uses can sustain progress, but they can also undermine it. The result of global warming is that the global average temperatures are 0.6° higher than they were about a 100 years ago. The pattern of energy consumption is a matter of another worry. Fossil fuels provide 78% of energy with oil 33%, coal 27% and natural gas 18%. But these are non-renewable resources. (“The Illusion of Progress”, *State of the World 1990*)

This is the unfortunate contribution of the capitalist world towards great human progress. Resistance to conservative measures comes essentially from corporations. They are obliged to their stockholders. Expenses of environmental destruction are passed on to society. The fossil fuel economy has caused greater degradation than the benefits it offers. Between 1950 and 1987 the U.S. has released 40 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere, Europe about 23 billion tons and the erstwhile USSR as much. India’s contribution is 3 billion tons. That will make the Western pontification a comical act to others. Burning petrol is spewing CO<sub>2</sub> in millions of tons. One therefore wonders if the invention of the automobile was not after all the invention of a Master Devil. The consequences of a fossil-based economy have geo-political ramifications also.

The evil had started raising its head long ago when the steam engines drove the commerce of the world. Wooden slippers for the railroads in Europe caused devastation of tropical forests on an unprecedented scale. Burma teak has become a rarer commodity now. Let us take the alarming decline in bird population as an indicator of the present-day health of the earth. “Of the 9600 species only 3600 are holding their own. The other 6000 are on the decline. Of these the population of some 1000 species is being threatened with extinction. The reasons include deforestation in the tropics, drainage of wet lands for farming and residential constructions; air and water pollution, acid rains; and hunting.”

But the tragedy is multifold. If fossil reserve is the untapped wealth of a nation or a region, that wealth itself remains improperly used. In fact it is being squandered away without recognising the fact that it can be of use in building a worthy society given to the pursuits of values of a higher and nobler civilisation. The oil-rich countries should have been by now elite nations taking humanity forward on the path of industry, commerce, culture, art, literature, all that is noble in man trying to find expression in life in the sublimity of the spirit. But the mind-set is still agonisingly mediaeval and shut to the light that can illumine the darkness of existence. At the other extreme we witness the havoc

wrought by affluence, distasteful and indecent affluence. It has administered another kind of perversion. Despicable consumerism and unruly frenzied vitalism have been injected into the system, the depravity of which can last for decades and decades to come. We are becoming instruments in the hands of a stern and rancorous Asura. This must be halted. All environmental concerns must be taken note of. But this can happen only when discerning and attentive consumers themselves become aware of the bio-consequences. The possibility of such an enlightened collective will asserting itself, though very often it is taken as the voice of an alarmist, is summarily rejected.

There are, however, no two opinions among experts that the earth's atmosphere is getting warmer and that human activity is largely responsible for that. In a report from Washington, dated 6 June 2001, we have a panel of American scientists showing anxiety about global warming. It is pointed out that the United States is culpable in a major way as an introducer of air pollution to the world. The report asserts that the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere is causing not only surface air temperatures but also subsurface ocean temperatures to rise. This will have adverse effects on the entire ecosystem including agriculture, health and water balance. If the present trends are to persist "human-induced warming and associated sea level rises are expected to continue through the 21st century."

When in March 2001 President Bush rejected the global warming pact,—an international treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol negotiated in 1997,—the European leaders quite understandably expressed outrage. But the buck was being passed on to lesser mortals. "One would want to be certain that developing countries were accounted for in some way, that technology and science really ought to be important parts of this answer, that we cannot do something that damages the American economy or other economies because growth is also important." Such was the argument from the Administration. It was not going to support the Protocol. "The President had made clear when he was a candidate that he did not believe in the Kyoto Protocol and had addressed the problem of climate change in a way that the United States could support," said the ingenuous spokesperson. It was claimed that science itself was still not certain that global warming was a real phenomenon. The approach may be "entirely rational within the framework of existing ideology," which in the context of market response and wealth maximisation seems perfectly convincing. "The threats to survival are currently being enhanced by dedicated efforts to weaken," says Noam Chomsky "the institutional structures that have been developed to mitigate the consequences of market fundamentalism, and even more important, to undermine the culture of sympathy and solidarity that sustains these institutions." (*The Hindu* 5 November 2001) The danger that the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases was accounting in a large measure does not get recognised in these formulations. More than 20% of the annual worldwide discharge of carbon dioxide is from the American industries. However, an open letter signed by 16 prestigious scientific panels in countries around the world calling for "prompt action" had another effect. Complexes are the operating forces and the results uncertain.

Industrialised nations release into the air most of the carbon dioxide. With 5 percent

of the world population, the U.S. accounts for 22 percent of world emissions from the use of fossil fuel. Western European countries and Japan, more energy-efficient than the U.S., emit much less carbon dioxide per person. But then emissions in developing nations are also catching up. Their expanding population, economies and demand for electricity and transportation, may in a few decades surpass the industrial world in terms of the carbon dioxide emission. If continued, it would be suicidal. The writing is bold and distinct.

It is therefore quite persuasively argued that the largest developing countries—India and China—should make commitments to lower their output of greenhouse gases. In their case, however, the context of the need for development should also be recognised. Their per capita emission of these gases may be low, but the aggregate effect is not negligible. Taking the 1990 level of emission the Kyoto Protocol has set for 38 industrialised countries a target of 5.4% reduction by 2008-12. It is estimated that, in order to stop the increase of carbon dioxide in the air, we need to cut emissions by about half. But who is going to do it? Science and technology have no answer, industry the least.

The Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984 witnessed the death of 16,000 people in the country. But nothing happened to the chairman of Union Carbide responsible for it. On the other hand, in the event of a terrorist attack the American response becomes immediate and “non-negotiable”. The moment the prestigious World Trade Center gets hit by the perfection of its own supporting mechanism the world begins to awake to another face of reality. Whatever undermines not national values but national interests and concerns must be met and exterminated without a second consideration. The moral is that, to survive in this realm of harsh realities, freedom and dignity have also to be matched with strength. And noble strength comes with nobility of the national spirit born in its own fire. We don’t seem to have even a particle of it in our elements.

In the present context “Operation Enduring Freedom is ostensibly being fought to uphold the American Way of Life,” says a commentator. “It will probably end up undermining it completely. It will spawn more anger and more terror across the world. For ordinary people in America, it will mean lives lived in a climate of sickening uncertainty: Will my child be safe in school? Will there be nerve gas in the subway? A bomb in the cinema hall? Will my love come home tonight? There have been warnings about the possibility of biological warfare,—smallpox, bubonic plague, anthrax,—the deadly payload of innocuous crop-duster aircraft. Being picked off a few at a time may end up being worse than being annihilated all at once by a nuclear bomb.” (Arundhati Roy, *The Guardian* 29 September 2001) The question of ridding the world of evil is intimately connected with the question of stacking it with saints. None has an answer to it.

Donald Rumsfeld, the US defence secretary, was asked about the kind of victory he would be aiming at in America’s new war. The answer was categorical. He said that if he could convince the world that the Americans must be allowed to continue with their way of life, he would consider it a victory. But what is the kind of life the bosses have in their mind for the country? Can we have any idea about it? If it is “a spirit of respect for the individual, a spirit of tolerance for differences of faith or politics, a respect for freedom of thought as the necessary foundation for all creativity and a spirit of unity that encom-

passes all kinds of differences,” then it must be considered something marvellous. “Only a society which worships freedom could constantly renew itself and its sources of power and wealth.” (*The New York Times* 2 October 2001) We should welcome it. But history has many other facets and one cannot be altogether oblivious to them.

Thomas Jefferson, who drafted the American Declaration of Independence, also pointed out economic democracy as an essential condition for a republic. Since then all through the chronicles of conferences of the White House, economic policy has emerged as the central objective in shepherding the conduct of business and action. That makes the government of the United States the “foster child of a special interest”. That makes capitalists and manufacturers the masters of the United States. But “development guided by people’s wisdom is different from one spearheaded by the privileged classes.” This is not there. People’s wisdom, it seems, has not found the true meaning of life they would like to live. The whole outlook is money-oriented. Take any walk of life, and we see the enormous costs involved in it. Divorce, crime, and emotional stress cost money. The cost of the emotional pop-up drug Prozac is \$1.2 billion. The cost of family breakdowns amounts to \$40.6 billion per year. Undoing the effect of over-eating costs \$33 billion per year. 70% of America’s medical bills stem from preventable lifestyle-related illnesses.

Does Donald Rumsfeld want to fight the War of Terrorism for such a way of American life? Did not his annual budget of \$350 billion prove worthless when his own commercial aircraft became weapons against himself? Against whom are then the complex and advanced firearms and against whom the painstaking strategies of defence? The irony is, the entire super-sophisticated military apparatus seems finally too fragile in the present reality of life. The antagonism between world powers on Ballistic Missile and Nuclear Non-Proliferation issues in the Terrorist Regime has become thoroughly meaningless.

After the Second World War if the American industry was engaged in the development of weapons of mass destruction, Japan laid its stress on consumer goods. Both of them have brought havoc to the world. The Eco-damage in the sequel is the new evil we have to deal with. “The present clash between business and nature, between economies and ecology, is mainly due to the fact that nature is cyclical, whereas our industrial systems are linear, taking up energy and resources from the earth, transforming them into products plus waste, discarding the waste, and finally throwing away the products also after they have been used. Sustainable patterns of production and consumption need to be cyclical.”

The issue of lifestyles and sustainability of resources must therefore be seen in another perspective. If we have positively arrived at the global or collective consciousness through large-scale business and commerce promoted by Big Science, we can also get solutions to these ponderous matters involving societies and civilisations. This is possible if we can find the true spirit in which things ought to be done. Perhaps there is something in the spirit of Big Science in which we can live and walk. “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (*Galatians* 6) If the steam engine began to grow and bring about a change in man’s approach towards the valuables of life, then there should also be something in it that should transform his outlook towards economy in a more

meaningful manner. Let us not reject the gift of rational mind, but enrich it by making it open to the higher perceptions as an aspect of awareness in the material domain. If our gain cannot spur just progress, then we should straightaway abandon it, or else it shall breed disaster.

Democratic governments cannot do this even if they are the expression of the will of the masses; for, they are bound to the support they receive from certain classes to put them into position. "Today's market democracies surpass the exploitative aggressiveness of their previous incarnations. These are the systems protecting the interests of the supranational mega-corporations seeking open access to raw materials and control over markets across the globe. The badge of democracy is only the instrument of deception." Other systems spell out equal failure. "The masses tried to revolutionise ownership through communist revolution, but they made no attempt to revolutionise values or organisation, therefore in these countries also man still remains the slave of his increasing desires and of the machines, of the power of coal, steam, gas, electricity and ultimately atomic power. His inventive powers have been mainly used to increase the horrors of war, for in fields of discovery, scientists are selling their brains in the best markets." (*Revive our Dying Planet*, Gnanodaya Prakashan, Nainital 1982) In fact governments of whatever extraction or form they be are incapable of implementing ideas and conceptions that the progressive thought of mankind cherishes. Our true strength, our true merit lies in possessing a nobler vision of the future which shall integrate the will of the physical, the longings of the heart, the leap of the intuitive mind, the vastness of the spirit in expression of the marvels that are ready to come down in their happy abundances.

Let us first remember the biblical proverb that whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof. Maybe in that wisdom we can find the roots of a sustainable tradition. It is in that tradition perhaps that trees of new wisdom shall grow in our soil. An anecdote distilled from the essence of life may very well illustrate it.

One day Akbar and Birbal were on their rounds of the country, of course, in disguise. In a village they found a very old man, bent with age, planting a sapling of mango, his limbs shaking. Surprised at his venture, Akbar approached him and enquired of him. "O sire, your action appears quizzical. You are very old and at this age you are planting a sapling. Do you hope to live to eat its fruits?"

The old man replied: "The world does not work that way, my son. My father planted an orchard of mango trees. I enjoy the fruit. I plant trees. My son will enjoy the fruits. That is how actions that take long periods to fructify are carried out."

"The day everyone thinks that he will eat the fruit of the tree that he plants," continued the old man, "no one will plant a tree. No one will be able to eat the mangoes either. In my family, trees link generations."

Surprised and happy at the old man's wisdom, Akbar revealed himself as the emperor and gifted to the old man a bag of gold coins. "The whole country should benefit from your wisdom, Sir," said Akbar.

The old man laughed and said: "See, a good act is not only its own reward. It brings external reward too. My father planted saplings of mango and they took thirty years to

yield fruit. I planted one today, and now itself I have a fruit.”

Akbar was delighted that the old man’s wit matched his wisdom. He gifted him with another bag of gold, now a reward for his spoken word.

The old farmer wouldn’t be put off. He said: “Mango trees normally yield fruits once a year, or in two years. Mine appears to be a special type, giving two crops in a single day.” Laughing, the emperor left the place wondering at the old man’s wisdom. (*Akshaya Vikas, Sustainable Development*, Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 2001)

The twin product of Terrorism and Eco-disaster that has been brought to us by the agency of Big Science cannot be dissolved just by discarding that agency. That will be throwing away the baby with the bath water. Let us not make that mistake. “The West isolates itself from the real environment by imposing a technosphere upon the biosphere, which is then mistaken for reality itself. The technosphere has become a surrogate life-support system that obscures our true dependency on the natural world, the sole giver of life.” (*Ibid.*, Winin Pereira and Jeremy Seabrook) In that context let us remember the ancient prayer:

ॐ द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः । वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः ॥

Om! May there be peace in heaven. May there be peace in the sky. May there be peace on earth. May there be peace in the water. May there be peace in the plants. May there be peace in the Gods of the Universe. May there be peace in the Brahman. May there be peace in all. May that peace, real peace, be mine.

(*To be continued*)

R. Y. DESHPANDE



## INTIMATE PORTRAITS

### ORLANDO: TRAVELS IN THE NATIVE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

[In June 2001, Gary and I visited the USA and travelled through some of its Southwestern States with Santosh who is the publisher and distributor of Sri Aurobindo's books in America. He also publishes books relating to the Native American people in whom he and his family have an abiding interest. Their holidays are often spent in some part of the country where the people who inhabited America before the Spanish Conquistadors came still live. This time we were fortunate enough to join them.

Not much is known about the Native people of America who welcomed the Spaniards only to fall victim to their sword and greed and were further hunted and killed by others who came later.

Today, the Native American is in search of his lost culture and past. His tribes have been assaulted since the sixteenth century and have been systematically wiped out. Consequently, the continuity of their existence has been almost totally erased. Well into the twentieth century, Native children were still kept captured in missionary schools and there were brought up and changed through the means of language, religion and another way of life.

Against all attempts at its elimination, the essence of the Native Americans' being has amazingly survived. A large and growing number of them is now aware of it and, ironically, they are strengthened and emboldened in their efforts at its resurgence by the education and rights they now have, for they too are legitimate citizens of the State that has taken over the country that used to be theirs.

The following is an account of how the spirit of the awakening of the Native Americans survives in one of them, the man named Orlando.]

ORLANDO drove up with us to the Acoma Sky City in the van that made the regular runs. He took us through his ancestral town and its landmarks and told of their meaning and history.

Tribal myths that survived the past in the backdrop of rocks, plants, buildings and sites cropping up under that burning sun—it all came alive because of Orlando. In his own particular manner, through the words he spoke and the way he moved in and out of his narration, he expanded our horizons and lifted us into a happy communion with him and the environment he knew and explained. Because of him, his people and their circumstances became a little more real for us, our perception of them grew clearer.

Driving back and down the Acoma hill, we felt exultant, larger and grateful. We had met an individual worth meeting and he had told us about others of his kind.

It was almost the middle of June when the six of us started: Santosh and Karuna with Marina and Shanta in their Hornet motor home; Gary and I were driving a rented

bright red Chevy Blazer. In twelve days we crossed through Colorado and New Mexico. Nights we slept at campsites with names like 'Lone Duck' or in small wayside establishments. Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Taos, Santa Fe and Albuquerque were the main cities on our route and, in between, there were Indian pueblos and reservations, the man-made and Nature-monuments where we stopped and visited.

In Colorado green was the central colour tone, in New Mexico it was browns everywhere. The further south we went, the more the landscape looked strange and rugged, yet it was grand and beautiful. Wrapped in a dry heat with dust engulfing everything, it was dotted with expanses of sage and punctuated by diminutive wild flowers compensating size for colour and loveliness while the yucca plants defined the space with something of majesty. Keeping our senses and eyes wide open, we absorbed, admired and exclaimed regularly with the newness of it.

Similarly, as we wandered through woods or paths across volcanic terrain and up rocky hills, we fell into a communion with ourselves and with nature that soothed and touched us deeply.

We photographed places that defy description and tried to capture their essence.

In the miniature-Sahara of the Great Sand Dunes, Shanta tumbled delightfully down their sides while the rest of us felt small and gathered in their innate quietude. Then, later on, we crossed gorges shaped through millennia of winds and water; we walked around cities of ruins that whispered about distant and inexplicable people. Using cameras and the sensitivities of film as an extension of the feelings surfacing in us, we approached Nature closely and felt a Mother holding all—nursing, nourishing. Somewhere deep, we felt nature to be our mother and we her children. Standing high up on cliffs, we looked down and far at the beginnings of the Rio Grande and Red Rivers and we saw Her body criss-crossed with life-filled waters.

In Bandalier we watched waterfalls from a distance that made the remnants of our water bottle even more precious. Then we were refreshed in the shade of graceful silver birches growing alongside redwoods—slender and pretty, they seemed maiden-like next to the strong and robust trunks of their companions.

In the wilderness of Chako, our journey came to a perfect conclusion. We gazed at the stars as they arrived abundantly with nightfall. Sand and wind surrounded us and got into our clothes, hair and tent, even into the food we prepared by the fire; it didn't bother us. In a radius of hundreds of miles around, there were the remnants of a culture and people long gone: magnificent ruins holding riddles and keeping secrets that match the grounds on which they lay, for nature there is grand and powerful, she refuses to be tamed.

A formidable setting, where we felt ourselves filled with contentment, peaceful and in the company of friends.

In our travels, we visited some of the settlements of the Native American people and glimpsed through the apparent into the spirit of their lives. They manage casinos and continue the tradition of their exquisite pottery, jewellery and leatherwork. The buffaloes are gone and so are the vast expanses where their ancestors revered and heeded Nature.



Yet, the land still breathes sanctity felt even when seen through our foreign and unaccustomed eyes.

We were on our way to Buena Vista in Colorado and stopped somewhere up the Wilkerson Pass, over nine thousand five hundred feet high. The wind felt icy cold and the plain below was dappled with cloud-shadows and rock-outcrops; the snowy peaks of the Rockies claimed the horizon behind. Gary trotted off and disappeared into aspens nearby.

Brush grew on the mountainsides and it filled the air with ‘something’. Behind the color, in the shape of the plant and its expansive growth there was something I seemed to recognise as offered adoration—the feeling of it, that is.

I was contemplating this and the physical view of the environment, when Santosh came by. He bent, cut a few twigs off, rubbed them and placed them close to my nose:

In one deep, long-drawn and healing inhalation, I took in their essence.

“What *is* it?” I asked, overwhelmed and satisfied.

“Sage!” he replied, and a name was added to the experience, as well as a closer physical contact. Carefully, I placed the few twigs in my pocket. Later, on our descent towards the valley floor, when the crisp mountain air became but a pleasant invigorating memory, their fragrance helped relive some of that feeling-of-adoration.

Later still, I came to know that the Native Americans make regular use of sage and burn dried bunches of it in rituals of prayer and worship.

In the plains, the heat was enwrapped in a dryness that held a sense of will and endurance. Subtly, it provided hope; one needed only to focus and set out on the task. Marina and I felt its supportive demand for quiet concentration as we climbed up the caldera sides at Malpais.

Carefully anticipating each step, we ascended high enough for a cherished view and a sense of achievement: Lavaland, rock hill-monuments and flowers so pretty, we had to stop and adore them. The landscape meeting our sight was desolate, hostile almost. Hot, dry and windy, it blew upon us. It made us observant and it opened us, it asked that we come out of ourselves; even its difficulties were one more detail to conquer, to meet with.

The easy talk among friends that accompanied the experience enhanced the absence of mental complications.

We drove on and on.

We met none of the Native American Indians personally. We remained strangers to them, with skin and features other than theirs, tourists with cameras strung on our shoulders and from different traditions and beliefs. We paid the ticket-fee for our entrance and they provided a guide for the tour around their pueblo, the cluster-like towns or villages made out of adobe. Architectural labyrinths, they rise up to three and four storeys high and their interconnected homes provided safety, warmth or coolness through an ingenious system of construction, which used ladders for access and materials taken from the surrounding land.

A pueblo is basic and earthy in appearance and the one in Taos was perfectly set against wooded soft hills and a sky of white travelling clouds on the day we visited it—such beautiful clouds! Thick and shapely, blown by the same wind that swirled the sand

and carried it around the village in tiny whirlwinds.

A pueblo contains in itself an underlying harmony because of the way it fits and grows into its environment. We felt these adobe settlements pulsating and alive, perhaps due to the elements that held them sacred; their people believe them to be so and our guides told us of contemporary feasts and rituals, which are adapted echoes but a continuation of what has always been. Each tribe's beginnings and ways may be shrouded by Time, yet, the essence of its role and purpose in the diversity of the world, lives on in its people.

Most of the Indians have moved out of the old settlements and only come back on assigned days, when the tribe gets together. Living the American way provides their lives with comforts and an educational system. They make use of both, but there is a growing number among them who are looking into their own particular roots. Attentively and with many threads missing, they try to assemble the tapestry of their past, fathom and rediscover its wisdom for use in the present. Not an easy task for they have been long disconnected.

Through these guided tours we learned about their history's details and mishaps, of the beauty they saw, the duties and the will they had to apply in life.

"They were hunted and chased out."

It was then when Orlando's efficient mask showed its first cracks and the individual behind. Our group had reached the old cemetery of the Acoma Sky City and Orlando was our appointed guide.

The city was a large village, perched up on a flat rock three hundred feet high and very wide across. It held the old cluster of adobe dwellings and the streets that wound around them; there was the church, the cemetery, the waterhole to catch the rainwater, and the traditional *kiwa*, where the men gather and meditate. The buildings were shorter here, at most two storeys high, and the view of the surroundings panoramic.

Nearby stood the Sacred Hill, further on were the mountains and below stretched a valley with corn patches in it. A majestic site indeed, and as we were taking its details in, Orlando went on to tell us how the tribe lost everything, firstly their land. They got scattered and their numbers diminished; desolation came about and the only possession of hope left to them was in the content of an ancient dictum: Never Quit!

Never Quit! Never Quit! Never Quit!

Like a mantra Orlando repeated it to us as he, simultaneously, ran his index and middle fingers down his cheek. The movement and the utterance were reminiscent of the times when his forefathers prepared for life's battle, painting themselves, as was their custom, with the necessary colours. Like Orlando, they too had repeated at each stroke: Never Quit!

The maintenance of matter and the psychological necessities underlying it belong to a feminine domain and they are best dealt with under female charge and care. Orlando's tribe and its society knew of this instinctively and, when the new colonists and Christianity made their dynamic appearance and attack, it fell onto the women to upgrade the meaning of the age-old utterance—Never Quit!

Unlike most of the other Native American tribes, the Acomas have always been a matriarchal one. Using common sense, the women applied the ancient call of non-resignation into the needs of that period in their history. They saw and knew the battle to be lost at its start and needed to find ways to survive. They did.

To counteract their men and children's captivity, torture and death by the Spanish, they had to look into what would pacify these intruders; perhaps, they could get along with them rather than fighting against them. Because the Spanish were too strong to be opposed, the women thought it prudent to find ways that would allow the tribe to live with them.

They looked at the strange white people and saw that, apart from their aggressive and violent greed, they were also a religious lot: fanatic and righteous, insistent about their god and his truth, particular about his house of worship—a church, then?

Sure, if this would spare and save their men, the tribe, their future.

The church today is one of the tour's highlights.

The women built it with their hands: adobe after adobe and carrying rocks for miles on their backs from the mountain beyond. They built and raised it high, careful to found it over the primeval spot where the old rites took place. Even today, there is something one feels in it, a presence of powers other than the usual Christian state. Those primordial links preserved in it were perhaps resonating within us, as we stood and listened to Orlando.

The Acoma women, he said, incorporated and added into the church's dimensions the sacred numbers that mothers and forefathers had passed on to them: secret numbers packed with the knowledge of ancient lore. They also adorned it with symbols of powers they had known and worshipped and painted on its walls the old imagery that brings coherence into realities otherwise intangible. To the rituals of the new Christian religion they attached those of their own and they celebrated feasts and saints based on needs and according to a calendar as old as their roots. They created a fusion and taught their children to live and survive within two worlds: that of the Christian necessity and the one of the tribe's own.

The tribe gave birth to new traditions and looked after their becoming; the ancient Acoma body of wisdom and experience was instilled in the new rituals as a living fact and value.

Never Quit!

Mantra-like, the utterance has coursed and travelled through time. It has initiated people and contributed in the creation of individuals like our Orlando, conscious and aware. For people like him life is larger than what is commonly thought; its duties and responsibilities are but rights of participation.

Orlando is not only living in the tribe, but in the world at large, too; the Orlando-individual is a fine blend of the fusion-attempt. Well composed in the certainty of his education and gracefully poised in the timeless elements given by the Acoma traditions, his personality came through with strength and force; he even had a down-home sort of humour. He told of the women:

"They know they are in charge, you see... They tell us what to do and we do it.

They say ‘stand’ and we stand, they say ‘sit’ and we sit... All men in Acoma have sore knees!”

Orlando studied anthropology and specialised in archaeology and sociology. The structure and vocabulary of the tour he gave us was professional and stamped by his American academic education. Only his passion had other roots and through them he worked the magic of ‘nearness’ we all felt and through which he taught us.

In a direct and personal manner, he passed on the knowledge he had learned from his mother and all the other present and past mothers—weavers-of-people. He delivered those bits and pieces of knowledge to his audience, so that we would know and share them in our hearts or our minds, if only for the heritage they express.

Never Quit!

But the initiates are never great in numbers. There are also many of his kin, Orlando confessed, who wasted their days and money playing cards at the casino. Impotent, angry tears filled his eyes, as he opened his heart and exposed this harsh truth.

“Never Quit!”

Orlando repeated the mantra and extended his right hand towards me, as he ran again the index and the middle fingers of his left on his cheek; then he said:

“We die only when we are not free and so death does not scare us because we Never Quit!”

We smiled at each other and the handshake we exchanged felt almost as if part of some ritual. The two of us were standing at the edge of the precipice from where, centuries ago, the women of the tribe, holding babies in arms and children by the hand, jumped—in fright and flight from the Spaniards...

The tour was over and Orlando was sipping water out of the plastic bottle he carried. I was milling about, a knot in my throat I did not know what to do with. Suddenly, it transmuted itself into words I heard myself saying:

“In Greece it is Freedom, Freedom or Death.”

Orlando and I looked at each other, as the precipice to our sides gaped in the hot sun, and the glances we exchanged contained a mutual and intimate understanding.

The sky was bright with the cerulean blue of the Southern States and adorned with those perfectly shaped, thick and fluffy white clouds. The sky, the landscape, the adobe settlement surrounding and we walking in it all—everything overflowed with feelings for a perfect farewell. It was our last day; Gary and I had to start the drive back immediately. I joined the others walking towards the square, where the van waited.

There we stood, all six of us. We were ready and hesitant, touched by the emotions of Orlando and short of words. Like a crescendo, the experience of our twelve-day-travels had culminated at this moment and had grown into a sense of a shared togetherness.

Orlando and the Acoma Sky City were its final touch, with a flourish!

Like a token, we held and passed around the warmth we all felt with a nod, in a look, within an embrace; simple, inconsequential words were traded:

“... Will write, e-mail...”

“... Bye!”

Slightly damp like my own, Karuna's eyes transmitted all that could not be said, for expression sometimes must find its own ways. In that moment, we exchanged things to carry forever.

KATI WIDMER

## AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT

*Mud with a little gold in it is often more highly prized  
than gold with a little mud in it.*

Austin O'Malley

GANGADHAR—“brother” to all and to whom all were “brother” or “sister”. Yet who was he? Do many remember him? Surely some do, when and if an occasion arises and then some have to untangle all those crowded, jumbled threads of the past to bring him back into focus in the present. That done, then what? Let our thoughts dwell a little bit longer on him and see what floats up.

Gangadhar was, to all appearances, just a Tamilian gentleman, bearded, long haired (both dark and thick). He was of normal proportions. His face was gentle, with large semi-closed eyes that smiled when he smiled, at any and every acquaintance he met—often with a “good morning brother” in a gentle voice. The dress was the simplest, white dhoti wrapped around a small, forgivable paunch and a white chudder thrown over the shoulders. This dress never changed. That’s all that surfaced after the first stirring—nothing very remarkable or out of the way. One more trait—I have hardly heard him talk but for the “good mornings” and maybe some more in his work time at the department (Sanitary Service).

Gangadhar lived in Nanteuil (opposite the Playground) back in 1945. Nanteuil is a beautiful, majestic, spacious old building, one of those from the past, with its own history and interesting stories. The building housed, let us say, “Royalty”. In the past an American daughter of the Mother, Nishtha, lived (and died) here. She was the daughter of President Wilson of the U.S.A. A remarkable lady she was. When terminally ill and suffering, she could have received the best of treatment anywhere she chose. But, she remained here saying: “They will take care of my body, but who will take care of my soul?” Then came Hyder Ali under its roof. He was a big man from the old State of Hyderabad—with his wife (French) Alice, daughter Bilquis and son Adil (and two big dogs). After that Sanat Kumar Banerjee, Ex-Consul General of India to French India and his family, lived and passed away under the same roof. Now, as most would know, the first floor contains memorabilia—sacred and dear to us—of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The place is named “Sri Smriti”. So where did the simple Tamil gentleman fit in? There was a small cubby-room at the back of the building, with a low ceiling, door and one window. Maybe it was meant to be a store-room (to which purpose it was put, after Gangadhar was shifted). Gangadhar lived there several years.

Veerampattinam is a village on the coast 5-6 km to the south of Pondicherry. A good-sized temple is situated therein. The deity is a form of Kaliasman. Once the Mother had gone thereabouts and found the atmosphere unwholesome (there was a time birds were sacrificed to appease or please the deity). When the Mother’s car was leaving, a small boy ran after the car. How far he kept up the chase, or whether he met the Mother—I could not ascertain. But, I believe he did come under the spell of her direct gaze. What-

ever the facts of the chance meeting, one thing is certain—the young boy was marked; he was fated to serve the Mother. When the boy grew into a man of 20 years—on 24 July 1933—he joined the Ashram. The young man was Gangadhar. No external needs goaded him. The inner ones compelled him.

Gangadhar was given work in the Ashram Sanitary Service. He served there (in the true sense of the word) till he could no more, i.e. the body's ageing was the cause. That was, I guess, in the late 80s or early 90s. He considered his work not just as a departmental occupation, but as the Mother's personal work. During his long tenure the heads (of the Department) changed, came and went, but he held them all with the same and utmost respect (many of them half his age). Were he late, he apologised to them. He said that the one sitting there (in the head's chair) was the Divine Mother Herself—not just a representative.

Gangadhar was a man with hardly any needs, let alone wants. He had whittled them down to the minimum. He never asked for anything extra, or even complained about anything. He used to say: "This is not my father-in-law's house." He did not believe in hoarding or collecting things, be they eatables or wearables. If a piece of bread was left over, he kept it in an old cardboard box and drew a ring of DDT to keep the ants away. Someone suggested: "Why not get a small meat-safe? Why this daily trouble of cleaning away DDT, putting on a fresh circle?" Gangadhar could not see the "trouble" part of it. He said he was doing a bit of necessary work! Some well-wisher offered him some money. He refused, saying, "Oh no, there will be no end to one's wants." (He did, I believe, accept a small amount for some specific purpose—but that was all.) He had an ancient mosquito net, patched up often enough, the threads somehow holding the holes in place. He took it to Prosperity for some more repairs. The people there had one look at it and referred back—10-15 then 30 years, to their records—to find out when last he had taken a net. They then requested him to take a new one. He never asked for a servant, but later Counouna urged him to take one to help him out (in his old age).

Then blew up a storm. It was a period when it was thought that Gangadhar was going round the bend. I am not sure if anyone knew what was really wrong. He shut himself up, would not eat and threw things about. Some boys were sent, and he was somehow induced to open the door and come out. Then he gave himself up. There was enough "reason" to send him off to Bangalore for psychiatric treatment. Gangadhar himself probably couldn't or wouldn't say much in his own defence.

There is an amazing sequel to the drama. When Gangadhar was admitted to the hospital (Bangalore), he was not in the least happy about it. Then a nurse, sweet and kind, came to him at night and saw to his needs, talked to him, soothed his mind, nerves and body, with her kindly words, companionship and compassion. She brought him round, away from that brink. He even started to look forward to her arrival. Then it was time for him to go, return home to Pondicherry. He was being discharged. Gangadhar was full of gratitude for that nurse—an angel in white. He wanted very much for her to come to Pondicherry, the main reason being that she should have a darshan of the Mother. He spoke to the hospital authorities, describing the nurse. He singled her out from among the



others. So far so good—but, there was a problem and a mystery! The nurse denied having nursed this man. The fact was that she had been on leave and had just returned to her duties! But Gangadhar was sure about his statements and his identification. He was insistent that she accompany them (himself and those who would come from Pondy to fetch him) to Pondicherry. The nurse,—you can well imagine her predicament,—was as strong in her refusal to come to Pondicherry and also her denials of having nursed him. Many around thought: “Maybe Gangadhar is having a relapse.” Gangadhar was somehow made to understand the situation and the party returned. Gangadhar was very disappointed that he could not repay his “angel”—also he was puzzled by her denials. Gangadhar went to the Mother soon after he returned and poured out his sorrows. The Mother smiled and lifted the veil of that “mystery”. She said it was SHE who went to Gangadhar every night to soothe his pangs and deliver him from, god knows, where or what!

Gangadhar resumed his life from where he had left. The short storm seemed to have left him unscathed. But when he returned, he was transferred to another house. Why, and why to that particular house I cannot answer. It was an old two storied building in a lane near Ambabihikshu garden (our cycle repair department is situated in that lane). Gangadhar had to live on the 1st floor. He had to come down for his ablutions, etc. The stairs were steep and his legs were not as strong as they were a few years before. So, the going up was on all fours. For the coming down his seat too had to participate. He progressed (downwards) lowering himself, supported by hands and feet, to sit on the lower step and so on.... He never complained. Then one day he fainted (whatever the reason). The doctor was called, who took him away for treatment. The good doctor spoke up for him, to get him a better place to live in. He (Gangadhar) was told about another place, a bit dark and damp (according to one of his well-wishers). Gangadhar agreed to move in, saying “Oh, it is alright, if Counouma has decided.” The friend remonstrated, saying “Gangadharji, you will die there!” Gangadhar smiled and reassured the friend: “I am not immortal anyway.” But better sense prevailed and he was given a room on the ground floor of Subbu House (our hair-cutting place). There he lived his last days, doing what he could in our midst. In what else, and where else, he was more active I cannot say much. But it does seem that his field of action was not just the department he worked in. The following may elucidate where lay his field of action, or at least give us a hint and allow a knowledgeable guess.

Once a person, who went to the Mother practically every day, mentioned to Her that Gangadhar came to Her only once a year. The Mother replied: “Gangadhar is always in my consciousness.”

One day, it seems that Sri Aurobindo asked the 75 and odd sadhaks as to why they were here. He (Sri Aurobindo) liked best the answer that Gangadhar gave. (Alas! I have not been able to find out what that answer was.)

On another occasion when the Mother appeared on the Balcony for the general Darshan, she said that Sri Aurobindo’s Grace was spread over the area like a mist and most had not felt or only vaguely perceived it. But one—that was Gangadhar—was very aware of it.



Gangadhar was in his room. He idly thought: “What is this Supermind? I don’t understand anything, have no idea about it!” Then it happened; all on a sudden he saw the place around him was bathed in gold. Even the water he poured out of the *kuja* flowed out like liquid gold. This seems to be but the precursor of some more and higher experiences that he had—as he himself wrote about them later. He talks of how the “thousand petalled lotus Centre above the head opened due to the Grace of the Divine Mother. So too the *Brahma-randram*. He experienced being transported to many regions of Golden Light, into the presence of the Supreme Lord, full of peace and Ananda.

These are a few bits and pieces gathered and patched together by belated promptings from within me—incomplete and inadequate. Maybe someone else could add and shed some more light on this man’s life. But it would require a “keener sight” (or insight) both to shed the light and for others to “see” it.

As matters stand, Gangadhar could pass off as just another of the thousands of Mother’s devotees. He was the simplest of the simple. No distinguishing or distinguished characteristics or achievements in any field of physical, mental or vital activities (not even in any of the social or friendly ties such as we dilly-dally in) marked him. At best we could single him out for being “not one of us”, and then shelve him in a corner of our minds. So much for the vestiges of him, and his life in our memories. But his mortal remains—they are resting in another far corner of Pondicherry—they went back to where they began this earthly journey. His friends and family members from Veerampattinam requested and were given the body to be buried there (as per their custom). This earthly journey ended on 16 August 1992. He was not too old, but not too young either. He had developed some urinary problems, but refused to be taken to Jipmer, saying: “My end is near—so let me be.” But, insisted upon, he relented. I am told he passed away even before being admitted to the hospital. He had quietly shaken off his mortal shackles, leaving us to figure out their future. It was in the scheme of things that he be taken to his village. The body was kept there for three days for his people to pay homage. It seems there was no smell, and no deterioration of the body was seen. Slabs of ice were kept in the vicinity—yet it is unusual (to say the least) that the body lasted so long.

No bells tolled, nor were requiems sung—but I would say that we keep a clean little niche in our hearts and minds for this gentle giant, following whose ways could be rather rewarding.

The ONE Gangadhar is mighty Shiva whose matted locks could absorb the thundering fall of Ganga and imprison that flow. This Gangadhar is a tiny trickle from those matted locks, gentle, pure and clear.

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

## SRI AUROBINDO — THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of January 2002)*

THE Ashram grew into a large family, with more and more seekers arriving from different parts of the country, distant lands on the globe, to participate and grow in this new mode of living, with the motto *All life is Yoga*. Every field of interest, every sphere of constructive life, was sought to be embraced in the spirit of God and turned into a means for individual and collective evolution of consciousness. The broad lines of sadhana were laid down: Knowledge, Love, Work. The means were taught: deepening of consciousness, enlargement of range and vision, transcendence of ego, desire and limitation thereof. Each was helped to a harmony of faculties of mind, will, heart and life—body,—with a view to developing into a channel for manifestation of Divine Consciousness. It was a positive endeavour, world-affirming, but with a different orientation—to realise the Kingdom of God on Earth. The practitioners wrote to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother of their experiences, their difficulties, on the Path of aspiration, rejection and surrender. Sri Aurobindo would answer them in detail, whatever the nature of the queries — elementary or philosophical — and a time came when besides attending to the reports of the various sections of Ashram work, he had to spend hours together (all the night and a good part of the day) answering the letters. Thus there was a constant touch between the Master and the disciples. He and the Mother would receive them on three occasions in a year: February 21st, the Mother's birthday; August 15th, the Master's birthday; November 24, the Siddhi day as it came to be known later. From 1939 onwards, April 24th, the day of the Mother's final arrival, was included. These were the days of Darshan, when they gave silent blessings to each one present; apart from the inmates of the Ashram there were always people from outside who had been specially permitted to attend.

Describing the character and aims of the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo has remarked: "This Ashram has been created with another object than that ordinarily common to such institutions, not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher spiritual consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

"When one enters the spiritual life, the family ties which belong to the ordinary nature fall away — one becomes indifferent to the old things.... There need be no harshness in it at all. To remain tied to the old physical affections would mean to remain tied to the ordinary nature and that would prevent the spiritual progress."<sup>2</sup>

"Our view is that the normal thing is in yoga for the entire flame of the nature to turn towards the Divine and the rest must wait for the true basis: to build higher things on the sand and mire of the ordinary consciousness is not safe."<sup>3</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

*References*

1. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 847.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 812.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 818.

## PLACING K.D. SETHNA, THE CRITIC

K. D. SETHNA, the critic, does not belong to a particular school. His capacity to blend the intellect and the visional enables him to synthesize different types of criticism. That is why the best way to define him is to see in him an integral seer. He endeavours to see the whole truth, the inner and the outer and is completely aware of the European critical tradition starting from Plato down to William Empson and Kathleen Raine with whom he has been exchanging letters frequently for the last three decades. And what letters! He has packed a whole body of Indo-Anglian aesthetics in a single letter, sometimes in a single passage within a letter:

Overhead poetry in general and the *Mantra* especially are the speech *par excellence* for uttering spiritual states in their true and pure essence as well as in the diverse ways they adopt to manifest their powers: these states become dynamic in a multiplicity of forms which are divine beings and objects, 'minute particulars' of moulded light and bliss. On the one hand there can be simply a beatific blank which may seem an apotheosised abstraction, but on the other there are plenty of 'containing vessels' (to use your term). The phrase you quote from Yeats — 'Asiatic vague immensities' — is most misleading if the stress is laid on the epithet 'vague'. The vagueness comes to the Western philosophic mind which has little touch on the 'immensities' familiar and concrete to Asia. Indeed the very word 'immensity' makes the European intellect boggle and be on its guard — perhaps all the more because of Hugo's lavish sprinkling of it and of its likes over his poetry without sounding real depths, and because a number of cultist mystagogues have employed them cheaply. (Letter to Kathleen Raine, *Indian Poets and English Poetry*, p. 45)

The passage indicates that Sethna is too serious about creating an alternative theory of Indo-Anglian Criticism, a theory which goes directly against the one popularly known today as the New Poetry Criticism. This new theory is partial because it focuses on mere externalities. The Indian life means also the inner life, the spiritual life. Mocking the poetry dealing with this life means going directly against the Upanishadic and the Vedic tradition of poetry.

In a book like *Adventures in Criticism* (1996) or *Talks on Poetry* (1989) a distinct approach to poetry comes out, an approach which blends the Classic and the Romantic in a powerful expository style mixed up with a sudden rush of poetry illuminating the logic of his structure. The following passage will show the catholicity of the critic and at the same time the critical stance against unwanted catholicity:

Catholicity of outlook, however, must avoid being a weak tolerance: in our zeal to show an impartial mind we must not let our aesthetic acumen be blunted by the interestingness or momentousness of the subject, the sincerity or novelty of the treatment. Though we may value Wordsworth's psychological observations, he can

never be forgiven for enfeebling his discoveries by deficient technique or setting marvellous lines to voyage, lonely and depressed, half their freshness lost, through a strange waste of watery verse like much of *Prelude* — in the literal and most damnatory connotation of the term, blank verse. Similarly, just because we do not judge from personal temperament, *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot's labyrinthine cross-lit fitfulness need not be accepted as a poetic paradise. In every department of art, what is required is not only "significant form" nor, as the modern temperament inclines to believe, a mere energy glorying in its own caprice: what is fundamental is a thrill of significant form, spontaneous energy in love with meaning and measure. And great poetry, like any other art attaining greatness, is a rapture, a peace or a pain, according to its creator's mood, in which a significance is shaped out with a glow and a tingle as of some secret from beyond the outer consciousness pushed through, bringing with it splendours and sweetnesses and poignancies far wider and deeper than the common range to which that consciousness is accustomed. Words become wings and in each movement of sound and sense some fiat as of a god strikes us, asserting by means of any part of man's being and through any mode of word-design and pattern of rhythm a unique inevitable loveliness. (*Adventures in Criticism*, pp. 2-3)

The passage is something like a clarification of inspired logic, which we, Aurobindonian moderns, tend to use frequently to characterise the prose of Sri Aurobindo. There is that typical wavy movement supported by a powerful intellect, which enlightens every clause and culminates in a rightly conclusive note.

Now let us have a look at the classical critic finding fault with the romantic Whitman, whose free verse, to Sethna, is not the best form to hold his wonderful experiences:

Sandberg and his free-versifying tribe produce better work than the cacophonists, but Whitman whose elemental *enthousiasmos* none of the recent free-versifiers have matched revealed the high-water mark possible to the new medium and at the same time the sure though subtle loss it involved when used to voice the "immortal longings" of life. He had the eagle's heart, the eagle's vision, but without the wings of metrical rhythm he was, on the whole, baulked of his right to the utter zenith—for, metre by its marked flux and reflux endows verbal music with a distinctness, a stability, a haunting power, a magic memorableness, whereby the idea and emotion expressed acquire a definite and sustained charm of vitality which evokes more easily than any other rhythm a strong sympathetic correspondence in the reader. (*Ibid.*, p. 5)

As a practising poet of exceptional calibre, Sethna knows how free verse is not always a successful medium to initiate a "rhythmic voyage of self-discovery" which was virtually the endeavour of Whitman. If we go back to Sri Aurobindo's observations on Whitman in the second decade of the twentieth century, we see how Sethna is at one with his Master

and at the same time thinking it out anew, remembering and forgetting the passages from *The Future Poetry*, like a critic making more out of the 'existing order' or the historical sense. Like Sri Aurobindo, Sethna rejects none, not even the most rational critics, and it is easy to see that he is in touch with the major critics of the modern and the post-modern scene. Talking on science and poetry he remembers I. A. Richards and exhibits his deep understanding of Richards' statements and expositions. Even if he does not agree with Richards on many points, he sees his real value as a critic of poetry:

Rarely does a critic appreciate with such definiteness the crucial role of rhythm. Richards has the feel of poetry in his blood; else he would not respond so intensely to rhythmical nuances. (*The Thinking Corner*, p. 15)

Sethna's observations are born out of his own experiences, the experiences of a practising poet:

The great poetic phrase does not photograph: it transmutes the external appearance by displaying to us on any level of awareness the concealed core of actuality; it opens in us eyes other than the physical... (*The Thinking Corner*, p. 55)

T. S. Eliot is an intellectual poet, to whom theorising may come quite naturally. Whereas, Sethna is a mystic poet trying to give us an intellectual presentation of his idea of the poetry of 'inside'. The mystic poet talking on poetry, favouring and refuting with the help of logic, arguing and revealing at times with a sudden swift sage-sayer is rare in the history of literary criticism. The present has overlooked him (thanks to the media for projecting non-writers as writers); the future reserves a place for K. D. Sethna. It is my good fortune that I have seen him in flesh and blood and have touched him physically.

GAUTAM GHOSAL

## “TO BECOME A WRITER, THAT NOBLE THING”

### A TRIBUTE TO V. S. NAIPAUL, NOBEL LAUREATE 2001

DECADES ago when I was a student of English literature at the undergraduate level, one of my learned professors gave me a copy of *An Area of Darkness*. It was a travelogue by a Trinidadian of Indian origin educated at Oxford— V.S.Naipaul. That book about India only reminded me of what Mahatma Gandhi had said of Ms. Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*.

Years later a Penguin imprint of *An Area of Darkness* which I picked up from a pavement bookshop joined my library and I had the opportunity of re-reading that great work. This time I could not dismiss the book as “a drain inspector’s report”.

We may have a hundred writers to say all good things about the greatness of our country – its culture, history, folklore and what not – but we don’t have even one writer of the calibre of V.S.Naipaul who could boldly point out our mistakes with a pinch of sarcasm. His comment on Gandhiji: “...he is nevertheless the least Indian of Indian leaders.” was justified by his remark: “Sanitation was linked to caste, caste to callousness, inefficiency and a hopelessly divided country, division to weakness, weakness to foreign rule. This is what Gandhi saw, and no one purely of India could have seen it.”

One needn’t have to turn up one’s nose when one reads the much celebrated passage in the book, for the author is not exaggerating when he says: “Indians defecate everywhere.... These squatting figures – to the visitor, after a time, as eternal and emblematic as Rodin’s *Thinker*—are never spoken of;... a collective blindness arising out of the Indian fear of pollution and the resulting conviction that Indians are the cleanest people in the world. They are required by their religion to take a bath every day. This is central;...”

Call Naipaul callous. Call him mud-slinger. Call him India-baiter or what you will. But who can deny the fact that he practised mud-slinging as an art and that his callousness proved to be his plus point as a writer? Had he lived in India, he would not have seen the India that he saw as an outsider.

Naipaul’s grandfather moved to Trinidad (West Indies) as an indentured labourer from Uttar Pradesh. The old man’s son Seepersad Naipaul (1906-1953) was a sign-painter, shopkeeper, reporter, social worker and above all a short story writer. In his book *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales* (1943), he portrayed in a detailed and unsentimental way the life of the Trinidadian Indian community of his day. His marriage with Dropatie (née Capildeo) resulted in six children and two of them—V.S.Naipaul (1932-) and Shiva Naipaul (1945-85) became distinguished fiction writers. Nearly every book written by the Naipaul brothers asserts the credentials of the culturally displaced, sometimes aggressively and defiantly, sometimes with a trace of apology, sometimes diffidently and questioningly, and sometimes in celebration of their own liberation from “an area of darkness”.

Born in Chaguanas (Trinidad) Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul had his education in Queen’s Royal College, Port of Spain, Trinidad (1943-49) and then set off for England, where he studied English literature in University College, Oxford University (1950-54)

and experienced only disillusionment. To put it in his own words “the course has little to do with literature”.

“Not formally educated, a nibbler of books rather than a reader, my father worshipped writing and writers,” writes V.S.Naipaul in his autobiographical fragment *Finding the Centre* (1984) and gratefully acknowledges his debt to his father: “The ambition to be a writer was given me by my father.” And once he decided to become a writer, a truth dawned upon him. “To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge.”

Naipaul wrote the first sentence of his publishable book on smooth, ‘non-rustle’ BBC script paper, when he was engaged as editor (1954-6) of the British Broadcasting Corporation’s ‘Caribbean Voices’ programme. And when he finished writing a book, he “felt it to be real”. That had been his ambition for years. And when the new book had been written he didn’t think of himself as a writer. He thought: “I should wait until I had written three. And when, a year after writing the second, I had written the third, I thought I should wait until I had written six.”

It was this ambition in life that made him put pen to paper. “So step by step, book by book, though seeking each time only to write another book I eased myself into knowledge. To write was to learn. Beginning a book, I always felt I was in possession of all the facts about myself; at the end I was always surprised. The book before always turned out to have been written by a man with incomplete knowledge. And the very first, the one begun in the freelance’s room seemed to have been written by an innocent, a man at the beginning of knowledge both about himself and the writing career that had been his ambition from childhood.”

It was this humility...it was this quest for knowledge...it was this hard work (“I usually work some 14 or 15 hours a day. And completely absorbed. It’s very exhausting.”) that had crowned him with John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize (1958), Somerset Maugham Award (1959), Hawthornden Prize (1963), Booker Prize (1971) and the much awaited and the most coveted Nobel Prize (2001).

Naipaul is a writer “writing differently different kinds of books. The range is very wide – travel writing, history, religion, different civilizations, personal portraits and what not. Starting from his first book *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) to his latest novel *Half a Life*, he has to his credit 25 books, “many of them displaying the coolest literary eye and the most lucid prose that we can find anywhere today”.

Naipaul’s first three books—*The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) and *Miguel Street* (1959)—were works of fiction. These sketches about Trinidadian life were attacked by West Indian writers who felt that Naipaul was “ashamed of his heritage and had betrayed it by taking up a castrated satirical position.” But contrary to such criticism, Naipaul in these novels sees his roots simply as he really sees them.

What really established Naipaul as a truly major novelist was his work of Dickensian proportions and vitality—*A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Considered as the greatest of Caribbean novels, it is an admirable portrait of an Indo-Trinidadian who struggles to



establish his independence within his wife's domineering family. The incidents of Seepersad Naipaul's life parallel closely those of Mr. Biswas.

*A Bend in the River* (1979), Naipaul's seventh novel proved to be yet another feather in the cap of the fast growing popular author. Set in Africa, the novel portrays the expatriate Asians, of tribal rebellions, of massacres and migrations, of grandiose government projects come to ruin. True, the novel reads like a work of historical journalism. Yet the reader will not fail to find it a novel of subtle power and immediacy, a triumph of the art of realism.

Naipaul's other novels include *Mr. Stone and the Knight's Companion* (1963), *The Way in the World*, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), *Guerillas* (1975), *The Mimic Men* (1967). But none of his works of fiction are 'novels' in the traditional sense of the word. It would be appropriate to call them, 'faction', that is fiction plus fact. And Naipaul too admits in his essay on 'Reading and Writing' that his novels are "experience totally transformed", as Evelyn Waugh defined fiction.

Naipaul is a proficient short story writer too. *A Flag on the Island* (1967) and *In a Free State* (1971) are two collections of his shorter fiction, published periodically throughout his career. Of these two, the second is a trio of stories set in Africa, the UK, and the USA and could easily pass for a novel. His stories can be treated on a par with his novels with regard to their thematic and tonal progression.

*An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilisation* (1977) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990) form Naipaul's travel trilogy which he calls "creative travelling". In an interview given to Mr. Sadanand Menon (*The Hindu*, Sunday, July 5, 1998) Naipaul remarked: "I have written three books about India. I have written them over a period of 36 years... All three books stand as far as I am concerned. All three books stand. They are to be read together. India exists at so many levels at the same time. But all three stand. The very personal horror and wound of "An Area of Darkness". I can still expose myself to it. It's still there. I can go and face it. The analysis which I did in "A Wounded Civilisation", which is about the effect of the Islamic invasions and the effect of the Hindu withdrawal and the sheer damage done to India. And the later book, which is about the people around me now in India, in whose experience I thought I could chronicle a point in the civilisation and culture of India. They are three different books and I stand by them all. But then, one does not precede the other. One does not push the other out of place. They are all to be read at the same time. Because they are different things happening at the same time."

Among his other non-fictional works, mention must be made of *The Middle Passage* (1962), *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) and its sequel, *Beyond Belief*, *The Return of Eva Peron* (1980), *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (1972) and *The Loss of El Dorado: A History* (1969). Many of these writings were an offspring of his being footloose in various countries, a habit he started in 1960.

No essay on Naipaul would be complete without a passing reference at least to his *Letters Between A Father and Son* (1999) which gives us a glimpse into the birth of a great writer and the end of another. In fact, it marks three crucial years in the life of

Naipaul which give the reader access to some of the more intimate areas of his life.

Naipaul loves writing. He believes that a writer deals with truth. And he confesses: “That is why I like the profession. That is my idea of it. It is not a game of lying, not a game of fantasy. I do not like those things at all.” Hence Naipaul’s writings are no imaginary pieces. One feels that not a word of his is a lie. They reveal a real world with politics, race and personality. He always tries to express “as clearly as I can absolutely what I feel. I am really concerned with getting it right. Sloppy language will obscure thought...or can make thought a cliché. Or can make response a cliché.” And his admirers invariably know that he uses “simple words...small words”. Well then! That’s the secret of Naipaul’s precise, concise way of narrating.

P. RAJA

(Courtesy: All India Radio, Pondicherry)

## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Selected Essays and Talks of Nirodbaran** compiled and edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya. Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, 24 Parganas, January 2001. Pp. 271. Price not mentioned.

IN the Ashram and among the circle of the devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo Nirod-da otherwise Nirodbaran is well known as Sri Aurobindo's amanuensis and attendant. In his writings over the years he has chronicled many an aspect of the Ashram life. His voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo is a classic example of Guru-Shishya samvad. His poetry is testimony to the fact that by tapasya even a sceptical medical man can become a kavi, a poet of the spirit.

So when I learned that Supriyo Bhattacharya of Calcutta has brought out in book form many of the speeches and talks of Nirod-da I lost no time in acquiring a copy. The book begins with an article written for the *Hindusthan Standard* on the occasion of the establishing of the relics of Sri Aurobindo in Nadia, West Bengal. Though it was written in 1959, and much water has flown down the Hoogly since then—some of the conclusions of Nirod-da about Bengal are still valid now as in 1959. Bengal, we know, is the land most favoured by the Shakti as birthplace of the greatest souls of modern India. Yet this land has in recent times forsaken her soul. Nirod-da reminds us of Sri Aurobindo's remark, "So long as there is no leader, She (Bengal) will go on in this way." And the leader can come only if there is an "aspiration for it."

The next article from the *Mother India*, February 1967 issue is of perennial significance. Here Nirod-da writes on Sri Aurobindo as guru. There is no doubt that Nirod-da is eminently qualified for this—he has been a unique recipient of *guru kripa*, grace of the guru. Nirod-da traces his years with Sri Aurobindo and brings out the mystique of the Guru-Shishya relation beautifully. It is not difficult to identify with Nirod-da for us children of a materialistic age. Many a question was hurled at the Master, each receiving a perfect reply, replete with levity and humour. To give a sample, once Nirod-da asked Sri Aurobindo what Brahman consciousness is. He received the following reply: "Brahman, Sir, is the name given by Indian philosophy since the beginning of time to the one Reality, eternal and infinite which is the Self, the Divine, the All, the more than All, which would remain even if you and everybody and everything else in existence or imagining itself to be in existence vanished into blazes—even if the whole universe disappeared, Brahman would be safely there, and nothing whatever lost. In fact, Sir, you are Brahman, and you are pretending to be Nirod; when Nishikanta is translating Amal's poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman's Brahman into Brahman. When Amal asks me what consciousness is, it is really Brahman asking what Brahman is. There, Sir, I hope you are satisfied now.

"To be less drastic and refrain from making your head reel till it goes off your shoulders, I may say that the realisation of the Self is the beginning of the Brahman realisation—the Brahman consciousness—the Self in all and all in the Self etc. It is the basis of spiritual realisation, and therefore of the spiritual transformation, but one has to

see it in all sorts of applications first.”

In his description of the twelve years he spent with the Master we see how a spiritual genius works, not so much by instruction or even influence but by his spiritual presence. We glimpse the magnanimity of the Guru, his boundless compassion, his modern outlook on life, his ancient wisdom. We realise the truth of the adage: The teacher shows the way, the Guru is the way.

This is followed by a series of pen portraits of prominent Ashram sadhaks. These include Nolini, Amrita, Pavitra, Champaklal, his friends Kalyan and Pradyot, Pujalal, Sunil, André—the Mother’s son, Indrasen, Bula, Sahana and Nishikanta. Nirod-da’s portrayal creates the atmosphere of an intimate direct contact, a characteristic of his nature. We feel we are getting a first person account without any inflation or deflation. In the talk on Nolini-da for instance, Nirod-da is able to bring into focus many facets of this complex and many-sided personality. His aloofness and abruptness, his knack of upsetting people without himself getting upset, his capacity for spiritual knowledge etc. Nirod-da relates the following episode. Once when someone complained that Nolini-da was not doing Sri Aurobindo’s yoga since he kept aloof, was unsociable, etc., Sri Aurobindo replied, “If Nolini is not doing my yoga, who is doing it? Is sociableness a part of yoga?” This should come as an eye-opener to us—as our Ashram expands and social consciousness finds an increasing play in our daily lives. In this and many other biographical essays Nirod-da regales us with memories of extraordinary souls who gave all to get All.

In the early eighties Sankari Prasad Basu, a Bengali littérateur of some renown, wrote on Nivedita and the National Movement a series of articles in the popular journal *Desh*. The gentleman created a storm in a teacup by making some references which show Sri Aurobindo in an inferior light. Nirod-da took up the cudgels on behalf of the Aurobindonians and replied to Basu in an article in *Mother India*. In this article Nirod-da marshals many facts to refute Basu and shows that Yoga and politics were not mutually incompatible activities for Sri Aurobindo. Basu quotes Nivedita as saying, “...he (Aurobindo) believes himself divinely impelled and therefore not to be arrested.” I am reminded of these lines from the poem *Invitation* written by Sri Aurobindo in Alipore jail:

I sport with solitude here in my regions,  
Of misadventure have made me a friend.  
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?  
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

These lines give us a peep into Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness at that time. In spite of political “misadventure”—for which Nivedita takes him to task rather harshly—Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness continued to ascend spiritually. Thus we see political activity had become part of his Yoga which was being guided by Narayan himself. Nirod-da wisely points out that for sadhaks who make a division between Life and Yoga the ‘ar-

senic poison of practical wisdom' may be necessary to temper the spiritual consciousness and adapt it to Life. But for the followers of a Purna Yoga to admit Voltaire's dictum would amount to admitting limits to the Divine's omnipotence. It has to be recognised that Sri Aurobindo finally gave up politics and took to a more intensive Yoga as the imperative necessity of his soul. But to a hostile critic like Basu it appears as a failure in politics. Nirod-da puts things in proper perspective and does it with élan.

In the next article of this book Nirod-da rises to the height of his narrative powers when he traces Sister Nivedita's spiritual career. It takes a sadhak of Nirod-da's standing to do justice to this theme. We know of Vivekananda's pro-jnana temper. But in his relation with Nivedita, the psychic qualities of the Guru are seen. His tactful handling of Nivedita's inner situation brings out the truth of *guruvad* and the greatness of the great Vedantin and his illustrious disciple.

The last few articles are short pieces. An inner dialogue with Sri Aurobindo regarding the Mahabharata war, an essay on Yoga in the material field, an account of his prostate operation, an article on the Matrimandir and a delightful account of an Ashram picnic—these five compositions form the close of the book. Nirod-da is thorough without being scholarly, witty without being flippant and serious without being boring. Occasionally an immodest modesty surfaces as when he says that at the time of Mahabharata war he participated perhaps as a rat or cat or at best a common soldier. This has been the grain of his nature from the beginning and Sri Aurobindo has referred to him as "*Modesticum Nirodicus*".

The book has many pictures which enhance the reading pleasure. Unfortunately the quality of some of the pictures leaves something to be desired. A few typographical errors have also crept in, things we do not normally associate with Nirod-da's books. The book is primarily meant for the disciples and devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who will find in it much that is interesting and memorable.

HEMANT KAPOOR