

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LV

No. 8

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
AFAR HE FLED (Poem)	...	649
THE OBJECT AND CONDITION OF LIFE IS ANANDA	...	651
SOME LETTERS	...	654
<i>Arjava</i>		
THE RHYTHM OF SILENCE (Poem)	...	657
<i>The Mother</i>		
AN ASPIRATION THAT IS SUFFICIENT, INTENSE AND EFFECTIVE	...	658
<i>Mukul Chandra Dey</i>		
MY DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO AT PONDICHERRY	...	661
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>		
SOME LETTERS	...	666
<i>Richard Hartz</i>		
THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI	...	669
<i>R.Y. Deshpande</i>		
CAN THERE BE AN INDIAN SCIENCE?	...	678
THE ADORATION OF THE DIVINE MOTHER (Poem)	...	686
<i>Shyam Kumari</i>		
WHAT DO YOU WANT?	...	687
<i>Allan Stocker</i>		
LAUGH (Poem)	...	687
<i>Aster Patel</i>		
A WORLD IN TURMOIL—‘ETERNAL INDIA’ POINTS AN ARROW INTO THE FUTURE	...	688
<i>Mary Helen</i>		
THOUGH WORDS ARE FEW... (Poem)	...	691
<i>Shakuntala Manay</i>		
A BUTTERFLY (Poem)	...	692

<i>Kati Widmer</i>		
INTIMATE PORTRAITS	...	693
<i>Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala</i>		
IF I WERE A PRINCESS (Poem)	...	697
<i>Manmohan Ghose</i>		
LONDON (Poem)	...	698
<i>Bhushan Dhingra</i>		
A FEW DREAMS	...	699
<i>Roger Calverley</i>		
DREAM (Poem)	...	700
<i>B. G. Pattegar</i>		
HUMILITY	...	701
<i>Nilima Das</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	...	702
<i>Subir Kanta Gupta</i>		
THE ROSE AND THE HIBISCUS (Poem)	...	707
<i>Goutam Ghosal</i>		
TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO	...	708
<i>Anonymous</i>		
EINSTEIN'S GESTURE	...	713
<i>Jugal Kishore Mukherjee</i>		
THE BOOK OF JOB: THE MARVEL AND THE MYSTERY OF PAIN	...	714
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE		
<i>Rita Nath Keshari</i>		
<i>Review of PERSPECTIVES OF SAVITRI — VOL. II, edited by R. Y. DESHPANDE</i>	...	720

AFAR HE FLED

“I HAIL thee, almighty and victorious Death,
Thou grandiose Darkness of the Infinite.
O Void that makest room for all to be,
Hunger that gnawest at the universe
Consuming the cold remnants of the suns
And eatst the whole world with thy jaws of fire,
Waster of the energy that has made the stars,
Inconscience, carrier of the seeds of thought,
Nescience in which All-Knowledge sleeps entombed
And slowly emerges in its hollow breast
Wearing the mind’s mask of bright Ignorance.
Thou art my shadow and my instrument.
I have given thee thy awful shape of dread
And thy sharp sword of terror and grief and pain
To force the soul of man to struggle for light
On the brevity of his half-conscious days.
Thou art his spur to greatness in his works,
The whip to his yearning for eternal bliss,
His poignant need of immortality.
Live, Death, awhile, be still my instrument.
One day man too shall know thy fathomless heart
Of silence and the brooding peace of Night
And grave obedience to eternal Law
And the calm inflexible pity in thy gaze.
But now, O timeless Mightiness, stand aside
And leave the path of my incarnate Force.
Relieve the radiant God from thy black mask:
Release the soul of the world called Satyavan
Freed from thy clutch of pain and ignorance
That he may stand master of life and fate,
Man’s representative in the house of God,
The mate of Wisdom and the spouse of Light,
The eternal bridegroom of the eternal bride.”
She spoke; Death unconvinced resisted still,
Although he knew refusing still to know,
Although he saw refusing still to see.
Unshakable he stood claiming his right.
His spirit bowed; his will obeyed the law
Of its own nature binding even on Gods.
The Two opposed each other face to face.

His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
 Around it her light grew, an ocean's siege.
 Awhile the Shade survived defying heaven:
 Assailing in front, oppressing from above,
 A concrete mass of conscious power, he bore
 The tyranny of her divine desire.
 A pressure of intolerable force
 Weighed on his unbowed head and stubborn breast;
 Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,
 Light was a luminous torture in his heart,
 Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves;
 His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze.
 Her mastering Word commanded every limb
 And left no room for his enormous will
 That seemed pushed out into some helpless space
 And could no more re-enter but left him void.
 He called to Night but she fell shuddering back,
 He called to Hell but sullenly it retired:
 He turned to the Inconscient for support,
 From which he was born, his vast sustaining self;
 It drew him back towards boundless vacancy
 As if by himself to swallow up himself:
 He called to his strength, but it refused his call.
 His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.
 At last he knew defeat inevitable
 And left crumbling the shape that he had worn,
 Abandoning hope to make man's soul his prey
 And force to be mortal the immortal spirit.
 Afar he fled shunning her dreaded touch
 And refuge took in the retreating Night.
 In the dream twilight of that symbol world
 The dire universal Shadow disappeared
 Vanishing into the Void from which it came.
 As if deprived of its original cause,
 The twilight realm passed fading from their souls,
 And Satyavan and Savitri were alone.
 But neither stirred: between those figures rose
 A mute invisible and translucent wall.
 In the long blank moment's pause nothing could move:
 All waited on the unknown inscrutable Will.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Savitri, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 666-68.)

THE OBJECT AND CONDITION OF LIFE IS ANANDA

THE object and condition of Life is Ananda; the means of Ananda is Tapas; the nature of Tapas is Chit; the continent and basis of Chit is Sat. It is therefore by a process of Sat developing its own Ananda through Tapas which is Chit that the Absolute appears as the extended, the eternal as the evolutionary, Brahman as the world. He who would live perfectly must know Life, he who would know Life, must know Sachchidananda.

Pleasure is not Ananda; it is a half-successful attempt to grasp at Ananda by means which ensure a relapse into pain. Therefore it is that pleasure can never be an enduring possession. It is in its nature transient and fugitive. Pain itself is obviously not Ananda; neither is it in itself anything positive, real and necessary. It has only a negative reality. It is a recoil caused by the inability to command pleasure from certain contacts which becomes habitual in our consciousness and, long ingrained in it, deludes us with the appearance of a law. We can rise above transitory pleasure; we can get rid of the possibility of pain.

Pleasure, therefore, cannot be the end & aim of life; for the true object and condition of Life is Ananda and Ananda is something in its nature one, unconditioned and infinite. If we make pleasure the object of life, then we also make pain the condition of life. The two go together and are inseparable companions. You cannot have one for your bed-fellow without making a life-companion of the other. They are husband and wife and, though perpetually quarrelling, will not hear of divorce.

But neither is pain the necessary condition of life, as the Buddhists say, nor is extinction of sensation the condition of bliss.

The world lives in and by Ananda. From Ananda, says the Veda, we were born, by Ananda we live, to Ananda we return, and it adds that no man could even have the strength to draw in his breath and throw it out again if there were not this heaven of Bliss embracing our existence as ether embraces our bodies, nourishing us with its eternal substance and strength and supporting the life and the activity. A world which is essentially a world of bliss—this was the ancient Vedantic vision, the drishti of the Vedic drashta, which differentiates Hinduism in its early virility from the cosmic sorrow of Buddhism and the cosmic disillusionment of Mayavada. But it is possible to fall from this Bliss, not to realise it with the lower nature, in the Apra Prakriti, not to be able to grasp and possess it. Two things are necessary for the fullness of man's bliss,—the fullness of his being and the fullness of his knowledge creating by their union the fullness of his strength in all its manifestations, viryam, balam, bhrajas, tejas, ojas. For Ananda, Sat & Chit make one reality, and Chit is in its outward working pure force to which our Rishis gave the name of Tapas. To attain even here upon earth this fullness of bliss dependent upon fullness of existence, illumination and force, must always be humanity's drift, man's collective en-

deavour. To attain it within himself here and beyond, *iha ca amutra ca*, must always be the drift of the human unit, the individual's endeavour. Wherever the knowledge in him thinks it can grasp this bliss, it will fix its heaven. This is Swarga, Vaikuntha, Goloka; this is Nirvana.

The bliss of the Brahman can be described as the eternity of an uninterrupted supreme ecstasy. There is no opposition or incompatibility between these two states in the nature of the Brahman. Bliss there is the keen height and core of peace; peace there is the intimate core and essence of bliss. There is no turbidity or turbulence in the being of the Brahman; its ineffable poignancy is eternal in its self-poise.

The essential mark of the descent of the consciousness from its highest grade in the supreme spirit is the constant diminution of the power of Sachchidananda, the intensity of its force, force of being, force of consciousness, force of bliss. The intensity of all these three in the supreme status is ineffable; in the Supermind the intensity of consciousness is ever luminous and undiminished; in overmind it is already diminished and diffuse; the highest intensity of mind is a poor thing in comparison with the splendour of overmind, and so it goes diminishing till it reaches an apparent zero which we call inconscience.

The degree and amount of pain which mind, life and body can bear is by our human standards considerable; but their capacity for pleasure is very limited and pale in its intensity, low in its degree. What we call ecstasy would seem to a god to be ridiculously thin and vapid and edgeless. Its capacity of duration also is pitifully brief and measurable by the moments.

In experience even on the spiritual plane so long as we do not transcend the spirit in mind, there is a difference between peace and Ananda. Peace is the Divine static, Ananda the Divine dynamic. Peace is a negative-positive; it is positive of itself, of status, of eternity, of the essential, of the abstract-concrete, of force in rest. It is or tends to be negative of all that is less than itself, contradictory to itself or more than itself, of the dynamic, of action, of creation, of time and happening, of the substantial concrete, of force in motion. Or when it allows these things or even feels or supports them, it is with a certain disinterested separateness. It has essentially the character of the Witness Spirit or at the most of the disinterested Witness-Creator. Ananda is in its every fibre a positive of positives. It affirms and rejoices in all that is native to peace, but it affirms too and rejoices in all that peace negates or regards with a sovereign separateness. Ananda is an all embracing and creative force. There can be in the world's tangle of conflicting forces an Ananda of pain and suffering and in the full manifestation pain and suffering no longer remain themselves but are transformed into Ananda. But these opposing differences prove in the end to be part of the separative mental creation, the disjunctive Maya in which we live. In supermind experience peace is always full of Ananda and by its

Ananda can act and create; Ananda is for ever full of the divine peace and its most vehement ecstatic intensity contains no possibility of disturbance. At the height of the supramental Infinite peace and Ananda are one. For there status and dynamis are inseparable, rest and action affirm each other, essence and expression are one indivisible whole.

One that is Two that are Many,—this is the formula of the eternal and timeless manifestation in the worlds of Sachchidananda.

One who is Two and becomes the Two who become Many,—this is the formula of the perpetual manifestation in time in the three worlds of Mind, Life and Matter.

One who is in himself for ever the Two and for ever innumerable All and Eternal and Infinite, this is the indication of the Supreme who is beyond Time and Timelessness in the highest Absolute.

The One is Four for ever in his supramental quaternary of Being, Consciousness, Force and Ananda.

Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, these are the eternal Four, the quadruple Infinite.

Brahma is the Eternal's Personality of Existence; from him all is created, by his presence, by his power, by his impulse.

Vishnu is the Eternal's Personality of Consciousness; in him all is supported, in his wideness, in his stability, in his substance.

Shiva is the Eternal's Personality of Force; through him all is created, through his passion, through his rhythm, through his concentration.

Krishna is the Eternal's Personality of Ananda; because [of] him all creation is possible, because of his play, because of his delight, because of his sweetness.

Brahma is Immortality, Vishnu is Eternity, Shiva is Infinity; Krishna is the Supreme's eternal, infinite, immortal self-possession, self-issuing, self-manifestation, self-finding.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 205-09)

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

Mother appears to be displeased with me today because she did not look at me while walking on the terrace. It may be due to the incidents I have mentioned. If anything else has escaped notice I may be enlightened; because I feel as if Mother has withdrawn her help.

The Mother: I am not at all displeased with you and it is not purposely that I did not look at you while I was walking on the terrace; for some reason or another (perhaps the great number of people who gathered there today) I had not seen you and informed Sri Aurobindo about it as soon as I came down from the roof.

Never believe that I have withdrawn my help—it is always with you—for this wrong belief only adds to the difficulty in becoming conscious of the constant presence of the force and the help.

17 February 1933

One advantage I got from Mother's note yesterday is that all my over-imagination and obscure ambitious ideas have been dismissed. I have been made to recognise my true position, namely that even inner peace is not established.

It takes time to establish peace; at first the peace gained may be real, but subject to lapses into lethargy or broken by disturbances.

How is it that between 4.00 and 5.00 p.m. hostile suggestions come with great force?

The hostile forces try to establish a time rhythm of that kind so that the consciousness may be accustomed by habit to receive them.

18 February 1933

Today I got a little angry with a workman and with K. I must understand the effect of this anger. Does it dissipate any force or quiet received? Does it create a bad effect on the person at whom it is thrown? I am now determined to give a last blow to anger, because a hostile force may take advantage of it.

Yes, anger is a harmful and wasteful force, harmful both to the person himself and to the one on whom it is thrown. You are right in saying that it must be got rid of. Anger immediately opens the door to the hostile forces; it is as if you were calling them.

While going out at noon from work, I wanted to inform Dr. M to go by the other way as we were closing. I called him twice but he did not respond and I felt as if he had deliberately slammed the door against me because of the mistake in the morning with some ladders, which inconvenienced him. This made me a little revengeful and I planned a way to treat him coldly the next time he came to talk to me. But somehow or other when he came and began to talk familiarly with me, I could not treat him harshly.

Vindictiveness, with or without a real cause for it, is even worse than anger because it is more cold and deliberate in its action and less of an impulse. One should be generous in nature and free from all rancour.

18 February 1933

At 10.00 yesterday night a suggestion came: "What, now you have gained so much! Does it matter if you do not go to the Darshan on the 21st?" And just now something tried to enter my body and shake its stability. As soon as I thought of writing to you, I felt a little weakness in the wrist and neck. What was it?

All these are simply different forms of attack, suggestions to the mind, nervous suggestions like the shaking of the stability, physical suggestions like the touch of weakness on the neck and wrist.

19 February 1933

I now see that the hostiles wanted to establish time-rhythms for attack in two or three ways. For several days, between 7.30 and 9.00 I used to get angry; after 10.00 I felt lethargic; and at 4.00 or 5.00 imaginative excitements came. Do the hostiles see a person materially or do they simply throw on him suggestions as if the material person was also unembodied like them?

The hostiles have themselves bodies though not of a gross physical kind—they see, but with subtle seeing that includes not only bodies, but movements of forces, thoughts, feelings.

I find that my memory is not very active nowadays. I forget many things; even Tamil words for work I do not remember well. What is the way to improve memory?

This kind of inactivity may go of itself—with a slightly increased attention.

19 February 1933

There are still some ambitious imaginations in the vital mind, such as that I will be given departmental management work or put in charge of money or brought into nearness with you. I wish to give up this egoism so it may stand rejected for ever.

Yes, that kind of egoism is a great stumbling block—it should be renounced altogether.

But with that loss of egoism, I want Yasodha bhava also.

What precisely do you mean by having the Yasodha bhava?

20 February 1933

By Yasodha bhava I meant the Vatsalya bhava—the mother's love for the Child Sri Krishna, and the readiness to sacrifice all physical and vital pleasures for the sake of that love.

I see; that is all right.

20 February 1933

After Pranam I felt a sense of freedom and stability and peace. Is it likely to remain like that?

It should remain—even if covered up temporarily by surface disturbances, the peace once gained reappears always and gains in depth and intensity as time goes on.

21 February 1933

N asked me for some explanations. I explained to him something about surrender, opening, calling down the Force and aspiring and about the hostile forces and right movements and the Divine's protection. But there was not in me that sense of display which was there before; it was simply a spontaneous, joyful giving of a little knowledge gained or given by you. Should I be careful in doing this or should I avoid it altogether?

It is all right if you are careful.

22 February 1933

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

THE RHYTHM OF SILENCE

THE moon that metes the dark time
 With hushful hours
And drowns in a tide of shimmering peace
 The tallest towers,
Sweeps with swift surge of loveliness
 Far other lands;
And no feet heavy with sorrow press
 Those dreadless sands.

Sentinel trees are fringing
 A far-off shore—
O stillness of the boughs that trace
 On a mossy floor
An ageless pattern of white moon-rays
 That shift and cross,
A glyph of beauty and of love-filled days
 Taintless, with no dross.

April 17, 1935

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: A certain charm and atmosphere of light are the chief qualities of the poem.

AN ASPIRATION THAT IS SUFFICIENT, INTENSE AND EFFECTIVE

88 — This world was built by Death that he might live. Wilt thou abolish death? Then life too will perish. Thou canst not abolish death, but thou mayst transform it into a greater living.

89 — This world was built by Cruelty that she might love. Wilt thou abolish cruelty? Then love too will perish. Thou canst not abolish cruelty, but thou mayst transfigure it into its opposite, into a fierce Love and Delightfulness.

90 — This world was built by Ignorance and Error that they might know. Wilt thou abolish ignorance and error? Then knowledge too will perish. Thou canst not abolish ignorance and error, but thou mayst transmute them into the utter and effulgent exceeding of reason.

91 — If Life alone were and not death, there could be no immortality; if love were alone and not cruelty, joy would be only a tepid and ephemeral rapture; if reason were alone and not ignorance, our highest attainment would not exceed a limited rationality and worldly wisdom.

92 — Death transformed becomes Life that is Immortality; Cruelty transfigured becomes Love that is intolerable ecstasy; Ignorance transmuted becomes Light that leaps beyond wisdom and knowledge.

It is the same idea, that is, opposition and contraries are a stimulus to progress. Because to say that without cruelty Love would be tepid... The principle of Love as it exists beyond the Manifested and the Non-Manifested has nothing to do with either tepidness or cruelty. Only, Sri Aurobindo's idea would seem to be that opposites are the quickest and most effective means of shaping Matter so that it can intensify its manifestation.

As an experience, this is absolutely certain, in the sense that, first of all, when one comes into contact with eternal Love, the supreme Love, one immediately has—how to put it?—a perception, a sensation—it is not an understanding, it is something very concrete: even the most illumined material consciousness, however much it has been moulded and prepared, is *incapable* of manifesting That. The first thing one feels is this kind of incapacity. Then comes an experience: something which manifests a form of—one cannot call it exactly “cruelty”, because it is not cruelty as we know it—but within the totality of circumstances, a vibration appears and, with a certain intensity, refuses love as it is manifested here. It is precisely this: something in the material world which refuses the manifestation of love as it exists at present. I am not speaking of the ordinary world, I am speaking of the present consciousness at its highest. It is an experience, I am speaking of something that has happened. So the part of the consciousness which has been struck by

this opposition makes a direct appeal to the origin of Love, *with an intensity which it would not have without the experience of this refusal*. Limits are broken and a flood pours down which *could not* have manifested before; and something is expressed which was not expressed before.

When one sees this, there is obviously a similar experience from the point of view of what we call life and death. It is this kind of constant “brooding” or presence of Death and the possibility of death, as it is said in *Savitri*: we have a constant companion throughout the journey from cradle to grave; we are constantly accompanied by this threat or presence of Death. Well, along with this, in the cells, there is a call for a Power of Eternity, with an intensity which would not be there except for this constant threat. Then one understands, one begins to feel quite concretely that all these things are only ways of intensifying the manifestation, of making it progress, of making it more perfect. And if the means are crude, it is because the manifestation itself is very crude. And as it becomes more perfect and fit to manifest that which is *eternally progressive*, the very crude means will give way to subtler ones and the world will progress without any need for such brutal oppositions. This is simply because the world is still in its infancy and human consciousness is still entirely in its infancy.

This is a very concrete experience.

It follows that when the earth no longer needs to die in order to progress, there will be no more death. When the earth no longer needs to suffer in order to progress, there will be no more suffering. And when the earth no longer needs to hate in order to love, there will be no more hatred.

(*Silence*)

This is the quickest and most effective means to bring creation out of its inertia and lead it towards its fulfilment.

(*Long silence*)

There is a certain aspect of creation—which may be a very modern one—it is the need to escape from disorder and confusion, from disharmony and confusion: a confusion, a disorder which takes every possible form, which becomes struggle, useless effort, waste-age. It depends on the domain you are in, but in the material world, in action, it means useless complications, waste of energy and material, waste of time, incomprehension, misunderstanding, confusion, disorder. This is what used to be called *crookedness* in the Vedas—I do not know the equivalent of the word, it is something twisted, which instead of going straight to the mark makes sharp, unnecessary zigzags. This is one of the things that is most opposed to the harmony of a purely divine action which has a simplicity... that seems childlike. Direct—direct, instead of making absurd and completely useless circumvolutions. Well, it is obviously the same thing: disorder is a way of stimulating the need for the pure divine simplicity.

The body feels very strongly, very strongly that everything could be simple, so simple!

And so that the being—this kind of individual agglomerate—can be transformed, it needs precisely to become more simple, simple, simple. All these complications of Nature, which they are now beginning to understand and study, which are so intricate for the slightest thing—the smallest of our functions is the result of a system so complicated that it is almost unthinkable; certainly it would be impossible for human thought to plan and put together all these things—now science is discovering them, and one can see very clearly that if the functioning is to be divine, that is, if it is to escape this disorder and confusion, it must be simplified, simplified, simplified.

(*Long silence*)

That is to say, Nature, or rather Nature in her attempt at self-expression, was obliged to resort to an unbelievable and almost infinite complication in order to reproduce the primal Simplicity.

And we come back to the same thing. From this excess of complication arises the possibility of a simplicity which would not be empty but full—a full simplicity, a simplicity that contains everything; whereas without these complications, simplicity is empty.

Now they are making discoveries like that. In anatomy, for example, they are discovering surgical treatments which are unbelievably complicated! It is like their classification of the elements of Matter—what frightful complexity! And all this is for the purpose of... in an effort to express Unity, the one Simplicity—the divine state.

(*Silence*)

Perhaps it will go quickly.... But the question comes to this—an aspiration that is *sufficient*, intense and effective enough, to attract That which can transform complication into Simplicity, cruelty into Love, and so on.

And it is no use complaining and saying that it is a pity, because it is like that. Why is it like that?... Probably, when it is no longer like that, we shall know. We could put it another way: if we knew, it would no longer be like that.

So, to speculate: “It would have been better if it had not been like that, etc.”—all that is unpractical, it is no use at all, it is useless.

We must hurry up and do what is needed to put an end to it, that is all; it is the only practical thing.

For the body it is very interesting. But it is a mountain, a mountain of experiences that seem very small, but because of their multiplicity, they have their place.¹

15 May 1963

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM, Vol. 10, pp. 166-70)

1. When this talk was first published, Mother remarked, “The scientists will deny it, they will say that I am talking nonsense; but it is because I do not use their terms, it is just a matter of vocabulary.”

MY DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO AT PONDICHERRY

AN ARTIST'S MEETING WITH SRI AUROBINDO IN 1919

It was 1919. I was in Madras at that time. After my book *Twelve Portraits* of Bengal had been published in 1917 I toured Bombay and South India and arrived at Madras. My aim was to see my country well before going to England and to earn for my passage. At that time there weren't any famous men of South India whose portrait I did not draw in pencil and whose special company and affection I did not enjoy.

The head of the publicity department of Theosophical Society at Adyar was Mr. B. P. Wadia. Mrs. Annie Besant and he were very happy and enthusiastic on seeing all my things and said, "Mukul Dey, we too will bring out a similar book from Madras, if only you can do a portrait of Sri Aurobindo and bring it back from Pondicherry. For, without a portrait of Sri Aurobindo, South Indian portraits will be incomplete." I agreed immediately—surely I'll paint and bring it. And in fact I succeeded. I received something greater.

I told them—surely I'll bring it, but on returning home I started worrying, how shall I go? Won't the police get suspicious and cancel my passport for England? About my going to England I had taken a firm decision. Anyway, after much hesitation I dressed in a peculiar mixed-up dress so that no one recognised me for a Bengali. Socks, shoes, trousers, tie, a long coat, and over that my special cap which I had brought from Japan—which resembles a bit the present day Gandhi-cap—it can be folded and kept in the pocket and when necessary can be used to cover the head. On seeing my gait, my dress, etc. some took me for a Goanese, some a Madrasi, or even an Anglo-Indian, but nobody took me for a Bengali. Whatever few words I spoke were all in English with Madrasi intonation. Thus safely I passed in the train and reached Pondicherry station at about 10-11 p.m. On reaching the station I got worried. I have arrived but where shall I put up? If someone makes out from my behaviour that I am a foreigner, a stranger, a new person, a Bengali,—then I would be in the soup. Again, I may be arrested by the police. I did not have any letter of introduction, of commendation or even of permission. There was no time to think even. Immediately I hit upon a plan, looked smart—as if I have visited the place many times—and in this way proceeded towards the horse-drawn cart. I asked the coachman—"Take me to the Grand Hotel, European French Hotel"—in the hope that there must be at least one "grand hotel."

After some time, crossing a sandy road covered with thorny plants, the coachman stopped in front of a European hotel. After paying the fare, I approached the manager of the hotel for the cheapest room. I entered the cheapest room with a rent of Rs. 6/- or 7/- per day. It was a room on the ground floor with a low ceiling—the terrace almost knocking the head! It was as dark as it was damp, as if water was seeping from the floor,—the walls were in equally bad shape. Only one opening in the room—the sort of window through which light and breeze could enter—from that some sea breeze came and one

could see the sea too. The room was a bit like a store room of our museums here. But at that time, on entering that room, I heaved a sigh of relief. At least a shelter had been found.

But so long as the real object of coming, that is, the painting of Sri Aurobindo was not accomplished, I could not be free from worries. Therefore I did not sleep well that night. The next morning I woke up early, got ready hurriedly and after somehow eating a little went out into the streets. I moved about a little and got familiar with the streets. Most of the time I walked along the seaside—as if I had come to enjoy the breeze. I kept my ears open to hear if there was any talk of Sri Aurobindo, and my eyes open in case he came for a promenade on the sea-shore. But I neither saw nor heard any of this that I wanted. I was afraid to ask anyone—in case thereby everything got spoilt. In this way I moved about along the thoroughfares—got acquainted with the streets. Three days passed by.

On the fourth day, 20th April, with a pencil and a pad under my arm I started moving about near the seaside and got acquainted with a local gentleman. I asked him—“Aurobindo is quite a good man, isn’t he? Of cool temperament. What do you say?” He replied, “Yes, surely, he is a very good person, at least to me he seems to be so. Gentle—but he never comes out of the house, he remains day and night in that old house.” I asked, “The house is somewhere on that side, isn’t it?” He said “No, not this side, it is that side, the house is on that street.” Without asking him anything more or giving him a chance to ask me anything, I took the road opposite to his. Then, remembering God with full concentration I took the road to Sri Aurobindo’s house. There was fear, anxiety, trepidation. Who knows if I’ll be able to see him—if there won’t be any obstruction on the way?

It was a noon of April, the sun was burning bright, the streets almost deserted. With palpitating heart, enquiring from a person or two, I managed to find the right house. It was an old two-storey dilapidated house. The walls were perhaps once yellow—now there were patches, green with moss—and the lime plaster had fallen off at places, exposing the red bricks. The doors and windows were wide open. Slowly, with a trembling heart and fearful eyes, I entered it. There was a banana tree in the courtyard, its leaves all torn. Grass and weeds made the courtyard look like a knee-deep jungle. At one place there was a heap of charcoal, at another fire wood—as if the things were left pellmell. Two or three cats were sleeping near the banana tree. In fact on all sides of the ash heap there were cats, as though it was a cats’ hostel.

A Bengali gentleman, thin in appearance—perhaps he was cooking or doing something similar—came out and asked me “What do you want?” I enquired—“Does Sri Aurobindo stay here?” He replied—“Yes, he stays here.”

“I would like to meet him once. Will it be possible to see him?” I asked.

“Who are you? You seem to be a Bengali!” he observed.

“Yes, I am a Bengali, my name is Mukul Dey.”

He led me upstairs.

He made me sit in the verandah on a wooden chair and said, “Please take your seat, I am informing him.” The chair also was ancient; like the house it was also in an old and

shaky condition. There was no trace of colour or polish; as if everything had been washed away, eaten away. I sat with a mixed feeling of happiness and anxiety.

I looked on all sides. There were some three or four pictures hanging on the wall, pictures published in monthly magazines, cut out and framed. At this I saw a glimmer of hope and cheer. So, he loves pictures! Suddenly I noticed, among these there was one painted by me; it had come out in a monthly—Sri Radha with a pitcher on her waist going to fetch water—and underneath the picture there was inscribed my name. I was very happy to see it. What a lovely coincidence! I felt some assurance and courage. This would do the work of an introduction letter; I had come, completely unknown, with no letter of introduction from anyone.

In the meantime he was slowly coming out of the room. He was wearing a small size red-bordered rather soiled dhoti which hung up to the knees; there were no pleats; one end was placed around the neck; bare feet; bare body; long hair; bearded, a thin, austere body. Immediately on seeing him I understood that he was Sri Aurobindo—exactly like the rishis of yore or as if I was seeing a living Christ.

He asked, “What do you want?”

“My name is Mukul Dey, I am a Bengali, I have come to draw your picture. I know you are fond of paintings.” I said this and showed him the pictures on the wall and added—“There, one of them is painted by me.”

He smiled a little and said, “Yes, I like it quite. I know.” Then he said as if pleased, “Well, what have I to do?” I replied, “You won’t have to do anything, it will be sufficient if you would just sit quietly.”

“How long do I have to sit?”

“About half an hour, one hour—”

“Can you draw if I sit now?”

As if the heavens had fallen into my hands, I was so overwhelmed with joy! “Yes, I can,” I said and took out a sheet of paper and a pencil and sat down. He too sat on an old wooden chair.

I have drawn portraits of so many people in my life but I haven’t seen any one giving such a wonderful sitting. I drew for one full hour, during which he did not move even a bit, nor did I see him bat an eyelid even once. He was going on gazing one way, at one side, with fixed eyes. Overwhelmed with surprise and joy I touched his feet and showed him what I had sketched. He was obviously happy. He looked at it from different angles. On my request he autographed it in English and Bengali and wrote the date. Telling him that I would come again the next day, I returned to the hotel. What happiness, what surprise and fullness in my mind that day! It cannot be expressed in words.

Next day, 21st of April, I got up early in the morning, had my bath, ate something, and taking my paper, pencil, etc. went out to see Sri Aurobindo. No more struggles for finding the way. Taking the known path I went easily to his house and straight upstairs. The doors were wide open—as if everything was easy and known—I sat down on that same chair in the verandah. A short while later he came out of his room and sat on his chair—in the same way, like a stone statue, immobile, quiet, with fixed regard. In one

hour I completed my second portrait. He saw and autographed it and put the date on it. I took leave of him by saying that I would come once again in the evening. I was filled with happiness. I would make three portraits from three sides and take them with me; surely people will like at least one of these.

I started again in the afternoon, with my portfolio under the arms. Myriad thoughts passed through my mind. He is that Sri Aurobindo. How wonderful, how strange he is! England-returned I.C.S.—Revolutionary leader—How many stories have I heard about him! Are they all true? Who knows!

Again straight away I entered the house, sat down on the same chair in the upstairs verandah. He too came out just a little later. In the same way, bare feet, a corner of the dhoti around his neck, with a smile on his face. I did my pranams and started immediately. Drew for over an hour, but how strange, did not see him bat his eyelids even once! After the drawing was over I took it to him. On the third also he signed his name. As soon as he lifted his head and looked at me smilingly, I said, “Can I ask you a few questions? I have heard many stories about you, I am very eager to know. You won’t mind I hope?”

Smilingly he said, “No. Tell me what you want to ask, put your question.”

“When you were in England, and studied there, how did you like the British at that time? What was your attitude towards them?” I asked.

“My outlook at that time was friendly and cordial. I mixed with a good number of them. I had many friends in London.”

“But I have heard that you were the leader of the revolutionary party of Bengal. Extremely anti-British. What is your present stand towards the British?”

“Yes, what you have heard is correct. I was in the revolutionary party. While in England I used to think a lot about my own country. Then on return to the country, I became hostile to the British rule. But now I have no animosity against the British or for that matter against anyone else—no spite or anger, now I am in peace.”

“How did spite and anger disappear and how did this inner change and peace come?”

“When I was working with the revolutionaries in Bengal, at that time I got acquainted with a great yogi. It was from him that I learnt pranayama yoga and practised it. After that I came here and my anger and spite against all have disappeared, now I am in peace here.”

“If you do not have any anger or spite against anybody why don’t you come to Bengal? I have heard that your wife is living. I have seen her photo, she seems very beautiful, why are you here all alone, why don’t you return home? Won’t you return to your native place? When will you return to your homeland?” [Note: Mrinalini Devi had passed away a few months before. Mukul Dey obviously did not know.]

He remained silent for a while, then replied slowly, “Yes, I’ll return. When the country becomes free from the British rule.”

After that there was no talk. On being able to hear such luminous words of his and having been able to draw three pictures, when I took my leave after giving my heartfelt thanks and grateful pranams, he said,

“I liked very much your work and your conversation. I bless you, I wish you well.”

Placing the sacred dust of his feet and his blessings on my head, I felt overwhelmed with a sense of fulfilment. With the joy and pride as if I had conquered an empire, the same day I left Pondicherry for Madras.

When I had gone there and had the meeting, I encountered no noise, no crowd, no rules and regulations, devout priests, or guards, there was nothing of the kind,—there was then no need for a letter of introduction or a pass. Everything was easy and simple. My questions were very simple, the answers too equally simple, true.

That day I did not have to prostrate myself before any priestly agent in order to have Darshan of the deity. I saw a Yogi living in Truth and Beauty. I saw an image of a great Rishi of our ancient Bharat. His smile and the benign look has never dimmed in my memory.

MUKUL CHANDRA DEY

(Courtesy: *The Heritage*, August 1988)

PASSING MOMENTS

A Book of Poems by R. Y. Deshpande

Published in April 2002, ISBN 81-87544-03-1

59 pages, Price Rs. 60.00

Ultra Publications

676/13, 12th Cross, 4th Main

M.C. Layout, Vijayanagar

Bangalore 560 040

SOME LETTERS

1

THANK you for your letter, closely followed by the book *Ancient World (A New Look)*. I am afraid this book on which you base your doubts about my chronology of the Bharata War is not at all satisfying from the strictly historical point of view. I have myself come across various astronomical calculations but I have never been quite sure that the dates were reliable. There have been many interpolations in old books and preconceived astronomical items are perfectly possible. There are also various interpretations. Take the date of Rama given in the book (p. 148): 10th January 4439 B.C. as derived from Valmiki's epic, and the date of the Bharata War 22 November 3067 B.C. (p. 165). But the scholar P. V. Vartak, on the basis of some astronomical details in Vyasa's epic, arrives at 16 October 5562 B.C. This is more than a thousand years before the birth of Rama according to your book! Or look at the astronomical dating of the Rigveda. A Parsi scholar, Khabardar, carries the Rigveda to 21,788 B.C. But a similar date is suggested by the Taittiriya Samhita (vii,4.8) for itself when it says: *eṣa vai prathamā ratriḥ samvatsarasya yad uttarā phālguni* ("This is the first night of the year when the vernal equinox is in the *uttarā phālguni* constellation"). Such synchronisation is impossible. Besides, another passage in the Taittiriya Samhita (3.1.15) runs: *Bṛhaspatiḥ prathamam jayamanaḥ tisyam nakṣatram abhisambabhuva* ("Bṛhaspati—i.e. Jupiter—crossed the *pusya* constellation for the first time."). This would carry us to 4650 B.C. Here again by a curious coincidence we have the Rigveda saying: *Bṛhaspatiḥ prathamam jayamano mahājyotiṣaḥ paramē vyoman* (4.50.4)—"When Brhaspati first appeared he was seen in the highest regions above the most resplendent place." Then the Rigveda and the Taittiriya Samhita would both be equally high up in the 5th millennium B.C. The synchronisation is again absurd.

I think we should give astronomy a wide berth and stick to more definite and reliable evidence. Apart from astronomical discrepancies, there are epigraphic pitfalls to be avoided. Thus your book (p. 111) cites with the utmost trust "the Janmajaya Copper Plate Gift Inscription of 3102 B.C." The writer fails to mention that this inscription is in Devanagari script which came into vogue nearly four thousand years after the date given! The inscription is a fake.

As to the supposed extreme antiquity of the Tamils in the book I cannot do better than draw upon the most eminent of South-Indian historians: K. A. Nilakanta Sastri. In his booklet *Aryans and Dravidians* (Suchin Publications, Ajmer 1979) he writes (pp. 3-4): "Some of the Tamils are tempted to treat legend as history and link the chronology of the Sangam period with the geological postulate of Lemuria and thus seek to establish hoary antiquity for the Tamil language and culture; but the story of the three Sangams which flourished for about ten thousand years and includes among the members of the Sangams some divinities of the Hindu pantheon, this story is not heard of earlier than in the commentary on *Iraiyanar Ahapporul* which may be of the eighth or ninth century

A.D. at the earliest. The wide gulf between the ten thousand years of the literary legend and the hundreds of millions of years of the geological ages is silently passed over from the heights of their credulity.”

My *Ancient India in a New Light* may be proved wrong, but not on such grounds as your *Ancient World* proposes. Further, if you don't object to the rest of my book, how can you think of a quite discrepant date for the Bharata War? The 15th century B.C. which I propose seems to be supported by the recent excavations at Dwaraka.

10.6.1990

2

You are pinning yourself to one statement in the Mahabharata as if that were the sole and single astronomical reference in the poem. The fact is that there are several and some of them seem to be consistent with one another while a number of them are at variance. Therefore I say in general that we cannot rely on these declarations. The epic is a conflation of various pieces of poetry and prose belonging to different ages. There is no guarantee that any of the astronomical indications belonged to the original composition which, according to Sri Aurobindo's acute stylistic analysis, consisted of about 25,000 verses instead of the present 100,000.

Going by one statement in the Adi Parva, K. S. Raghavan calculated that the astronomical Kaliyuga started on 11 January 3104 B.C. and his school of scholars have placed the War's beginning in November 3067 B.C. But perhaps you don't know that in Mausala Parva I.1 & 3, the Kaliyuga is said to have commenced 36 years after the War. So if the Kaliyuga is to be dated to January 3104 or else for some reason to 3102 B.C., then the War would begin in 3140 or in 3138 B.C. But even this calculation is spoiled by the Bhagavatyana Parva Sec. CXIII which says that the Kaliyuga started at the time of the War itself.

In my earlier letter I quoted the scholar P. V. Vartak who, on the basis of some astronomical references in the Mahabharata arrived at 16 October 5562 B.C. for the War.

In dealing with astronomical questions you can't afford to have a single Raghavan-tracked mind. Perhaps the most thorough astronomical treatment of the epic is by Velandai Gopala Aiyar in his article "The Date of the Mahabharata War" in *The Indian Review*, a Monthly Journal edited by G. A. Natesan, Vol. II, January-December, 1901, pp. 424-37. He claims that, except for two statements which conflict with his conclusion, all the other texts—8 in number—point to the inference that the War which lasted for 18 consecutive days, ended on the fifty-first night before the winter solstice. Computing backwards from the fact that at present the winter solstice falls on 21 December, V. G. Aiyer reaches the date 31 October 1194 for the close of the War and hence 14 October 1194 B.C. for its inception.

I think the wisest course for you is to set aside astronomy in this connection and try to understand why I have suggested the 15th century B.C. My chronology, as I have said, finds support in the recent sub-marine archaeological excavations which on solid grounds date the submergence of Dwaraka to the 15th century B.C. My conclusions had nothing

to do with these excavations. The latter have come in happily as some sort of corroboration.

In my earlier letter I had shown how astronomical interpretations lead to extravagant historical situations. You have refused to listen to anything except the one bee which Raghavan has set buzzing in your bonnet. I suggest that this bee, like so many others, has strayed in from outside the original Mahabharata, Vyasa's glorious honeycomb of about 25,000 resounding verses.

The second edition of my *Problem of Aryan Origins*—expanded to more than double the length of the first edition—will contain the evidence from Dwaraka in one of its five new supplements.

29.6.1990

3

When I say that, according to J. Allegro, Jesus was not a man but a mushroom, I do not simply mean—as you understand—that “there was never a Jesus in flesh and blood but he was a sudden development (mushroom) in the imagination of the cultists, intended to symbolise their writings.” I particularly mean the cult centred upon the worship of fertility-powers by which the cultists not only symbolised their religion but also attained visionary and ecstatic experiences because of the hallucinogenic properties of the mushrooms, especially the mushroom known as fly-agaric whose scientific name is *amanita muscaria*. The figure called Jesus is for Allegro an invention of the cultists to represent a mushroom-plant and even his name is interpreted in terms of the Sumerian language to mean both a fertility-power and an actual member of the mushroom family. The word “mushroom” is employed literally, not metaphorically in the sense of “sudden development”. No doubt, Jesus is thus reduced to a myth but he is not a mythical character as in a novel, where an imaginary man is intended. He is, to Allegro, not a man at all, whether imaginary or real. When the Gospels and St. Paul talk about him, they talk about a mushroom in cryptic language concealing the true purpose of their writings. Looking on the New Testament as a legend and a symbol you have compared the writings of the fertility-cultists to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. But *Savitri* is a legend about human beings who are symbolic of the future spiritual development of such beings. In these writings there are no human beings.

As for Sri Aurobindo and Christ, Sri Aurobindo does not exclude any spiritual movement: he assimilates the essentiality of each movement and makes it a power for a future greater than any power compassed in the past. Some movements play a direct part, others an indirect one.

You have asked whether Sri Aurobindo expressly declared his identity with Krishna. In my article “The Procession of the Avatars” I have attempted to deduce from his own words as well as the Mother's that he was Krishna in a past birth. But I have also learnt privately from certain statements of Nolini to his friends that during the Mahabharata War Sri Aurobindo had been born as Krishna. Nolini bases his pronouncements on Sri Aurobindo's own confidences.

1985

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

The Symbolism of Night in “The Symbol Dawn”

10

A SUBJECTIVE or spiritual enlightenment of some kind, already exemplified in the lives of individuals, is perhaps beginning to be recognised as an ideal towards which humanity is slowly tending. But our subjection to the laws of Nature would seem to forbid us to aspire for a more radical transformation harmonising our outer existence with the freedom and immortality of the Spirit. The very notion of such an attempt is bound to be viewed with the disbelief voiced by the “sense-shackled human mind” in *Savitri*:

“How can man grow immortal and divine
Transmuting the very stuff of which he is made?
This wizard gods may dream, not thinking men.”¹

This incredulity is only natural when even the great spiritual traditions have denied the possibility of such a change here on earth in the human body.² Yet charged with pursuing an impossible ideal, a “high insanity, a chimaera”,³ Sri Aurobindo could calmly reply with the irrefutable logic of revelation:

Earth’s winged chimaeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven,
The impossible God’s sign of things to be.⁴

Fully aware of what it is in the nature of things that makes the idea of divinising material life look like the fantasy of a self-deluding mind, Sri Aurobindo gave ample space in *Savitri*, starting with the opening page, to presenting this side of the picture with all the force it deserves. But those who accepted his ideal on faith sometimes went to the other extreme from the general scepticism, light-heartedly underestimating the obstacles to a supramental manifestation. Sri Aurobindo wrote to one of these disciples in 1933:

My difficulty is that you all seem to expect a kind of miraculous fairy-tale change and do not realise that it is a rapid and concentrated evolution which is the aim of my Sadhana and that there must be a process for it, a working of the higher in the lower and a dealing with all the necessary intervals—not a sudden feat of creation by which everything is done on a given date. It is a supramental but not an irrational process. What is to be done will happen—perhaps with a rush even—but in a workmanlike way and not according to Faerie.⁵

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo seemed to take a story right out of “Faerie” to symbolise what he had in mind for humanity. But through decades of highly “workmanlike” revision, he turned this poem based on an ancient legend into a definitive symbol of the “rapid and concentrated evolution” envisaged in his Yoga. In the opening passage, subjected to the most intensive revision of all, we have seen that several aspects of the Inconscient—that ultimate support of Matter’s resistance to Spirit—came to be indicated in this passage in the course of its development. One of these, the aspect of law, whose symbolic guardian is the “Dragon of the dark foundations”,⁶ has still to be discussed.

The preceding instalment of this series was accompanied by a facsimile showing a column of one of the last manuscripts of the opening of *Savitri*. A line that has not yet been commented on,

Renewing for ever its unconscious act,

appears to the right of the column seen in that facsimile with an arrow indicating its insertion after “As in a dark beginning of all things”. Another arrow moves both these lines down before “A mute and featureless semblance of the Unknown”. Thus the sentence on the “cosmic drowse of ignorant Force” and its “sommambulist whirl” (an earlier version of which has been discussed in a previous instalment) came to read as follows:

As in a dark beginning of all things,
Renewing for ever its unconscious act,
A mute and featureless semblance of the Unknown
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its sommambulist whirl.

The final expansion of this sentence came in the next manuscript. There, “Repeating” was substituted for “Renewing” in the second line and a new line was inserted before this one. The new line turned out to be the last that Sri Aurobindo would add to the passage that now forms the first printed page of *Savitri*, a passage whose long growth had reflected the importance of this opening symbolisation of the Night of inconscience.

The new line reinforced the idea introduced in the preceding version, forming with its companion a couplet,

Prolonging for ever its unseeing will,
Repeating for ever its unconscious act,

which was revised in the next manuscript. That manuscript, Sri Aurobindo’s last version of the opening passage in his own hand, for which he used sheets from a small chit-pad, is reproduced in a facsimile in this issue.⁷ There these two lines were first written as in the previous version, then transposed and altered to the order and wording of the final

text, with “its” changed to “the” in both lines. The sentence, forming the lower half of the second page of the manuscript, reads there as in the published text except for the second line:

As in a dark beginning of all things,
 The mute semblance of a featureless Unknown,
 Repeating for ever the unconscious act,
 Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,
 Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
 Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
 And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.

After Nirodbaran copied this from the manuscript, Sri Aurobindo dictated his final revision of the second line. He changed this line to

A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown,

and also shifted the four-line sentence beginning with the words “Almost one felt” (the second to fifth lines on the second page in the facsimile), moving it up to its present position before “A power of fallen boundless self”.

The last two lines added by Sri Aurobindo to the opening page of his epic,

Repeating for ever the unconscious act,
 Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,

introduce an idea that is closely related to his concept of law in the material world. This, in turn, brings us near to the central issue of *Savitri*. For repetition is the basis of habit and Sri Aurobindo defined physical laws as the “habits” of Nature,

Her firm and changeless habits aping Law,

which are part of the “massed machinery”, the “senseless dire revolving Wheel” whose disastrous movement Savitri stops by the conscious power of her seeing will when she matches “with the iron law her sovereign right”.⁸

Obviously, law is not a bad thing in itself. Without Nature’s “subtle and mighty laws”,⁹ the world could not exist for a moment. Physical law must ultimately be a translation of that higher order which the ancient Rishis called Ritam, “supreme truth of movement, action, manifestation,... the spontaneous Right, the free Law, the original divine order of things untouched by the falsehoods of the divided and separative consciousness”.¹⁰ A mysterious Vedic deity, Ahi Budhnya, alluded to by Sri Aurobindo as “the mystic Dragon of the Foundations”,¹¹ seems to be connected with the maintenance of that supernal Law. For his name indicates that he belongs to “the supreme plane, the foundation of the Truth, *ṛtasya budhnaḥ*”.¹²

But in this fallen world, law can become a restrictive bondage for the consciousness struggling to regain the freedom it has lost. The protector of this lower law—apparently the dark reflection of Ahi Budhnya—is described in the *Record of Yoga* as “the Dragon of the nether foundations who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested”.¹³ Now, *Savitri* is the epic of that stage in the evolution of consciousness when the time has come for the supreme Will to be manifested undeformed in place of the old law of the Inconscient. Therefore the poem revolves around Savitri pitting her “sovereign right” (which represents Ritam, the law of the Truth) against Death’s “iron law” (the law guarded by “the Dragon of the nether foundations”).

Before sentient beings appeared amid the “somnambulist whirl” of this universe created by an ignorant Force, there was no need for any law except that of the endless repetition of unconscious movements, sustained (“cradled”) by an Inconscient described on the opening page of *Savitri* as a “semblance of the Unknown”, a featureless shadow of the equally featureless Superconscient. In another passage “the spirit of the brooding Void” is said to prolong similarly the “self-repeating whorls” of Energy that constitute all objects:

This vast perpetual motion caught and held
In the mysterious and unchanging change
Of the persistent movement we call Time
And ever renewing its recurrent beat,
These mobile rounds that stereotype a flux,
These static objects in the cosmic dance
That are but Energy’s self-repeating whorls
Prolonged by the spirit of the brooding Void,
Awaited life and sense and waking Mind.¹⁴

There was nothing in this arrangement to feel unhappy about, so long as there were no conscious beings whose interests might be in conflict with the workings of this huge lifeless machinery. But when life and sense arrived on the scene, and still more with the advent of mind and intelligence, the rigid laws of an unconscious world began to be felt more and more as an intolerable tyranny.

For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind a mind or, at least, minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible.¹⁵

Admittedly, Sri Aurobindo here puts the difficulty “trenchantly, with exaggeration, if need be, rather than with diminution,” so as to find a way to untie “this great knot and tangle of Matter denying the Spirit”.¹⁶ In the very month of August 1916 when he published these poignant sentences in the *Arya*, he began writing *Savitri*. There the death of Satyavan serves as an example of just this sort of “blind and insentient cruelty” of the rigorous law of an “iron existence”. In early versions of the poem, we already find Narad’s explanation that this is not a mere wanton cruelty, but the “heavenly cruelty” of the process of an evolution towards divinity:

Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing man
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould.¹⁷

Some three decades later, Sri Aurobindo expanded the short passage containing these lines into a long and powerful canto, “The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain” (Book Six, Canto Two). He elaborated here on the purpose of this evolutionary “cruelty”, made necessary because of the inertia of the substance in which our consciousness is embodied:

Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.¹⁸

This inertia is due to our being only half awakened from the “cosmic drowse of ignorant Force”. Evidently, then, if we wish to escape from pain and suffering, we must awake fully or else sink back into the original sleep of the Inconscient. It is doubtful, however, whether the latter option is open to us. In any case, another sentence in the same passage suggests that pain was pre-existent in the Inconscient itself, always latent there as a potential problem which can be permanently solved only by transcendence:

Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience
Which was thy body’s dumb original base;
Already slept there pain’s subconscious shape:
A shadow in a shadowy tenebrous womb,
Till life shall move, it waits to wake and be.¹⁹

This leads to the question of the ultimate nature of pain, its origin as an unavoidable consequence of the total negation and partial reaffirmation of Sachchidananda in this involutionary-evolutionary world. This is referred to repeatedly in *Savitri*. In Book Two, Canto Four, for example, we read:

A contradiction founds the base of life:
The eternal, the divine Reality
Has faced itself with its own contraries;

Being became the Void and Conscious-Force
 Nescience and walk of a blind Energy
 And Ecstasy took the figure of world-pain.²⁰

A notable feature of this passage is that though Sachchidananda is a trinity, its negation is described as having four aspects. This is because of the separation of Consciousness from Force—Chit from Shakti or Tapas—breaking up the inherence of Force in Consciousness and Consciousness in Force that exists in the higher hemisphere.

From the point of view of the present study, what especially calls for comment is the relationship of the four negative terms listed by Sri Aurobindo as the contradictions of Sachchidananda—the Void, Nescience, blind Energy and world-pain—to the four “Matter Powers” of the *Record of Yoga* whose combined presence in various passages in *Savitri*, including the opening, has now been demonstrated at some length. These are symbolised by Night, the Sphinx, the somnambulist Force and the Dragon. Not only are there four in each list, but several correspondences between them can easily be discerned.

We have seen that the Void, the negation of Being, is often symbolised by Night; indeed, the expression “Non-Being’s night” occurs a few lines before the sentence quoted above.²¹ That the Sphinx and “her long obscurity”²² represents what Sri Aurobindo often referred to as Nescience is suggested by passages such as the one on the “tenebrous awakened Nescience”²³ discussed in the last instalment. For further support, we might cite the following lines which depict the end of Nescience in a manner that calls to mind the victory over the Sphinx, who perishes when her riddle is solved:

The Enigma ceased that rules our nature’s night,
 The covering Nescience was unmasked and slain....²⁴

The “walk of a blind Energy”, the third of the four “contraries”, is surely the inertia of the “sommambulist Force” that resulted from the divorce of Shakti (Force) from Chit (Consciousness)—two that in the unity of Sachchidananda are so inseparable that one term, Chit, suffices to denote both.

The least obvious correspondence is that between “world-pain” in the above passage and the “Dragon of the dark foundations” who, it is said in Book Three, keeps unalterable the “law of Chance and Death”.²⁵ The law of Chance and Death would seem to imply the law of Pain, but the phrase actually used does not by itself establish a direct connection in Sri Aurobindo’s symbolism between the Dragon and the contradiction of Ananda. However, as was pointed out in an earlier instalment,²⁶ the dragon that “sullenly” looms in Book Ten, Canto One,

Defending its ground of tortured mystery,²⁷

seems to suggest a perversion of the delight of being. Further reasons for associating the “Dragon of the dark foundations” with the law of pain can be found in a sentence in Book

Two, Canto Three, which describes “the inert Inconscient’s law”—the specific domain of the Dragon—as the “insensible foundation” of a suffering world.

Sri Aurobindo tells us what happened when Life overflowed from her own plane into the rigidity of material Space:

Interned now in the slow and suffering years
Sojourns the winged and wonderful wayfarer
And can no more recall her happier state,
But must obey the inert Inconscient’s law,
Insensible foundation of a world
In which blind limits are on beauty laid
And sorrow and joy as struggling comrades live.²⁸

“Insensible foundation” is a precise characterisation of the Inconscient as the negation of Ananda, the eternal Delight. For Delight would not have been changed immediately into world-pain when “all was plunged in the negating Void”.²⁹ A “fathomless swoon of insensibility”³⁰ must have come first,

Bliss into black coma fallen, insensible,³¹

from which pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, all the troubled dualities of sensation and emotion, gradually emerged. So long as this substratum of insensibility imposes its law of limited response, the divine Ecstasy must continue to take “the figure of world-pain”. Yet a time will come when the “Dragon” seeking to prolong indefinitely this inferior law will be compelled to relinquish its hold on embodied beings who have awakened into a Light beyond mind and found there a higher law expressing the reunited truth of Sachchidananda:

There on the verge of Nature’s summit steps
The secret Law of each thing is fulfilled,
All contraries heal their long dissidence.
There meet and clasp the eternal opposites,
There pain becomes a violent fiery joy;
Evil turns back to its original good....
Then shall be ended here the Law of Pain....
This mortal life shall house Eternity’s bliss,
The body’s self taste immortality....
Thy agony shall change to ecstasy,
Indifference deepen into infinity’s calm
And joy laugh nude on the peaks of the Absolute.³²

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. *Savitri* (1993), p. 520.
2. However, Sri Aurobindo found “ideas, intuitions, experiences” in various traditions which, it may be supposed, “point to, if they do not exactly denote, the physical transformation”. (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1237)
3. *Savitri*, p. 520.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
5. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 147.
6. *Savitri*, p. 336.
7. These first two pages of the last manuscript of the opening passage have also been reproduced in *Perspectives of Savitri* (Volume Two), p. 598, as part of a selection of facsimiles of manuscripts of *Savitri* representing different periods of its composition.
8. *Savitri*, pp. 19-21.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
10. *The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 475.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 382. Sri Aurobindo translated *ahina budhmyena* in Rig Veda IV.55.6 as “the Dragon of the foundation”, *ibid.*, p. 499.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
13. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1261.
14. *Savitri*, p. 156.
15. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 243.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Cf. *Savitri*, p. 444; “man” was changed to “men” in the final text.
18. *Savitri*, p. 443.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
21. See *Mother India*, September 2001, p. 675.
22. *Savitri*, p. 449.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
26. See *Mother India*, June 2001, p. 442.
27. *Savitri*, p. 601.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
30. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 319.
31. *Savitri*, p. 221.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 450-51, 454.

The last manuscript of the opening of *Savitri* (c. 1945)

CAN THERE BE AN INDIAN SCIENCE?

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

The Royal Society of London

FRANCIS BACON was an acclaimed celeb who maintained that there has to be a use for knowledge. While the proposition gives a sense of crude utilitarianism, it does provide a surer degree of solidity to our understanding of the nature of things and ideas. The gains of knowledge for the sake of knowledge can be frustrating and it is only in application that there can be the truer Advancement of Learning. In Bacon's famous pronouncement Knowledge is Power and Power is meant to achieve something. It can be historical, legal, political, scientific knowledge but in the end it must prove fruit-bearing. One aspect of it for him was to see his country acquiring prosperity with the will to be superior and to rule over the world: He held expansionist monarchy as a desirable ideal for Great Britain. Public good ensuing from the employment of knowledge became in his reckoning service to the State. War, nor religion nor the designs of fate, the fortunes of empires ever drove the course of history; rather, he thought, practical wisdom moulded the destiny of people.

Bacon also answered the question as to how one is to acquire this wisdom. He proposed "critical empiricism" as the foundational principle in this pursuit. Inductive logic based on observation of nature and the verifiable deductions made from it became the guiding method. Thus physics and metaphysics got differentiated. While the first sought for the material and efficient causes, the second engaged itself with the formal and final.

Having made observation of facts the foundation of scientific knowledge, neither Aristotle nor Scholastic Authority nor Revelation claimed merit in its success. The result was that its findings at once became objective, and hence universal. "The conclusion which forced itself upon English commonsense," says a commentator providing a specific historical illustration, "was the necessity of abandoning *a priori* speculation and the abused syllogism in favour of observation and induction." The immediate reward was the advance made in the positive sciences. Bacon became the founder of experimental philosophy. Not disputing with words in the manner of the Scholastics but understanding things by observation was the new change that came with the acceptance of his thoughts.

This programme of Bacon drew great respect from the thinkers following him; in fact the European intellectual culture underwent an enormous change in its wake. Not that he was the first to come to this conclusion; but the weight of his personality and the force with which he put it made all the difference. Verification of experimental data with the utmost rigour became the condition in pursuance of the studies of the physical world. So was born the useful functional science. This in turn implied that science had to engage itself in a collective effort, adding knowledge to knowledge. In order to carry it out on

this scale State financing of the enterprise became imperative. Science thus got institutionalized.

Knowledge in the use of humanity soon led Bacon into the domains of utopian fiction—as if to make it real and realistic. His *New Atlantis* envisioned an ideal society that was “an efficient imperial autarchy, evidently organized on hierarchical lines, and centred on the monarchy and a research institution called Solomon’s House.” Thirty-six years after his death this House came into existence in the form of the Royal Society of London.

In his account of the early beginnings of the Society (1645-1662) John Wallis tells us the following: “About the year 1645, while I lived in London (at a time when, by our civil wars, academical studies were much interrupted in both our Universities)... I had the opportunity of being acquainted with divers worthy persons, inquisitive into natural philosophy, and other parts of human learning; and particularly of what has been called the New Philosophy, or Experimental Philosophy. We did by agreements, divers of us, meet weekly in London on a certain day, to treat and discourse of such affairs... These meetings we held sometimes at Dr. Goddard’s lodgings in Wood Street (or some convenient place near), on occasion of his keeping an operator in his house for grinding glasses for telescopes and microscopes; sometimes at a convenient place in Cheapside, and sometimes at Gresham College, or some place near adjoining. Our business was (precluding matters of theology and state affairs) to discourse and consider of Philosophical Enquiries, and such as related thereunto: as physic, anatomy, geometry, astronomy, navigation, statics, magnetics, chemics, mechanics, and natural experiments; with the state of these studies, as then cultivated at home and abroad. We then discoursed of the circulation of the blood, the valves in the veins, the venae lactae, the lymphatic vessels, the Copernican hypothesis, the nature of comets and new stars, the satellites of Jupiter, the oval shape (as it then appeared) of Saturn, the spots in the sun, and its turning on its own axis, the inequalities and selenography of the moon, the several phases of Venus and Mercury, the improvement of telescopes, and grinding of glasses for that purpose, the weight of air, the possibility, or impossibility of vacuities, and nature’s abhorrence thereof, the Torricellian experiment in quicksilver, the descent of heavy bodies, and the degrees of acceleration therein; and divers other things of like nature. Some of which were then but new discoveries, and others not so generally known and embraced, as now they are, with other things appertaining to what has been called The New Philosophy, which from the times of Galileo at Florence, and Sir Francis Bacon (Lord Verulam) in England, has been much cultivated in Italy, France, Germany, and other parts abroad, as well as with us in England... We would by no means be thought to slight or undervalue the philosophy of Aristotle, which has for many ages obtained in the schools. But have (as we ought) a great esteem for him, and judge him to have been a very great man, and think those who do most to slight him, to be such as are less acquainted with him. He was a great enquirer into the history of nature, but we do not think (nor did he think), that he had so exhausted the stock of knowledge of that kind as that there would be nothing left for the enquiry of aftertimes, as neither can we of this age hope to find out so much, but that there will be

much left for those that come after us...” The first group of men coming together to form the Royal Society included Robert Boyle, John Wilkins, John Wallis, John Evelyn, Robert Hooke, Christopher Wren, and William Petty. This was around 1645. John Wallis presented his account of the Society in 1700.

The main considerations that weighed in the minds of those Savants of the Society were essentially about the investigative quest of the physical world, as to “how far more importantly a good method of thinking, and a right course of apprehending things, does contribute towards the attaining of perfection in true knowledge, than the strongest, and most vigorous wit in the World, can do without them.” It was further avowed that, in this pursuit, the “barbarousness” of the style of the Indians would not be encouraged. While Plato was allowed “to be the chief Master of speaking”, Aristotle “was esteemed one of the purest, and most polite Writers of his time.” But in the new times these Masters of Reason had to be dismissed. “If they would be content, with any thing less than an Empire in Learning, we would grant them very much. We would permit them to be great, and profound Wits, as Angelical, and Seraphical, as they pleased: We would commend them, as we are wont to do Chaucer; we would confess, that they are admirable in comparison of the ignorance of their own Age: And, as Sir Philip Sidney of him, we would say of them; that it is to be wondered, how they could see so clearly then, and we can see no clearer now... Of the extent of the matter, about which they have been already conversant, and intend to be hereafter; there can be no better measure taken, than by giving a general prospect of all the objects of men’s thoughts: which can be nothing else, but either God, or Men, or Nature.”

But the conflict between Science and Religion or Reason and Faith had to be resolved by coming to a meaningful positive conclusion. If one was “Solomon’s Porch to the Temple” leading to unanimous agreement, through the other only “God’s peculiar People” passed. This meant that there could be areas other than those which would come under the purview of empirical rationalism. The works of Art have also to be as much understood and accepted as the works of Nature for the use of society. However, the thrust of the entire manner of thinking was to impart a definite affirmative slant to the objective pursuits of knowledge rather than speak about the vagueness of the questions concerning divinity. We must take this as an epoch-making event in the advancement of the knowledge of the material world. That spirit is well imbibed in the following letter written to the King of England urging him to issue a Royal Charter of Incorporation:

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

To The King.

Sir,

Of all the Kings of Europe, Your Majesty was the first, who confirmed this Noble Design of Experiments, by Your own Example, and by a Public Establishment. An

Enterprize equal to the most renoun'd Actions of the best Princes. For, to increase the Powers of all Mankind, and to free them from the bondage of Errors, is greater Glory than to enlarge Empire, or to put Chains on the necks of Conquered Nations.

What Reverence all Antiquity had for the Authors of Natural Discoveries, is evident by the Diviner sort of Honor they conferred on them. Their Founders of Philosophical Opinions were only admir'd by their own Sects.

Their Valiant Men and Generals did seldome rise higher than to Demy-Gods and Heros. But the Gods they Worshipped with Temples and Altars, were those who instructed the World to Plow, to Sow, to Plant, to Spin, to build Houses, and to find out New Countries. This Zeal indeed, by which they expressed their Gratitude to such Benefactors, degenerated into Superstition: yet has it taught us, That a higher degree of Reputation is due to Discoverers, than to the Teachers of Speculative Doctrines, nay even to Conquerors themselves.

Nor has the True God himself omitted to shew his value of Vulgar Arts. In the whole History of the first Monarchs of the World, from Adam to Noah, there is no mention of their Wars, or their Victories: All that is Recorded is this, They lived so many years, and taught their Posterity to keep Sheep, to till the Ground, to plant Vineyards, to dwell in to work in Brass and Iron. And if they deserved a Sacred Remembrance, for one Natural or Mechanical Invention, Your Majesty will certainly obtain Immortal Fame, for having established a perpetual Succession of Inventors.

I am (May it please Your Majesty) Your Majesties most humble, and most obedient Subject, and Servant,

Thomas Sprat

King Charles II put his Great Seal of approval on 15 July 1662 and the Royal Society of London came into official existence. "The King presented the new Society with a silver mace which has the emblems of England, Ireland, Scotland and France on its head." The first president of the Society was Viscount William Bouncker and the first meeting was held on 20 May 1663. In that meeting 150 Fellows were elected.

"The Royal Society is the world's oldest scientific academy in continuous existence," says a recent Internet write-up, "and has been at the forefront of enquiry and discovery since its foundation in 1660. The backbone of the Society is its Fellowship of the most eminent scientists of the day, elected by peer review for life and entitled to use FRS after their name. There are currently more than 65 Nobel Laureates amongst the Society's approximately 1300 Fellows and Foreign Members. Throughout its history, the Society has promoted excellence in science through its Fellowship, which has included Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Ernest Rutherford, Albert Einstein, Dorothy Hodgkin, Francis Crick, James Watson and Stephen Hawking." It also tells us about the objectives to which the Society is committed—"to recognise excellence in science; support leading-edge scientific research and its applications; stimulate international interaction; further the role of science, engineering and technology in society; promote education and the public's understanding of science; provide independent authoritative advice on mat-

ters relating to science, engineering and technology; encourage research into the history of science.”

With the motto *Nullius in Verba* the Royal Society stands for the “Improvement of Natural Knowledge”. Its enduring commitment has been the empirical evidence as a basis of comprehension of the physical world. In this formulation we discern the practical mind of the British in its pursuit of wisdom. It is in this regard that the commercially busy and professional London resembles more the ancient wealthy and powerful Corinth than Athens. “The honour of being Athens goes to Paris.”

In this development, although knowledge became use-based, there is the sign of the beginning of another cycle of human growth. Indeed, it became an instrument of world conquest. The following account speaks glowingly about the political power that was acquired by the English: “If there can be a true character given of the Universal Temper of any Nation under Heaven: then certainly this must be ascribed to our Countrymen: that they have commonly an unaffected sincerity; that they love to deliver their minds with a sound simplicity; that they have the middle qualities, between the reserved subtle southern, and the rough unheven Northern people: that they are not extremely prone to speak: that they are more concerned, what others will think of the strength, than of the fineness of what they say: and that an universal modesty possesses them. These Qualities are so conspicuous, and proper to our Soil; that we often hear them objected to us, by some of our neighbour Satirists, in more disgraceful expressions. For they are wont to revile the English, with a want of familiarity; with a melancholy dumpishness; with slowness, silence, and with the unrefined sullenness of their behaviour. But these are only the reproaches of partiality, or ignorance: for they ought rather to be commended for an honourable integrity; for a neglect of circumstances, and flourishes; for regarding things of greater moment, more than less; for a scorn to deceive as well as to be deceived: which are all the best indowments, that can enter into a Philosophical Mind. So that even the position of our climate, the air, the influence of the heaven, the composition of the English blood; as well as the embraces of the Ocean, seem to joyn with the labours of the Royal Society, to render our Country, a Land of Experimental knowledge. And it is a good sign, that Nature will reveal more of its secrets to the English, than to others; because it has already furnished them with a Genius so well proportioned, for the receiving, and retaining its mysteries.” Here we have the typical British traits which, while promoting the application of science, manifested themselves in every conduct of life. The practical wisdom and the efficacy of empirical rationalism came as a liberating force to give another sense of direction, not only to material growth and prosperity but also to the intellectual mind reaching out new horizons.

If we briefly look at the earlier progress of mankind we immediately discern that the boons of science boast of some unmistakably assuring quality. The tortuous era of religion was left behind and man’s spirit started breathing freedom. The suffocation caused by the canonical approach was removed by one mighty gust of the new wind. We have to just remember the theological argument that was formulated by the Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325. Its doctrine of “coinherence” had sharply divided body and soul—with

the denial of value to the physical world altogether at the cost of the paradisaical gains. This pretty earth became an object of disdain, and beings with bright wings and faces with the nimbus of light began to be venerated. Maybe that was the necessity of the time; but by the seventeenth century it had served its purpose and, by the process of decay-disintegration-death, things had to change. Neither the elements of fine gracious sensitivity that came with the Christian religion nor the ignominy to which it succumbed later had any place in the newfound aspiration of the human soul. Empirical rationalism gave a positivist turn and with it got initiated another cycle of social evolution. The Royal Society is the tangible sign, and also a fulsome symbol, of this new beginning.

The strong complaint made against the articulators of faith as well as the learned ancients who had only theoretic ideas of the world had an understandable justification. The Greek philosophers talked and talked but none thought it worthwhile to conduct controlled experiments and set their ideas on the basis of dependable observations. They built peripatetic academies and not laboratories; they chiefly bestowed their attention on speculative aspects and not on studying sciences and crafts; they brought the powers of free thought to man and not the gifts that come from the physical objects themselves. Not that these studies would not have made them renowned. There is indeed every reason to believe otherwise. Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Epicurus would have been as much honoured, if not more, had "they only set things in a way of propagating Experiences down to us, and not imposed their imaginations on us, as the only Truths." The happy fall-out would have been the nearness of philosophy to science, of giving dignity to the material objects. The world of ideas has a charm no doubt but the workshop of Hephaestus has also to give them the solidity of form that can hold fiery beauty of another dimension in it. It is the "thingishness" of things and not the abstract perception that is more appealing to our senses which are the means of cognition in the physical domain. They must be fulfilled.

But the entire pre-Galilean world was of a different make in which the Sciences suffered at the cost of the Arts. "The reason of this is evident. It is because philosophy had been spun out to so fine a thread, that it could be known but only to those who would throw away all their whole lives upon it. It was made too subtle, for the common, and gross conceptions of men of business. It had before in a measure been banished, by the philosophers themselves, out of the World." If the philosophers were too aristocratic to do menial work, then it is quite understandable as to why the culture of laboratory never developed in those days. The desirable intimacy with the earth was largely missing.

In the backdrop of this attitude one sees the constructive role of scientific societies in relocating the centre of gravity towards what is substantial and gainful. "But it is too late to lament this error of the Ancients; seeing it is not now to be repaired. It is enough, that we gather from hence; that by bringing Philosophy down again to men's sight, and practice, from whence it was flown away so high: the Royal Society has put it into a condition of standing out, against the Invasions of Time, or even Barbarism itself: that by establishing it on a firmer foundation, than the airy Notions of men alone, upon all the works of Nature; by turning it into one of the Arts of Life, of which men may see there is daily need; they have provided, that it cannot hereafter be extinguished, at the loss of a

Library, at the overthrowing of a Language, or at the death of some few Philosophers: but that men must lose their eyes, and hands, and must leave off desiring to make their lives convenient, or pleasant; before they can be willing to destroy it.”

If the desirable counterweight against the airy-fairy stuff came with the arrival of science, it now seems that it has also dulled our senses and with that our wits. Take again the example of the Royal Society and its insistence on objective-inductive approach based on experiments and measurements. Thus we have in the British Museum Robert Hooke’s statement, dated 1663, that begins as follows:

The business and design of the Royal Society is—To improve the knowledge of natural things, and all useful Arts, Manufactures, Mechanick practices, Engynes and Inventions by Experiments—(no meddling with Divinity, Metaphysics, Moralls, Politicks, Grammar, Rhetorick or Logick).

The Royal Society thus became, and continues to remain so, down-to-earth and pragmatic in its pursuits of knowledge. Man is finally the measure of things and all must be reduced accordingly. In that pursuit the rising spires of amazement and glory vanish into the blueness of the skyey nothing. Knowledge not for the sake of knowledge but knowledge for the sake of power then becomes the guiding spirit. In this philosophy of science we already see the first seeds of the rampant consumerism ravishing us today.

Even at the operational level there are frightening dangers, serious threats of another kind. The harshness of materialism of yesteryears had its birth in the scientific tradition that got set in the wake of empirical rationalism. But by wrapping ourselves in the virtue of empirical rationalism we have closed our sight to the possibilities of a subtler intuitive perception that can broaden and enrich our life. The shades of multi-dimensionality and the magnificences of orchestral composition are absent. We have become linear. “We are threatened,” says François Jacob, “by monotony and dullness.” The brisk success of science has forced upon us a philosophy that is devoid of all values. We have become arrogant, without realising that our arrogance is not based on the soundness of our knowledge of things. When Laplace and Stephen Hawking talk of God or Creator in the context of their achievements they are talking preemptorily; they are actually stepping outside the boundaries of empirical rationalism. “The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affair of the universe,” says Hawking. “With the success of scientific theories describing events, most people have come to believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started—it will be still up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end; it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?” (*A Brief History of Time*, pp. 140-41) The present understanding of science itself does not

warrant such a conclusion. In that sense Newton is careful to say that he does not make any hypotheses about things that do not pertain to his understanding of the physical world. There is sensible advice also from Einstein: “We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has of course, powerful muscles, but no personality.” (*Out of My Later Years*) To put it poetically, in the language of Hamlet,

There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

The Royal Society aimed at the “perpetual succession of inventors,” but now there is the opposite complaint. Three hundred years after the establishment of the Society we meet a set of objections, challenging the basis on which the prestigious institution was brought into existence. “The chief trouble I see with Science is that,” says A.V. Hill in his lecture at the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow in 1923, “it is often not philosophical enough, so many of its apostles cultivate some little corner of it so insensitively that they never find time or inclination to go up to the top of the neighbouring hill in order to see their own little patch in its proper proportions, and to enjoy the romance of the larger landscape. And after all the best and the noblest motive for the study of Science is the intense mental enjoyment and the spiritual satisfaction that it brings. Science has proved and will continue to prove useful, in a material way, in alleviating man’s lot, in curing disease, in prolonging and beautifying life; and there are few investments more profitable than provision for those who have the skill, the persistence, and the ability to pursue the close and careful analysis of the ways of the living organism; but let us, and them, not miss the pleasure, the enjoyment, and the profit—in the end if you like the material advantages—of seeing the picture as a whole. It is easy to be so busy about much serving, in the scientific laboratories, that one sees only a little corner, and indeed humanity owes much to the close and assiduous cultivation of potato patches; but humanity would never advance much, spiritually, mentally, and materially, were the whole world covered only with small holdings and potato patches; one needs occasionally to be selfish and to take the better part, to reflect on the fundamental mysteries of the world, on life and its nature and development. And even though one cannot formulate a precise and definite creed about them... one can make, at any rate, a humble attempt to see things as a whole, and, in biology, to see things as a whole is to recognize on the one hand that there is no limit to the physical and chemical investigations of living mechanisms, and yet, on the other hand, no limit to their biological synthesis into the complete and intelligent, the wonderful and beautiful, living creature.” (*The Ethical Dilemma of Science*, 1960)

This is a very happy thought indeed, particularly when it is coming from an English scientist himself. But this was a thought put in 1923 and the world since the 1940-45 War has changed completely. Whatever element of the “wonderful and beautiful” was there in the tradition of Britain has been swept away by the strong tide of the American Big Business, including Big Science. In America we see an enlarged version of the Royal Society in its relentless pursuit of utilitarian science, and there is no trace of intuitive

mind looking at the physical world with the eye of its truth and its reality. Indeed, it is that which will make the experimental science itself broader and more meaningful, more significant. But before we come to these matters let us continue with our survey of science that developed through the past centuries.

(*To be continued*)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

THE ADORATION OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

THUS was abolished the eternal nay
 And only the forceful positive stood there,
 The fire that gives fire to a million fires.
 Immortal death worked with the heart of love
 And ignorance was a bright page in the book
*Om Chidrūpiṇī Paramā**, her name.
 Sons of divinity hymned her glories
 And offered to her onyxes and diamonds
 And epic conquests of nobility
 And real-ideas of distinction,
 Found in her the secret of the Veda.
 The avataric soul was fulfilled in her.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

(Based on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, Book III, Canto 2)

* She whose form is consciousness, supreme.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

O LORD, what, but O what do you want from me? I have nothing; neither heart nor hearth. Then what, O what do you want of me? "Nothing, O nothing, from you," you replied. But my Master, there is a need in me to give myself to You, to be held in Your arms yet that is me holding you. O Being! you have nothing to give but won't you open your heart to receive the riches of love? Is not your heart spacious enough? Must I search for someone else for my self-giving? Why do you wonder? You deny your kingship, you assent to be a beggar yet all the kingdom is there. Yet I wager I will win, You will have to accept my self-offering.

SHYAM KUMARI

LAUGH

LIBERATE with laughter,
Don't bury yourself in serious study.
A child at play is closer to heaven,
If there be such a place

Then what use is there for this facade,
When one can become the eye that sees the sun
That knows the morn
And every song it sings.

Laugh a deep uproarious laugh
For no reason at all,
For no one or nothing at all,
Laugh...laugh...laugh.

Until this world drops away
And another appears of joy, and love, and play
Coming to whisk you away.
What do ya say? Come play.

ALLAN STOCKER

A WORLD IN TURMOIL—‘ETERNAL INDIA’ POINTS AN ARROW INTO THE FUTURE

THIS arrow has a long trajectory to describe—but, at least, it indicates a direction to pursue. A direction that is positive, is of the nature of a concrete action and commends itself to our understanding and persuasion.

We are not at a moment, in the affairs of men, when we can afford the luxury of indulging in mere ‘reflections’ on the present situation—whether political, economic, social and psychological, or spiritual. We are in a deeply disquieting and ‘existential’ kind of an ‘inner space’, in which we are compelled to look for a clarity of perception as to the root causes of the turmoil and upheaval we have all around us. This turmoil is not ‘outside’ of us—it is somewhere ‘within’ us, as existential beings. We are responsible for the kind of world that we have created. No one else has done it for us! Somehow, the state of the world must, necessarily, be an expression of what we are: what we are in our being, in our very nature, in the patterns and structures of our ways of knowing, feeling and acting.

In order to arrive at a clarity regarding the root causes of the problems facing us, we must look at ourselves, as we are today—at the present moment of man’s evolution on earth—and discover a concrete line of action, of endeavour that can lead to a qualitative change in our existential status of being. For only such a change will make it possible for us to bring about a change in the outer structures of life. Re-organisation arrived at by external means of compromise and accommodation has been tried for long and doesn’t work any longer. Its reach is limited and precarious at best. A new spring of action is called for. Perhaps it is a process of inner assimilation of contraries realised in man’s own consciousness that is now needed.

Let us try to arrive at a clarity of perception regarding man’s present situation in the status and quality of his being.

The preceding century, the twentieth, has seen a tremendous acceleration and spread of the mental faculty of man. The mind of man, like an arrow-head, has pushed ahead from achievement to achievement leaving us dazed at the pace of its movement. No sooner is a discovery or invention made than is it succeeded by another. This vertical thrust has been equally matched by a horizontal extension of its action. It has achieved this through a wider reach of education to large multitudes, through a proliferation of democratic institutions, through ideologies touching the lives of the peoples, through rapid means of communication and effective information systems. The list is endless.

The mind of man, sharp as a razor, has cut through seeming impossibilities in its search for the laws of nature and the use that can be made of this knowledge for his convenience, in terms of technology. Its characteristic function has been to analyse, to delimit, to break up into parts and to re-assemble the parts into aggregates. It has looked for general principles, for the unifying elements but has not been able to seize the concrete experience of unity that can be made an integral part of life as such. It seeks unity but

cannot arrive at it. Its action breaks up more than it can bring together, it divides what is one, it fragments and alienates.

At the dizzy end of this spiral to success, the mind of man has plunged us—as individuals, as societies, almost as a race, one is tempted to say—into a collective state where problems loom large and multiple and prove intractable. Problems are inter-linked in a multi-dimensional, web-like structure in which our feet are firmly glued and no escape seems possible. Mind seems to have reached its zenith, its acme of achievement, as also a corresponding sum of limitations it suffers from.

Sri Aurobindo, born in India in our present times, like the great Rishis of yore, sums up this predicament very forcefully in these words:

Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it... Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.¹

But the difficulties met at the end of one curve of growth only indicate the lines of progress to be pursued in the next—till a greater completeness is achieved in the many realms of man’s total being. These lines of growth for the future are already discernible in our lives and lead us to the clarity we are looking for.

These possibilities have come into prominence through the results of scientific research in what is known as the frontier areas of knowledge. In pursuing investigation into the laws of nature, man has followed the analytic and reductionist method of science of the 16th century Renaissance in Europe. This method, as we know, seeks to break up into ‘parts’ that which is to be studied, to isolate the parts for a more careful scrutiny and then re-assemble these parts to arrive at a knowledge of the sum of the parts. But at a certain point of the investigation, while delving into the core of matter, the scientist found himself dealing no longer with ‘parts’ that could be put together to form an assemblage. He was in the presence of ‘wholes’, organic and dynamic... ‘wholes’ of conscious energy. These ‘wholes’ are *present* in the ‘parts’ and give to them the form and shape and content that is needed. Reality is given in a ‘whole’, and not in a sum of ‘parts’. The notion of ‘parts’ and their ‘constitutiveness’ is exceeded in a greater and vaster truth of the universe.

This discovery by science of the ‘wholeness’ of matter, of a core of ‘consciousness-content’ in matter, of the change in the functioning of the universe that this leads to—

1. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 1053-55.

these are the most significant facts of our times. The scientist has undergone a total reversal in his view of the nature of the universe and in his understanding of how the universe functions. Thus man, the most conscious being in the universe, is compelled to look at himself anew, at his own being and the pattern of active relationship with such reality. The imbalance between what we know to be true and what we are has become untenable. We have to measure up to the greater reaches of the Real.

These truths have been arrived at by pursuing investigation by a reductionist method! The contradictions are nearly perfect in conception and result!! But, at this point of its long and very successful application, this method itself comes into question. It has reached the point of affirming the presence of 'wholes' in the universe as existential realities. But it cannot seize a 'whole', cannot embrace it in its many-sided totality. It stands at the threshold! It cannot help us to become identified with this 'whole', so as to make it part of our embodied being and our established modes of perceiving and acting in harmony with the nature of the universe.

On this point, the scientists are in silent agreement. It is a hard fact to announce but they do acknowledge that this method can proceed no further, except to continue with cycles of technology on the basis of knowledge already gained. Another method, other ways of knowing are now needed—more inward, more direct, more supple and all-embracing that can experience this 'conscious whole' of existence in all its richness of being and dynamic possibilities of action.

The question arises—have these other methods been known to man, in other moments of history? The scientists, in the West, point out that this perception of matter and of the nature of the Real formed the core of the body of knowledge possessed by ancient India. Through the long ages of her past, this truth has been firmly held and has maintained a line of continuity through renewed experience from time to time. But how was this knowledge reached at another moment of time? And what was the method pursued?

From what we know, this ancient methodology as practised in India centred on the action and power of 'consciousness', and of fresh experience constantly made, offering corroboration. The process followed was that of a deep introspection into the various realms of conscious existence, by an act of willed and conscious identity—from the heights of the Spirit to the core of Matter. The nature of this process is doubtless 'intuitive', meaning thereby that knowledge results from a process of 'direct contact' between the act of self-conscious seeking and the contents in the 'whole' of Consciousness. Consciousness, and Energy inherent in Consciousness, is the underlying, all-pervasive fact of Existence. Knowledge springs from the fact of conscious identity with the 'Whole'.

Two such different methodologies, one analytic and reductionist, the other holistic and intuitive, distanced across large tracts of both time and space—they yet arrive at a similar understanding of the Real. There is a wide divergence of method but a convergence of result! Does this indicate that we are at a curve that marks the possibility of an 'integration of knowledge'? By whichever road we travel, if we go far enough, we seem to arrive at a completeness of knowledge, which stands strengthened by our myriad approaches. These are the questions of our times to which we must address ourselves.

We are in need of a wide, comprehensive and many-sided process of knowing that can seize that Whole and yet perceive, at the same time, the fine details of inter-linking structures existing within the Whole. Such a seeking for a new ‘methodology’ is rather urgent. In fact, it has to contain the possibility of another ‘process’ too. One that can effect a corresponding change in our very status as existential beings, so that our consciousness can measure up to the vastness of the universe, and action flow from that source. Knowledge, being and action need to be of the nature of the Real.

(To be concluded)

ASTER PATEL

THOUGH WORDS ARE FEW...

THOUGH words are few and distance seeming great,
And obstacles are laid along the way,
There dwells behind the walls a quiet love
Which needs no past nor future seeks to bind.
Resting not on promises or time
But on an inner strength and calm and joy;
And even if the path is rugged still,
Hid among the stones are blossoms sweet;
The golden harmonies play behind the clouds,
She’s given us the key, Her Blessed Feet.

MARY HELEN

A BUTTERFLY

PEACE in the cells of the body,
Wings of intuition land on reason's ground.
I hear footsteps of the perfect.
Suddenly the horizon widens,
Something new quires within,
An embrace is felt,
The beloved is around.
Tearing the veil of loneliness
Time stands still,—
It is but a painting, a still life!
In quiet the splendour rains
And earth releases jasmine's fragrance.
The summer-sun is setting,
Dusk announces darkness,
Yet immortality's lamp lights on its own.
Rainbow, infinity's bow
Brought heaven so low!
A flash of an arrow darted,
Piercing my being with love.
It was the hour of God,
Almighty presence in cells
Gave me utter joy,
I emerged from cocoon now as a butterfly,
Beautiful, free and bountiful.
In the Lord's workshop
Though a crawling caterpillar once
Whose sight had no light,
And life had only movement,
I wove my own garb around.
Darkness, limitation, suffocation
Finally left no trace of the worm,
But assumed a new form
When all seemed a meaningless exit.
A force opened from nowhere.
Only the creator's hand was felt,
Now as a butterfly's.
Know his hand is still at work!
Know not what is to come!
Freedom with free wings,
The emerged butterfly merges in him,
To be what he wills!

SHAKUNTALA MANAY

INTIMATE PORTRAITS

Fire in the Mountain Caught in a windstorm in Hokkaido, Japan

ROUGH black lava shifts underfoot and, over the edge, there is a hundred-metre drop. The sides are steep and the terrain is bleak and inhospitable. We are on the rim of a volcano's crater and we huddle together crouching in a pebbled hollow. A windstorm rages, the sun is gone and the cold is bitter. The grand vistas of moments ago have been replaced with self-proclaimed desolation and the windblasts are heavy with sand. There is no shelter or help. We crouch lower and turn towards the gaping fall.

We are stranded atop Tarumae San, everything and everybody is far away and it is Gary's fiftieth birthday. What, I wonder, as I snort out some lava grit from my nostrils, are we doing *here*—Japan wasn't supposed to be like *this*!

We stayed in Japan six weeks and most of this time we spent in pristine Nature. We had chosen Hokkaido, the northernmost and mountainous island of the Japanese archipelago, as it is the least populated and covered with forests; it also has a few active volcanoes. Winter was ending when we first reached there; spring comes late in these northern parts.

We stayed in little inns where rooms of a few tatami¹ provide travellers with simple comfort. We hiked through mountain forests and we camped by lakesides; we gathered wood to cook and keep warm and we found solace in our tent when it rained and rained. Hardship, some would call it, and so it was. Yet it went beyond hardship's inconveniences, for there was more—beauty, for instance, and also peace.

That day we started before sunrise; the summit of Mt. Tarumae San, one of Hokkaido's active volcanoes, was our goal. It was mid-May, yet winter was insistent and there was old iced snow, crunchy and slippery, in the ravines and gorges. The air was crisp and invigorating and we walked in silence through the early morning quiet.

Slowly, the sun came up and the blue of the sky showed clear through the leafless branches. The path was muddy and the trees flanking it huge. Soon we were crossing the Moss Gorge, the first wonder of our trek—four hundred and twenty meters of stone wall, rising high and vertical and covered with thirty different kinds of velvety moss. It was beautiful, but still patchy from the frost; its full glory would come later in the season.

As the elevation grew, so the number of trees diminished. After the last bushes dwindled and vanished, there were only outcrops of boulders to rest against and take in a landscape strikingly reminiscent of Japanese paintings. Apart from the newly-weds taking pictures of each other at the end of the Moss Gorge, we met or saw no one; we were alone in the rocky pathways. The caldera of Lake Shikotsu spread sparkling and turquoise below, in the distance the snowy peak of Mt. Yotei rose white and perfect against the sun—a commanding, serene view.

1. A mat made from woven rushes, used as a traditional floor covering in Japan; it is also a standard unit in room measuring there, approximately 6 ft by 3 ft.

We moved on and stopped only to place our own stone-offerings on the piles that others before us had stacked up, in the tradition of mountain climbers everywhere.

It took us almost six hours to reach the top. A black boulder-strewn moonscape, it was a place so alien and unlike anything I had ever known or seen, I could hardly relate to it; strangeness, emptiness and isolation amplified its appearance and enhanced its effect.

It may have been the stillness or may be it was the silence—an inward movement surfaced and my pace grew mechanical. Large strips of snow were scattered across the plateau and our footprints on them stood out and marked our aloneness. Coming round one side of the crater, the stench of sulphur reached us, just as the smoke belching out from a vent made the reality of the volcano finally real: a living reality.

I have read somewhere, Agni is described as an ‘upside down volcano’. This image floated into my mind now and there I held it, just as I did the same with the breath in my lungs; for they were both too much for me. The stink was overpowering and the idea behind the image demanded thought.

An upside down volcano—what could this refer to? Is it that the roots and origin of Agni start from up high? Is it its down-pouring force? What does it mean? It was difficult to concentrate or think clearly. The strangeness of the place engulfed all and everything. The grandeur of its moonlike bareness and harshness affected me yet, gradually, a perspective settled in: standing as we were in that expanse, I saw ourselves as a part apart; although we felt ourselves gathered, attentive and cradled in her, Nature was a being too large to fathom.

Amidst her resplendence, something within me stirred and was kindled and, abruptly, all deliberations ceased. As inner grounds shifted, the search for the meaning of Agni was rendered meaningless. Instead, and replacing it all, a centre was found and there was warmth. It was intent and resolute and it viewed experience just as it ignored speculation. Radiating from its seat, it spread and blazed. The surroundings stayed as they were, the centre of attention changed. As if rediscovered in another dimension, a presence came through and it felt old yet youthful. A reality of symbols avalanched the being and there I was, firmly holding the *Riches*, by them held.

A little later, I caught up with Gary and the two of us stood still to stare for awhile at the rare, strange sight, Mt. Tarumae San’s lava dome with its pudding-shaped volcanic cone on it. Leaning against one of the black boulders, we had nothing to tell each other; words were irrelevant.

Meanwhile, the warmth in the heart persisted and I kept kindling it.

The wind started blowing just as we had ascended the crater and reached the little Shinto temple. Several tablet-offerings were placed in it. Wondering if they were tokens of pledges or oblations, we thought of the warriors of old Japan and, also, of their queen who threw herself into an active volcano. Someone had told us about it but not why—was it an act of sacrifice, a profound attempt for union? Whichever, her act started a cult and others after her did the same.

The time we spent inside the little shrine helped to further collect ourselves and get

a sense of the known and familiar. Amidst the vast surrounding strangeness, its plain wooden walls gave us the comfort of matter built on a smaller scale. Interesting, how we needed to reduce the scale of things, bring it down to our level. A visit to Nature does that; it conveys an old perspective and it opens one up to perceptions otherwise left unseen.

Wrapped up in the repetition of our daily rounds, we forget, usually, that we too are Nature's creatures. We let our bonds with her lie latent and disused as we restrict our lives within self-built compounds. An art half-lost is the part in us that came before the upgrade to the protection of civilised society. City-bred and science-fed, most of us have grown ignorant and distant from Nature. Her elements are foes or challenges we think we must master; our exchanges with each other are mostly abstract needs. Our primeval beginnings and the strengths we have inherent are pushed aside and we are unmindful and disconnected from what brought us forth.

Eventually, we walked out from the peaceful enclosure and into the wind. It had built up during our short repose and its strength made us hurry towards the security of lower ground. But the slope was steep; the ridge exposed and narrow. There was a sheer drop with sharp rocks cropping up and they looked dangerous. But the view was panoramic, we could see where to go and started walking along the natural curve of the ridge, intending later to move progressively down—or so we thought. By this time, the wind had become stronger and was turning into a gale.

The puffy clouds that had lined the far horizons were moving in with the wind now. Dark and heavy, they added icy particles to the gusts that hit our hands and faces with a freezing pain. We were in danger and fear overtook us. Above the roar, we shouted instructions to each other (well, Gary did and I confirmed that I heard them). We could not go the way we had planned and we were already too far from the temple to return to it. Nodding agreement at each other, we bent forward and started pushing through the storm. But not for long, the wind blew into our steps and its rush threatened to fling us over the edge. We were not far from the black lava edge, where the solid rock sides sloped steeply down to the forest below.

The tempest had us soon prone and flattened down and its surges lifted and carried the smaller gritty lava grains straight into our mouths and nostrils. The grandeur and the vistas of our ascent were gone and we stared at the rough pebbles against which we pressed, wondering what to do. We could only crawl, and we opted for the drop into the crater rather than the outer side of the ridge because it was shorter or, perhaps, we had become accustomed to it.

Fear, wind and clouds, cold and grit—they all pressed down upon us, they covered and threatened.... It all grew in force and momentum and its impetus reduced us to creatures of primeval instincts. As we clambered down the slope, it stripped from us all else but panic. We had to face the hopelessness of our circumstance and our inadequacies. The sheer drop pulled on our bodies and we started slipping.

Then, there and then, something revolted. Or, rather, something took over and refused. A shift occurred and strength replaced desperation. A will to survive resisted the

regression. Amid the gale and its roar, against its thrusts and pulls and the fear it caused, there came a sense of concord, of order and, strangely, of quietude.

Feet kept on digging into shifting lava grains and skin ignored the pain from scraping against them. Crouched, scratched and sliding, I felt a change in instinct's course. Along with it, a word: the *Coverers*—I still don't know if it was the warmth in the heart that came back first, or if it was the Vedic image that worked on panic. In any case, the circumstance changed and I looked at danger, no longer with fear.

Still the storm raved. Yet the other storm, the one within, receded. Parts that had gone amiss and frightened came together. The warmth in the heart was held and its blazing reality kept all else inside its focus; it watched over the body still slipping down and being scratched, it looked at the storm and saw it passing.

We slipped down further till we, finally, came against one of those feared sharp outcrops. There we stopped and lay till the storm's time and fury moved on—which it did, with the same abruptness and brevity with which it had moved in.

Warm and reassuring, the sun came out and its radiance chased away all that had been; it found us sprawled on our backs and from there we joined in its paean of light and clarity. Our eyes followed the clouds and saw them moving fast, southwards.

Reality and symbols mingled and they wove patterns for the mind to grasp. Still alive in its freshness, our experience looked for words ancient forefathers had put in place. The Vedic Rishis had lived in Nature and their lives were heightened by her scope and breadth; seasoned and prepared participants, they had drawn no distinctions between the within and the without. The Light, the Coverers, the Fire, the Riches were to them live matter and material; in each and everything, in every action and reaction involved, it was a corresponding vast truth that they saw.

I let those musings run their course; the mind needed to speculate on what had just happened. At another level, though, needs were less exacting and the real echoes of the experience took awhile to fade off; they lingered on and accompanied us most of the sunlit and peaceful way down.

We were on the Path and life was a Journey.

Late in the evening, cross-legged on the tatami, Gary concluded the day by writing a sonnet:

Where mounds of moonscape rock pray in snow
 The Fire in Mountain struck fear inside our heart,
 Its raging wind delivered a stunning blow
 And bent us to a crouch, as every part

Strained against this fury atop the dome,
 With crater fumes sulphuring yellow the sky,
 We felt ourselves forlorn on deathly loam
 While a volcanic fear proposed we die.

Stumbling in the lava dust daylight
 Upon soot pebbles, we stopped surprised, to stare
 Through a vent in this lava-dome of might
 Showing the way to Mountain-Fire's lair.

We stood transfixed in awe as mystic smoke
 Tore inside a veil and Fire spoke.

KATI WIDMER

IF I WERE A PRINCESS

If I were a princess
 Well I wouldn't ever drink milk.
 I'd only wear shorts and T-shirts,
 Never dresses of silk.
 Actually, I think
 I wouldn't wear dresses at all!

If I wanted to I'd climb trees
 'Cause I know I'd never fall,
 I'd watch my giant telly
 And stay up until three,
 Knowing all the while
 That I'm completely FREE!

I'd never do homework
 'Cause I wouldn't have to study.
 I'd just read and read all day
 And revel in being just—ME!

GAYATRI LOBO GAJIWALA
 (Age 12 years)

Amal Kiran: Very pretty.

LONDON

FAREWELL, sweetest country; out of my heart, you roses,
 Wayside roses, nodding, the slow traveller to keep.
Too long have I drowsed alone in the meadows deep,
 Too long alone endured the silence Nature espouses.
Oh, the rush, the rapture of life! throngs, lights, houses,
 This is London. I wake as a sentinel from sleep.

Stunned with the fresh thunder, the harsh delightful noises,
 I move entranced on the thronging pavement. How sweet,
To eyes sated with green, the dusty brick-walled street!
 And the lone spirit, of self so weary, how it rejoices
To be lost in others, bathed in the tones of human voices,
 And feel hurried along the happy tread of feet.

And a sense of vast sympathy my heart almost crazes,
 The warmth of kindred hearts in thousands beating with mine.
Each fresh face, each figure, my spirit drinks like wine,—
 Thousands endlessly passing. Violets, daisies,
What is your charm to the passionate charm of faces,
 This ravishing reality, this earthliness divine?

O murmur of men more sweet than all the wood's caresses,
 How sweet only to be an unknown leaf that sings
In the forest of life! Cease, Nature, thy whisperings.
 Can I talk with leaves, or fall in love with breezes?
Beautiful boughs, your shade not a human pang appeases.
 This is London. I lie, and twine in the roots of things.

MANMOHAN GHOSE

(Songs of Love and Death, 1926)

A FEW DREAMS

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

A DREAM 1-2 JANUARY 1981 NIGHT

THERE is a house. I am sleeping in a room and my mother is sleeping in another room. There is nobody else. I wake up (in the dream). I find that heavy rain is falling outside. I get up and go to her room and see that she is lying but feeling restless. I start massaging her body but she is still suffering with acute pain and feeling restless. I suddenly wake up and then I pray to the Mother for her health, just as I had prayed earlier at Jwalapur. For a long time I consecrated my mind, life and body to the psychic centre and prayed for my mother's health. Then I prayed to the Mother to make me sleep as I had to go to work the next morning. My whole concentration was still on the psychic centre and, after having gone to sleep, I experienced that I had started flying. I do not understand till today whether this experience had come in sleep or in meditation. The flight was very fast. I remembered the Mother's own experience of going high above in the sky and her gown, etc. But I remember only that I was flying like a rocket, without knowing where. Then after some time I felt a jerk and came back to my bed.

27 JUNE 1981

A dream in the early morning before waking up. I was standing in somebody's house. I do not remember the exact place and date. In the meantime, I see a glider-like object flying towards us. It landed at a place near to where we were standing. There was nobody in it to drive it. Then I saw that there was one dish in it. It appeared that there was some *prasād* in the dish. There were *singhārās* as *prasād*. Everybody took one *singhārā*. I also got one.

The view changed. I saw I was coming to meet you—my mother—on the scooter, driving very fast. Ultimately I reached you. I see that you and my respected father are seated facing each other. Father looks very bright with some special light on his face and as such I go on looking at him. Just at this time when I had to talk with you and my father, the sleep was over and the dream got interrupted.

(To be continued)

BHUSHAN DHINGRA

DREAM

THERE is a world beyond this world,
A sea beyond this sea,
And a heart that is bound beyond the beyond
To the shores of Eternity.

Within the void behind this world,
At the portal-gate of form,
A sacred need is born in time
And the pain of quest is sown.

Music comes, but void of sound,
And a voice in noiseless song,
A melody of the secret soul
As deep as the world is long.

There is a time for dreaming dreams,
A time to give them wings
And a time for flight in the crystal light
Where the voiceless singer sings,

A time when dreams must come to life
In a world that dreams no dreams,
A time for sleep to awake in quest
And brave the ocean streams.

Eternity is awakened here
On the shores where visions beach,
Where formless light forsakes the beyond
And the quest achieves its reach.

ROGER CALVERLEY

HUMILITY

HUMILITY is a quality normally associated with the poor, helpless, unlettered or ignorant, because it is considered unnecessary for and unbecoming or uncharacteristic of the wealthy, the powerful, the learned and wise, in whom it is in fact thought to be a sign of weakness. This however is a wrong notion. True humility, far from being a weakness, is a noble virtue and is indeed an added adornment to the man of riches, power or wisdom. In fact, it is a happy offshoot of true learning and wisdom. As the saying goes: *vidyā dadāti vinayam*, learning begets humility.

The Mother includes humility among divine virtues and emphatically states that the Divine is the most humble. She says: “Paradoxical though it may sound, the Divine who is absolutely perfect is at the same time absolutely humble—humble as nothing else can ever be. He is not occupied with admiring Himself: though He is the All, He ever seeks to find Himself in what is not-Himself—that is why He has created in His own being what seems to be a colossal not-Himself, this phenomenal world. He has passed into a form in which He has to discover endlessly in time the infinite contents of that which he possesses entirely in the eternal consciousness.” (CWM 3:175)

There is a significant verse in *Srimad Bhagavata Purana* which highlights the supreme humility of the Divine. In His discourse to his dear devotee Uddhava, Sri Krishna says:

निरपेक्षं मुनिं शान्तं निर्वैरं समदर्शनम्।
अनुब्रजाम्यहं नित्यं पूयेत्येत्यङ्घ्रिरेणुभिः॥

I always follow the sage who has no expectations, cares for nothing, is calm, bears enmity to none and is ever even-minded, with a view to purifying Myself by the dust of his feet. (*Srimad Bhagavata* 11:14:16)

Can one imagine the Divine, who is All-Pure, wanting to purify Himself and that too by the dust of the feet of men? If He can thus openly talk of purifying Himself by the dust from the devotee’s feet, is it not a case of the Almighty showing His supreme humility? Clearly, humility is a virtue worth being cultivated by everyone, irrespective of one’s social status, power or personal accomplishment.

B. G. PATTEGAR

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

THE letters of Sri Aurobindo to his disciples are sometimes full of humour and give many invaluable instances. And without those examples he could not have made complete the picture of his external life. The main object of these letters had reflected the many-sided interplay of the human and the Divine. One can see that limitless understanding, compassion, mercy and love flowed out from the illumined and blissful depths of Sri Aurobindo's being. The correspondence between Sri Aurobindo and the disciples indeed keyed to different problems like freewill and determinism, the Personal God and the Impersonal Absolute. These letters which are logically put convey the supra-sensible. He would accept only what he could personally verify. The positivist tendency to lay stress on the perception by the outward-looking intelligence, something of the temper of Bertrand Russell whose cautious "clear-headedness" and poised "realism", he admired.

Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* in two volumes and collection of letters to Dilip, Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), Arjava, Harin, entitled *Life, Literature, Yoga*, and Dilip Kumar Roy's *Among the Great, Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* and *Yogi Krishnaprem* have illustrated in Sri Aurobindo's, vast literature of very great value, full of humour and humanity, bearing also upon universal application.

Nirodbaran's report runs on the following lines: "If you read my correspondence with Sri Aurobindo you will see how he took in hand this raw and sceptical fellow and carried him along the path of sadhana, changed his entire way of sadhana, changed his entire way of thinking and opened his eyes to new realms of creative poetry and literature. But in this I was not alone, for Sri Aurobindo did the same for many other disciples, although I might have been a more difficult case! However, as our correspondence progressed, I was thrilled to notice that a new tone and manner was coming into his letters to me, a note of easy familiarity, of intimacy even, with shafts of humour lighting up the whole letter. This was certainly unusual and I did not fail to grasp my good fortune with both hands. I started writing to him much more freely and his replies continued in the same vein. It had a marvellous effect. I soon lost all my reservations, my fear and awe of him, and I wrote to him on every subject which occurred to me, putting all sorts of questions to him, and with a sense of freedom which I could not have imagined before. Friends would sometimes caution me against my boldness but Sri Aurobindo never objected nor did he rebuke me and his indulgence towards me was another way of showing his regard for individual liberty, his readiness to look at the whole life from the sublime to the trivial, and his incomparable tolerance and compassion. It is also an illustration of his way of dealing with each sadhak according to his nature and on the basis of his individual relationship with the Guru. In this way our correspondence flourished for a period of five and half years. In the process it revealed a side of Sri Aurobindo's nature which dispels once for all the notion that he was always aloof and grave. I had written to him once: 'Your grandeur, your Himalayan austerity frightens us.' And his reply was: 'O

rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! Every blasted thing that I never was! I groan in unAurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the commonsense of all you people? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality’.”¹

There is not enough place to bring out fully, through illustrative excerpts from Sri Aurobindo’s letters, their great range in subject matter and their variegated richness in tone and style. The correspondence reveals the unique power and personality that is present behind them. We are giving below a beautifully phrased reply, redolent of wisdom and learning, wit and humour—What a diversity of themes, and what a variety of approaches!

On that famous passage of Shakespeare’s—

Our revels now are ended; these our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep—

Amal Kiran wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “Would it be legitimate to comment as follows?—The meaning, on the surface, is that for each of us life will pass away as if it were a dream and what will remain is the sleep of death, an undetailed everlasting rest. But there is a deeper implication: just as the actor-spirits have not been destroyed and only their visible play has vanished while they themselves, seeming to melt into ‘thin air’, have returned to their unknown realm of consciousness, so too the sleep of death is but an annihilation in appearance—it is really an unknown state which is our original mode of existence. Nor is this all: from the fourth line onward the language and the rhythm serve to evoke by a certain large and deep suggestiveness an intuition of some transcendental God-self—a being, rapt and remote, who experiences through each individual life a dream-interlude between a divine peace and peace, an ‘insubstantial pageant’ conjured up for a while by its creative imagination between two states of self-absorbed superconsciousness. We are reminded of the Upanishad’s description of the mystic trance in which the whole world fades like an illusion and the individual soul enters the supreme Spirit’s unfeared ecstasy of repose. Shakespeare’s intuition is not pure Upanishad, the supreme Spirit is not clearly felt and whatever profundity is there is vague and unintentional; still, a looming mystic light does appear, stay a little, find a suggestive contour before receding and falling away to a music sublimely defunctive.”

Sri Aurobindo replies: "I don't think Shakespeare had any such idea in his mind. What he is dwelling on is the insubstantiality of the world and of human existence. 'We are such stuff' does not point to any God-self. 'Dream' and 'sleep' would properly imply somebody who dreams and sleeps, but the two words are merely metaphors. Shakespeare is not an intellectual or philosophic thinker nor a mystic one. All that you can say is that there comes out here an impression or intimation of the illusion of Maya, the dream-character of life, but without any vision or intimation of what is behind the dream and the illusion. There is nothing in the passage that even hints vaguely the sense of something abiding—all is insubstantial, 'into air, into thin air', 'baseless fabric', 'insubstantial pageant', '*we are such stuff as dreams are made on.*' 'Stuff' points to some inert material rather than a spirit dreamer or sleep. Of course one can always read things into it for one's own pleasure, but..."² (8-3-1935)

Here are three poems by Amal Kiran with Sri Aurobindo's comments:

ARCH-IMAGE

A kiss will break the quiet whole
 Of your white soul;
 Shape from the silver of that poise
 A magic voice,
 The lustre of a skyward call—
 No flickering grace, but all
 Your spirit's gathered virgin light
 One death-oblivious height
 Of shadowless body rapture-crowned—
 A face of reverie caught beyond
 Our time-throbs to strange heavens afar...
 O build from hush of star on star
 That shining statued secrecy
 Of love's divinity!

Sri Aurobindo's comment: "Very fine throughout—both the thought and expression very felicitous and intuitively right—exactly expressive of the thing seen."

RISHI

He brought the calm of a gigantic sleep:
 Earth's mind—a flicker gathering sudden gold—
 Merged with unknowable vistas to come back
 A fire whose tongue had tasted paradise.

A plumbless music rolled from his far mouth:

Waves of primeval secrecy broke white
 Along the heart's shores, a rumour of deathless love
 Afloat like a vast moon upon the deep.

Sri Aurobindo's comment: "A very fine poem, lines 1, 4 are from the Illumined Higher Mind. The second comes very splendidly from the Illumined Mind, the third is Higher Mind at a high level. The fifth comes from the Higher Mind—the sixth, seventh and eighth from the Illumined Mind touched with something from the Overmind Intuition, though the touch is more evident in 6 and 8."

SILVER GRACE

A love has sealed us one with paradise—
 A kiss of crescent moon upon earth's soul
 By virgin raptures dreaming in the blue
 That even the pit of hell is a buried sky.
 No warrior gold can pierce the veil of time;
 For God's own glory here has sunk asleep,
 And how shall that abyss of majesty
 Brook from its summit-self a lash of light?
 Therefore this love's seducing glimmer came,
 This haloed serpent of the Infinite,
 A white bliss curving through our blinded deeps
 To give the darkness' mouth a shadowless smile.

Sri Aurobindo's Comment: "A very fine poem throughout. The 2nd and 3rd lines are from the Illumined Mind. The first from the Higher Mind—the fourth is in substance from the Illumined Mind but there is a mental rhythm—very good and expressive rhythm, no doubt. The rest is the Higher Mind with touch of Illumination and Intuition—the last three lines are the Illumined Mind with Overmind Intuition touch, extremely fine."³

Regarding poetic appreciation and evaluation here is a long letter from Sri Aurobindo:

"If I have given high praise to a passage, it does not follow that it is from the Overmind; the poetic (aesthetic) value or perfection of a line, passage or poem does not depend on the plane from which it comes, but on the purity and authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense vision and inspiration from whatever source. Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature. No doubt, if we can get a continuous inspiration from the Overmind, that would mean a greater, sustained height of perfection and spiritual quality in poetry than has yet been achieved; but we are discussing here short passages and lines."

"The Overmind is essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and

sublimates it; it has an essential aesthesis which is not limited by rules and canons; it sees a universal and an eternal beauty while it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular. It is besides concerned with things other than beauty or aesthetics. It is concerned especially with truth and knowledge or rather with a wisdom that exceeds what we call knowledge; its truth goes beyond truth of fact and truth of thought, even the higher thought which is the first spiritual range of the thinker. It has the truth of spiritual thought, spiritual feeling, spiritual sense and at its highest the truth that comes by the most intimate spiritual touch or by identity. Ultimately, truth and beauty come together and coincide, but in between there is a difference. Overmind in all its dealings puts truth first; it brings out the essential truth (and truths) in things and also its infinite possibilities; it brings out even the truth that lies behind falsehood and error; it brings out the truth of the Inconscient and the truth of the Superconscient and all that lies in between. When it speaks through poetry, this remains its first essential quality; a limited aesthetical artistic aim is not its purpose. It can take up and uplift any or every style or at least put some stamp of itself upon it. More or less all that we have called Overhead poetry has something of this character whether it be from the Overmind or simply intuitive, illumined or strong with the strength of the higher revealing Thought; even when it is not intrinsically Overhead poetry, still some touch can come in. Even Overhead poetry itself does not always deal in what is new or striking or strange; it can take up the obvious, the common, the bare and even the bald, the old, even that which without it would seem stale and hackneyed and raise it to greatness. Take the lines:

I spoke as one who ne'er would speak again
And as a dying man to dying men.

The writer is not a poet, not even a conspicuously talented versifier. The statement of the thought is bare and direct and the rhetorical device used is of the simplest, but the overhead touch somehow got in through a passionate emotion and sincerity and is unmistakable.”*

“I do not know that it is possible for me to say why I regard one line or passage as having the overhead touch or the overhead note while another misses it. When I said that in the lines about the dying man the touch came in through some intense passion and sincerity in the writer, I was simply mentioning the psychological door through which the thing came. I did not mean to suggest that such passion and sincerity could of itself bring in the touch or that they constituted the overhead note in the lines. I am afraid I have to say what Arnold said about the grand style; it has to be felt and cannot be explained or accounted for. One has an intuitive feeling, a recognition of something familiar to one's experience or one's deeper perception in the substance and the rhythm or in one or

* Quoting from memory, Sri Aurobindo has modified Richard Baxter's first line which in the original was:

I preached as never sure to preach again!

A wider poignancy, an elemental cry, has come in to replace the somewhat restricted though still keen feeling in a narrower context that is found in Baxter. —K.D.S.

the other which rings out and cannot be gainsaid. One might put forward a theory or a description of what the overhead character of the line consists in, but it is doubtful whether any such mentally constructed definition could be always applicable.”⁴

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

1. *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages* by Nirodbaran, p. 207.
2. *Life-Literature-Yoga: Some letters of Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 218, 219.
3. *Overhead Poetry*—edited by K. D. Sethna, pp. 48-49.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

THE ROSE AND THE HIBISCUS

A LOVELY red rose tells a crimson hibiscus,
 “Look, how beautiful I am and everybody
 Wants to possess me. You have colour
 Only and no perfume or popularity like me.”

“True, but I am indispensable for the
 Worship of Goddess Kali and nothing else
 I want,” answers the hibiscus.

SUBIR KANTA GUPTA

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of July 2002)

An Integral Approach on Education

UNLIKE the Mother and Tagore, Sri Aurobindo has not spoken much about the practical or material aspects of education. The Mother has compensated for Sri Aurobindo's silence and physical aloofness by building up a powerful educational centre in Pondicherry. Yet, above all, there has always remained Sri Aurobindo's authentic consent to the application of education in life. The material life is the basis of his yoga and he seems to have depended on the Mother for the details relating to the application of education in our material life. Tagore, like the Mother, worked hard as a teacher, thinking out not just the ideological issues but also the prospects relating to the economic security of his pupils. The ideological issues have been identical: the development of the soul of man, the growth of beauty in the individual and above all the change of consciousness. If society is the enlargement of the individual, then both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo have struggled throughout their lives to hasten that enlargement.

Tagore's career as an educationist may be divided, according to Satyendranath Roy,¹ into three phases: 1) Pre-Santiniketan Days (1892-1901), 2) Pre-Visva-Bharati Santiniketan era (1901-1918), and 3) Visva-Bharati period (1918-1941). Most of Tagore's English writings had been pre-shaped in Bengali. The famous pieces in English include *The Centre of Indian Culture* (1919), *An Eastern University* (1921), *The Visva-Bharati Ideal* (1923), *The School Master* (1924), *A Poet's School* (1926), *Ideal of Education* (1929), *My Educational Mission* (1931) and *Ideal of Indian University* (1934).

In the Pre-Santiniketan period (1892-1901), Tagore held forth against both the British system and the indigenous private system which were still prevalent in India. The major essay of this period entitled *Shikkhar Herfer (Alterations of Education, 1892)* concentrates on two points as a criticism of British or colonial education: 1) the harmonisation of life and education, and 2) the inevitability of the mother tongue in education. Tagore sees no life in colonial education. This essay is a prescience of Tagore's educational philosophy in its final shape: English is the language of utility, not the language of our emotion; the seed time of our life is wasted as we struggle to learn this language; this education has no link with our inner life; this education is to produce clerks not "man"; there is no place for joy in this education; it just strengthens our memory and weakens our imagination. Among the supporters of this view was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee whom Sri Aurobindo appreciated two years later as the most expressive of Bengali native culture.² Sri Aurobindo, himself divorced from the native soil, realised the truth and echoed Tagore in the following passage:

The language which a man speaks and which he has never learned, is the language of which he has the nearest sense and in which he expresses himself with the greatest

fulness, subtlety and power. He may neglect, he may forget it, but he will always retain for it a hereditary aptitude, and it will always continue for him the language in which he has the safest chance of writing with originality and ease. To be original in an acquired tongue is hardly feasible.... It has something unnatural and spurious about it like speaking with a stone in the mouth or walking upon stilts. Bankim and Madhusudan, with their overflowing originality, must have very acutely felt the tameness of their English work. The one wrote no second English poem after the *Captive Lady*, the other no second English novel after *Rajmohan's Wife*.³

Santiniketan school was founded in December 1901. Tagore had then a vague perception of ancient Indian *Tapovan*, an idealistic image formed in a poet's consciousness, an image mirrored in the *Naibedya* (*Offerings*, 1901) poems. In 1906, just a year after the partition of Bengal, Tagore was strongly nationalistic in all his writings on education. His educational ideas began verging on Internationalism from 1917 onwards and when the Visva-Bharati phase started in 1918 it was a distinct call for global education instead of a pure Indian education. The ideal of Visva-Bharati was the fusion of spiritual and scientific education, the blend of national and international education. In 1924, a village school was founded in Sriniketan (*Shikshasatra*) as the second experiment of Tagore, the educationist. It was a direct action related to the secondary aim of education, the aim of securing jobs. By 1924, Tagore had become a champion of mass education. Tagore knew, like Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that the aim of livelihood is related to our wants and necessities and that the aim of life is "completeness," which is above all necessities. The aim of human life and the aim of education are the same. It is just here that we see the meeting place of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Education keeps alive the quest for completeness, the quest for endless becoming. Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore was aware of the value of man in relation to society; he also knew like the sage of Pondicherry that the education should be complete and integral:

... Our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings.⁴

Time and again, Tagore returns to the issue of integrality—not of course with the word "integral"—and there is always a consideration for the mass and the elite, the spiritual and the mundane, the high and the low:

Our ancient *topovanas*, or forest schools, which were our natural Universities, were not shut off from the daily life of the people. Masters and students gathered fruit and fuel, and took their cattle out to graze, supporting themselves by the work of their own hands. Spiritual education was a part of the spiritual life itself, which

comprehended all life. Our centre of culture should not only be the centre of the intellectual life of India, but the centre of her economic life also. I must co-operate with the villages round it, cultivate land, breed cattle, spin cloths, press oil from oil seeds; it must produce all the necessaries devising the best means, using the best materials, and calling science to its aid. Its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial activities carried out on the co-operative principle, which will unite the teachers and students and villagers of the neighbourhood in a living and active bond of necessity. This will also give us a practical industrial training, whose motive force is not the greed of profit.⁵

Tagore then passes on to the ideal, which has to be felt and realised through our proper attitude to life. He comes directly to the Aurobindonian world when he speaks of “our conscious relationship with the Infinite, and the lasting power of the Eternal in the passing moments of our life.”⁶ Sri Aurobindo’s poetry of the early years records this realisation in moments when the poet stands before the sea or a tree by the beach or a sun going down into the sea in the far away horizon.

Sri Aurobindo’s theory of education is directly related to his new Yoga, the Integral Yoga, and to his theory of man as a multiple being. He knows that every layer of the being has to be trained to achieve a synthesis of knowledge within us. Like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo began with a strong stress on national education and then went on to explain the relevance of national education to humanity in general. He was never fanatically national, as the following passage from *Bandemataram* (Feb. 24, 1908) will tell us:

We must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that Europe can give her and assimilate it to her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonise into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self-reliance so as to build up men and not machines—national men, able men, men fit to carve out a career for themselves by their own brain-power and resource, fit to meet the shocks of life and breast the waves of adventure. So shall the Indian people cease to sleep and become once more a people of heroes, patriots, originators, so shall it become a nation and no longer a disorganised mass of men.⁷

The passage indicates that Sri Aurobindo in his Calcutta phase was as actively political as Tagore was around 1905. Both the educationists were after a definite credo lying beyond their immediate politics of national education. Sri Aurobindo found it very concretely as he has in the following:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest

and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.... The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career.⁸

Sri Aurobindo wishes the child to have a free growth. This idea is part of his existential philosophy: a child's growth is unforeseen as an invisible guide within is shaping his/her destiny. The parents or the teachers should not obstruct the law of his nature, which Sri Aurobindo calls *dharma*. "It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common."⁹

Sri Aurobindo considers "heredity" and "surroundings" as he comes to his third principle of education. A child should not be uprooted from his environment. If anything has to be supplied from outside, it must be placed before the child as an offer, not imposed on his/her mind. He appreciates the progressive ideas regarding the education of a child and it is clear that he is appreciating the western educators, who see in the child a deeper self, a psychic entity. In chapter three of *The Human Cycle* he says: "These new educational methods are on the straight way to this way to this truer dealing. The closer touch attempted with the psychical entity behind the vital and physical mentality and an increasing reliance on its possibilities must lead to the ultimate discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine and that the evocation of this real man within is the right object of education and indeed of all human life if it would find and live according to the hidden Truth and deepest law of its own being."¹⁰ He contradicts the idea preached in the totalitarian states that the individual does not exist and that only the life of the community matters. Both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo emphasize the role of the individual in building a sound collective life. In the Pondicherry period, in the second decade of the twentieth century, the Lover of Humanity explains his concept of Nationalism more clearly than his earlier efforts in Calcutta (1906-1910). The tone is quiet; the vision is certain in the following passage:

A national culture, a national religion, a national education may still be useful things provided they do not interfere with the growth of human solidarity on the one side and individual freedom of thought and conscience and development on the other; for they give form to the communal soul and help it to add its quota to the sum of human advancement; but a State education, a State religion, a State culture are

unnatural violences.¹¹

In *War and Self-Determination*, Sri Aurobindo raises again the value of the child as a free spirit. He was in the ancient patriarchal concept “the live property of the father”, his created image of himself. The father claimed God’s property for himself:

He had the right to make of him what he willed, and not what the being of the child really was within, to train and shape and cut him according to the parental ideas and not rear him according to his own nature’s deepest needs, to bind him to the paternal career or the career chosen by the parent and not that to which his nature and capacity and inclination pointed, to fix for him all the critical turning-points of his life even after he had reached maturity. In education the child was regarded not as a soul meant to grow, but as brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. We have travelled to another conception of the child as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own who must be helped to find them, to find himself, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital energy and the utmost breadth, depth, and height of his emotional, his intellectual and his spiritual being.¹²

Sri Aurobindo is speaking here about the integral development of the child as a free traveller whose guide remains within him waiting to be activated. Any interference from outside blocks the growth and evolution of the psychic entity. Sri Aurobindo’s theory of education is directly linked up with his yoga of perfection. The aim is too high even for a Rousseau or a Gandhi. For morality and a faint perception of Beauty or God were not the quest of Sri Aurobindo. Only in Tagore’s ideal of education there is a clue to the beautification of man and this earth and the dream of the God-touch in human life. This dream of Tagore, even though it is restricted to the mental prescience of the Supramental, links him up with Sri Aurobindo, who speaks of a complete education: mental, vital, physical, psychic and the spiritual. The Mother completes the map of this fivefold system of education. It is interesting that both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo did not themselves actively participate in sports. But then, both were aware of the necessity of physical education. Tagore wished the students to train their body with the help of natural activities:

By training of the body I do not mean physical exercise. By that I mean those works which we usually do with the help of the body. That educates the body and drives away its inertia. Those works unite the body and the mind. And the unification helps the development of both.¹³

Sri Aurobindo perhaps had another method or approach. But that was not his sole prescription for humanity. On December 30, 1948, only about two years before his passing, his message¹⁴ for the *Bulletin of Physical Education* verges on the Mother’s philosophy of physical education as the art of infusing consciousness into the body. Sri Aurobindo sees the revival of the Greek spirit in the re-establishment of the Olympiad as an

international institution and also in the mass appeal of sports, games and athletics in his own time. Both stayed away from the sportsground and yet both agreed that no education is complete without the education of the body.

GOUTAM GHOSAL

References

1. Satyendranath Roy (ed.): *Rabindranather Chintajagat: Shiksha Chinta: Rabindra Rachana Sankalon*. Granthalay, Calcutta, 2002.
2. *SABCL*, Vol. 3. See the essays on *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee*, pp. 75-102.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
4. Sisir Kumar Das (ed.): *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Volume Two, 2001, p. 469.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 568.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *SABCL*, Vol. 1, p. 718.
8. *SABCL*, Vol. 17, p. 204.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *SABCL*, Vol. 15, p. 28.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
13. *Santiniketan Patrika*, July 1925. Passage Quoted by Satyendranath Ray in *Shiksha Chinta*, p. 215. Translated by Goutam Ghosal from Bengali.
14. *SABCL*, Vol. 16, pp. 1-4.

EINSTEIN'S GESTURE

DR. ALBERT EINSTEIN, who normally worked with mathematical concepts far beyond the understanding of the average person, found the time to help a school-girl with a simple problem in geometry. 15-year-old Johanna Mankiewicz in Los Angeles, who was a little weak in geometry, got the best qualified man possible to help her.

Johanna and her classmates were unable to work out a geometry problem involving the length of the common tangent of two tangential circles of known radii. Johanna recalled that Einstein had been an acquaintance of her grandfather and that Einstein was known as something of a mathematician, and decided he would be a good source of possible help. Johanna wrote to the world-renowned theoretical physicist at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, where Einstein had worked for several years since seeking refuge in the United States. In a few days, she received from Einstein a reply with the solution to the problem sketched out in his own handwriting!

ANONYMOUS

THE BOOK OF JOB: THE MARVEL AND THE MYSTERY OF PAIN*

“THE Marvel and the Mystery of Pain”: What an arresting title for a book: It cannot but engage the eager attention of the philosophically minded readers.

And when we come to the explanatory subtitle of the book, “A New Interpretation of the Book of Job”, our expectation from Prof. Sitaramayya’s book increases manifold. For, has not this ‘wisdom book’ of the Old Testament sought in its own way to tackle the strange riddle of the affliction of the innocent in the all-just and all-powerful God’s world of creation or manifestation? The author of this ancient book, whoever he may have been, Moses or Solomon or someone else, could not, of course, at the then-stage of ‘revelation’, offer any further light on the riddle than to say that the omniscient and omnipotent God cannot be challenged and brought to account and that the real solution of the mystery will ever elude the grasp of the mortal mind of man.

Does the Professor’s so-claimed “new interpretation” take us any farther than that? With this eager inquisitiveness in his heart the present reviewer picked a copy of the well-produced dainty book of Sitaramayya and started delving into it with deep attention.

For, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, when one seeks intellectually for a divine presence in the world and for a divine governance of its workings, the large part offered to pain and grief and affliction in the economy of universal Nature baffles man’s reason and tends to overcome the instinctive faith of mankind in such a government and in an all-seeing, all-determining and omnipotent Divine immanence.

The problem is that all human thinking that is not downright atheistic and materialistic or else primitive and anthropomorphic cannot but arrive at the end of its inquiry to the postulation of the two following propositions:

First, there is an omnipresent Divine Reality, perfect and blissful, without whom and apart from whom nothing could exist.

The second affirmation which is a consequence of the first postulate is that all things in the universe are ordered and governed in their fundamental relations and in their processes by the supreme consciousness, power, knowledge and wisdom of the omnipresent Divinity.

But how are we then to account for the almost universal prevalence of the emotional-sensational consciousness of pain and suffering and of the ethical problem of evil in the world? This cruel and disconcerting phenomenon as presented to the experience of man does not immediately harmonise with the first two basic assumptions as stated above.

This confronts us with a problem which appears to defy any satisfactory solution. As a result the thinking mind of man is thrown into great perplexity of contradiction and driven to doubt and denial.

In all ages and in all countries, the sages, the thinkers and spiritual men have ever

* A review-article of K. B. Sitaramayya’s book. *The Marvel and the Mystery of Pain (A New Interpretation of the Book of Job)* with a Foreword by Rev. Dr. Theodore Swanson and published by M.C.C. Publications (Bangalore). Price Rs. 150.00.

sought in various ways to solve this riddle but no universally satisfactory consensus has emerged so far. The Book of Job too of which Prof. Sitaramayya's book under review is a "new interpretation", attempted to resolve the same mystery in its own way but left it suspended at the end, appealing to an act of faith when all intellectual understanding fails.

But what is this Book of Job? Many Indian readers of the present review-article may not be well acquainted with this striking book of old. Thus it may be difficult for them to appreciate in an adequate measure the full worth of the precious commentary that the learned professor Sitaramayya has offered us through his well-cogitated literary production. It will not therefore be amiss if we say something about the Book of Job as a prelude to our reviewing Sitaramayya's novel interpretation.

The Book of Job, named after its protagonist, is the literary masterpiece of the 'wisdom movement'. According to Catholic tradition, five books of the Old Testament are called 'wisdom books'. These are: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus, and Wisdom. Wisdom literature flourished throughout the ancient Middle East. This 'wisdom' ignored national boundaries and gave little attention to religious thought but concerned itself with human situations and with man's predicament in the world. It sought to treat of the meaning of life, not philosophically in the Greek manner, but by appeal to experience. It tried to offer a recipe for a really happy and successful living.

Now, the Israelites were acquainted with this 'wisdom movement' of Egypt, Assyria and Mesopotamia. Their own earliest 'wisdom works' closely resembled those of the neighbouring races. The sages and wise men of ancient Israel were very different from those who produced either the priestly or the prophetic writings. The sages were not particularly interested in the liturgy nor did they show much concern for the past and future fortunes of their nation; they were absorbed in the individual and his destiny. This, however, the Israelites viewed in a clearer light, that of the religion of Yahweh. The contrast previously drawn between wisdom and folly became more and more an opposition between virtue and vice. In particular, the wisdom of man was set in perspective with the infinite wisdom of God.

The oldest and simplest form of 'wisdom literature' was the *mashal*. The *mashal* was a striking sentence that caught the imagination, or a popular saying, or even a maxim. Later, the *mashal* developed into more elaborate forms, becoming in time parable, allegory, discourse, or even argument. With Job, the book under our consideration, the *mashal* became a great literary composition. Indeed, the Book of Job is an exquisite dramatic poem. The contents of the book, together with its artistic structure and elegant style, place it among the literary masterpieces of all time.

Job, the main character of this book, was a famous figure in ancient history (See Ezekiel, 14: 14,20), believed to have lived in the patriarchal age on the borders of Arabia and Edom, a region which was well known for its wise men (See Jeremiah 49: 7). Job was traditionally regarded as a model of virtue, whose loyalty to God remained unshaken despite grievous trials in his life.

The author of the Book of Job used this old tradition as the framework of his book.

But who was this author and when did he live? These facts are not known to us with any certainty. But the author must have lived at a time when God was known among the Israelites by the name of Shaddai (the Almighty) more than by the name of Jehovah or Yahweh; for he is called Shaddai about thirty times in the Book of Job in the original.

Also, internal evidence shows that the book must have been composed at a time when absorption in the destiny of the nation as a whole was giving way to an interest in the individual.

But why was the book written? The literary form of the Book of Job, with speeches, a prologue and an epilogue, all disposed according to a studied plan, indicates that the purpose of its writing was didactic with a final lesson that even the just and the innocent may suffer here, but their sufferings are a test of their fidelity to God and they shall be rewarded in the end.

The Book of Job presents us with an exposition of the obscure book of divine Providence and suggests solutions of some of the dark and difficult passages of it. The apparent prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the virtuous have always been reckoned as two of the hardest chapters of the book of Providence. The Book of Job seeks to reconcile these with the undeniable divine wisdom, justice and goodness, by the ultimate end of these disconcerting phenomena. But the question is: this *end* is where and when? Here upon earth and in one's present life? or elsewhere in another world and beyond time?

This was a hard nut to crack for the author of the Book of Job, for he had to start with the resources of the conservative view prevalent in his time. This view held that a man's actions are rewarded or punished here on earth itself. Amongst the Israelites this iron rule was plainly enunciated, so far as a nation as a whole is concerned, by the classic texts of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26; its working out in history was demonstrated by the books of Judges and Kings; and the same idea underlies the preachings of the Prophets. With Ezekiel (ch. 18) the conception of individual responsibility finds clear expression but even he has only earthly retribution in mind and is therefore brought sharply up against the very obvious harsh reality that contradicts it. For if it is the inexorable rule that the individual is to be recompensed for his own actions, how is it that the good man often suffers? Yet this is a fact and the protagonist of the Book of Job is a glaring illustration!

The Book of Job: Its Setting and Synopsis—In this book we have (1) the history of Job's sufferings and his initial patience under them, not, of course, without a mixture of human frailty; (2) a debate between him and his three friends upon these sufferings, in which (a) the opponents were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; (b) the respondent was Job; (c) the moderators were, first, a young man Elihu, and secondly God himself. The result of it all was that Job's honour was restored, and his prosperity redoubled.

To speak a little more in detail particularly for the benefit of our Indian readers, we may add that Job, an oriental chieftain, was pious and upright in an exemplary way, richly endowed in his own person and in worldly prosperity. God allowed Satan to test him to see if he would remain faithful despite unexpected misfortunes.

As a result, Job lost all his possessions and his children too: he suffered a sudden and complete reversal of fortune but remained steadfast in his complete resignation to God.

Next, his own person was attacked. A loathsome disease afflicted his body, which was revolting and intensely painful, but he was still resigned to the Will of God; he did not complain against Him.

At this point three of Job's friends, reputed to be equally wise, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, visited him to condole with him and offer him sympathy. Job protested his innocence and said that he did not understand why he was so grievously afflicted. There ensued then a four-cornered debate which consisted of three cycles of speeches. Job and his friends opposed their different conceptions of divine justice. All the three friends offered the traditional thesis of retribution upon earth. They insisted that Job's plight could only be a punishment for his personal wrongdoing and an invitation from God to an act of sincere repentance. They added that although Job's own opinion might acquit him but God's judgment would not.

Job rejected their inadequate explanation and protested his innocence more vehemently than before. He confronted his friends' theorising with his own sad experience and with the almost universal phenomenon of injustice. He was painfully brought up against the blatant mystery of a God of justice who somehow makes the good man suffer. Constantly groping in the dark Job made no progress towards a satisfactory solution. His tortured mind matched his suffering body: the body had its paroxysms of pain and its times of relative ease; and his soul its revolts and its surrender. This alternating motion had two climaxes: its first in the act of faith in chapter 18, and its second in his final protestation of innocence in chapter 31.

A new character, Elihu by name, now entered the scene. He affirmed that both Job and his three wise friends were mistaken and sought to vindicate God's ways (chapters 32-37). He made a new point; according to him, suffering is a preventive as well as a cure for sin.

In response to Job's plea that he be allowed to see God and hear from Him directly the real cause of his suffering, God appeared and 'from the heart of the tempest' (the traditional setting for theophanies) gave Job his answer, or rather there was no answer since God in his reply did not try to justify His action before men but simply referred to His own omniscience and almighty Power. How could man with his finite ability be the judge of God's wisdom and power which were intrinsically infinite?

Job was content with this line of argument. He realised the folly of his words, recovered his attitude of humility and invariable trust in God. Here is a representative portion of the final dialogue between God and Job:

Calling upon Job to compare God's eternity with his own infinitesimally limited time, God's omniscience with his own ignorance, and God's omnipotence with his own impotency, Yahweh proceeded to reason with Job pointing out the infinite distance and disproportion between him and God, demonstrating that he was by no means an equal match for the mighty Yahweh. Yahweh spoke:

“Who is this man obscuring my designs
 with his empty-headed words?...
 Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?...
 Have you ever in your life given orders to the morning?...
 Have you an inkling of the extent of the earth?...
 Is the wild ox willing to serve you?...
 Are you the one who makes the horse so brave?...
 Does the hawk take flight on your advice?
 Is Shaddai’s opponent willing to give in?
 Has God’s critic thought up an answer?”

Overawed, Job replied to Yahweh:

“My words have been frivolous: what can I reply?
 I had better lay my fingers on my lips.”

Yahweh continued:

“Do you really want to reverse my judgment,
 and put me in the wrong to put yourself in the right?
 Has your arm the strength of God’s,
 Can your voice thunder as loud?”

Job then made his final submission with these words:

“I know that you are all-powerful:
 what you conceive, you can perform.
 I am the man who obscured your designs
 with my empty-headed words.
 I have been holding forth on matters
 I cannot understand,
 on marvels beyond me and my knowledge....
 I knew you then only by hearsay,
 but, now, having seen you with my own eyes,
 I retract all I have said,
 and in dust and ashes I repent.” (Jerusalem Bible)

The words of Job justifying himself were thus ended: after that he said no more to that effect.

The Book of Job ends with a happy Epilogue: Yahweh rewarded Job with sons and daughters and doubled his worldly possessions. “After his trials, Job lived on until he was a hundred and forty years old, and saw his children and his children’s children up to the fourth generation. Then Job died, an old man and full of days.” (*Job: Epilogue 16-17*)

Thus the final lesson offered by the Book of Job is this: “Faith must remain even when understanding fails.” Indeed, as the Christian theologians would point out, in the

stage of divine revelation available at the time when the Book of Job was written, the author could go no further with the traditional belief in earthly retribution here and now. In order to lift the veil from the mystery of suffering innocence, man had to wait in Israel for the New Testament revelation of the prospect of a future life in which recompense is really made and of the great worth of suffering itself when it can be united with the suffering of Christ. To give Job a right and comforting answer we have to, the Christians would say, refer to two texts of St Paul:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rm 8:18)

“I Paul rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh for his body’s sake.” (Col 1: 24)

Here is how the Eighteenth Century commentator, Mathew Henry, annotates the first text of Paul:

“Though we may be losers *for* Him, we shall not, we cannot, be losers *by* Him in the end. Now, that suffering saints may have strong supports and consolations from their hopes of heaven, Paul holds the balance in a comparison between the two. In one scale he puts the sufferings of the present time. The sufferings of the saints are but suffering of the present time, strike no deeper than the things of time, last no longer than the present time, light afflictions, and but for a moment. In the other scale he puts the glory, and finds that a weight, an exceeding and eternal weight. In our present state we come short, not only in the enjoyment, but in the knowledge of that glory which shall then be revealed. This glory will surpass all that we have yet seen and known. There is something to come, something behind the curtain, that will outshine all. The glory shall be, not only revealed *to* us, to be seen, but revealed *in* us, to be enjoyed. And this will be so to eternity.” (Vol. VI, p. 419)

But even the Christian solution as typified by this Pauline assurance does not satisfy our heart and mind. To rest on the hopes of a future post-mortem recompense even if of eternal duration, does not adequately solve the mystery of evil and affliction on this side of the physical dissolution of the embodied life. To take the case of Job himself: A man of such eminent piety so grievously afflicted, so reproached and so slighted, and made the very centre of all the calamities of human life, but to what purpose, to what end? Only to test the fidelity of this honest man in difficult situations? and finally reward him in redoubled measure? This does not seem to be plausible to our rational intelligence nor convincing to our believing heart. This could not surely be the pith of the whole complex drama that God sanctioned and executed in the case of Job. But the author of the Book of Job remains silent there; the whole question rests suspended in the air.

It is here that Prof. Sitaramayya steps in with his novel interpretation which raises the basic problem to a higher level and offers a sufficiently satisfactory spiritual solution to the riddle. This he has been able to do because of his intimate acquaintance with the ancient Indian Scriptures.

(To be concluded)

JUGAL KISHORE MUKHERJEE

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Perspectives of Savitri — Volume II edited by R. Y. Deshpande. Publisher: Aurobharati Trust, Pondicherry. Pages: lxxv+605. Price: Rs. 100.00. Available from SABDA, Pondicherry.

The Sun-fields of *Savitri*

My review of *Perspectives of Savitri* Vol.1 (*Sri Aurobindo's Action*, December 2000) was concluded with an earnest wish for its sequel. Now that the second volume of *Perspectives of Savitri* is before us we can judge whether it fulfils the expectations created by the first one.

The second volume begins with an introduction by the editor, Prof. R. Y. Deshpande. Entitled 'Apropos of *Savitri*', the introduction draws us towards *Savitri*—the legend, the symbol, the epic and the Sun-Word. He elucidates Sri Aurobindo's theory of earthly evolution and the role of the Supermind in executing the transformation of the physical consciousness in the context of the epic *Savitri*. He also explores the power of the Savitri Mantra composed by Sri Aurobindo (although we call it Gayatri Mantra). According to Deshpande, "One is the Mantra of Manifestation, the other of Transformation."

Savitri is also a double autobiography registering the spiritual experiences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In their letters and talks they mention how their yogic siddhi got embossed in the epic. Savitri's encounter with the luminous Presence, after the conquest of Death, results in the divinisation of the earthly life. This is not merely a figment of the imagination, since a parallel can be drawn between the life divine in *Savitri* and the descent of the Supermind.

Deshpande focuses on some critical areas of the story of Savitri which can baffle the modern reader. He takes up these 'imponderables', as he calls these critical areas, and suggests plausible answers. Why is Aswapati blessed with a daughter when he asks for a male heir? The premature death of Satyavan, even when treated as a narrative technique, seems too dramatic. Why does Narada convey the fateful news of Satyavan's death to the bewildered parents in the presence of Savitri? We also wonder why Death, whom Savitri has annihilated, is asked to function as her instrument. By probing deeper into the spiritual significance of these 'imponderables' we receive the necessary clues for approaching the epic.

In the second part of the Introduction the editor thoughtfully provides a brief sketch of the articles included in the present volume. In fact, the articles are of such high standard that they deserve to be highlighted.

One of the best ways of reading *Savitri* is by visualizing it. Huta was guided by the Mother to transfer onto canvas what her inner eye perceived in the epic. In her article "My *Savitri* Work with the Mother" she tells us about the *Savitri*-paintings the Mother had inspired her to create. She was led to occult spheres and exposed to many new things and beings with their vibrations. The luminous atmosphere, the subtle play of light and

colour and the effulgence in Huta's paintings will be a trendsetter for the paintings of the future.

Like Huta, Shyam Sundar Jhunjhunwala was fortunate enough to be initiated into the exploration of *Savitri* by the Mother. We have interesting insights into the Mother's methods of revealing the spirit of *Savitri* to the initiate. His article "Some Reflections on Savitri" is divided into several parts. The first is about the guidance from the Mother about *Savitri* and the rest convey the writer's deep reflections about the epic and the structural forms of the Matrimandir in Auroville. The author sees a parallel between the Sun-Ray in *Savitri* and the aspiration of Matrimandir architects to let the sun's rays illumine the crystal in the inner chamber. Thus the profound truth of *Savitri* will find adequate expression at the physical level too. Matrimandir is a symbol of the transformation that architecture will undergo.

Savitri came to redeem mankind and therefore her personal salvation was not her final objective. She is determined to apply her powers for the upliftment of the human race. She returns to earth in order to transform it. M.V. Sitaraman's article "Savitri, the Mother" approaches this crucial point in *Savitri*'s yoga and illustrates how her decision renders her greater. She has to bridge the gulf between the ultimate Reality and this earthly manifestation. She is the World-Mother who cradles the entire earth for its security.

Savitri needs to reinforce herself during her decisive battle with Death. She enters her 'meditation's house' where she can surrender completely to the will of the Divine. In his article "Savitri's House of Meditation" R.Y. Deshpande analyses the purpose of the Vedic Yajna which Agni the Lord of the House and Aditi as Swaha perform. This is a memorable situation in the entire epic because *Savitri*'s will-force merges with the Transcendent will. After this momentous event she grows mightier than Death. She takes up her position as the leader of the evolutionary march.

Sonia Dyne in her article "The Book of Beginnings: *Savitri* As a Path of Initiation" treats the epic as a process of the inner journey on the path of Integral Yoga and 'The Symbol Dawn' in the Book of Beginnings is the point of departure. The metaphorical journey has many milestones; each helps the voyager to work out a change in his consciousness. Aswapati, the father of *Savitri*, is the beacon light on the way. The ascent of the World-Stair begins at the plane where the kingdom of Subtle Matter is located and culminates in Aswapati's gaining of the Greater Knowledge. He is granted the boon of a radiant daughter, the incarnate form of the Divine Mother. From this point onwards she will replace Aswapati on the path of action and will.

Savitri's encounter with Death is inevitable. The demise of Satyavan is symbolic of the battle against Night which she has to win. V. Ananda Reddy's article "*Savitri*: Its Inner Significance" explores the parallels between *Savitri* and the Yoga of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The author focuses on each turning-point in the narrative of *Savitri* and demonstrates how it could have been influenced by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual realizations. There is unanimous agreement about *Savitri* being the epical representation of the Mother but opinions differ with regard to Satyavan and Aswapati.

Sri Aurobindo's Yoga bears close resemblance to the tapasya done by both Aswapati and Satyavan, according to the author.

We generally accept that the mind's capacity to grasp truth is limited. Once blessed with the sight of the Spirit we can travel through the various planes of consciousness and even soar up to the Transcendent. Jugal Kishore Mukherjee in his article "The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*" expounds this theory painstakingly. The author also answers pertinent questions about 'vision' from the perspective of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. He reminds us that creation sprang to life because the Supreme opened his "closed eyes" and the whole movement of the universe is sustained because of the benevolent gaze of the Supreme. This sight of the seeker can merge with the Eternal's gaze. Jugal Kishore has developed the theme of this article into an interesting monograph retaining the same title.*

Prema Nandakumar's article "*Savitri: The Devikavyam*" explains that Aswapati's invocation to the Divine Shakti and her boon for the birth of Savitri carries echoes about the role of Tantra in the 'efficacy of Integral Yoga'. According to her, the vast body of Tantric philosophy is subtly represented in the poetry of Sri Aurobindo. The occult siddhis of Tantra are acknowledged by Sri Aurobindo 'as part of Sat, the Existence'. However, the elements of Tantra in *Savitri* are not linked to the usual rites permitted in temple worship. The second line of argument in this article is that Sri Aurobindo succeeded in recreating the mantra-power into English, especially the blank verse of *Savitri*. The author demonstrates, by drawing various examples from the epic, that *Savitri* is actually meant to be "Devikavyam".

K. B. Sitaramayya's article "*Savitri and the Bible*" displays a careful selection of Biblical lore and images in *Savitri*. The protagonist must also wear the cross if she wants to redeem the world. The author traces out the link between Jesus and Lady Wisdom as the Word of God aptly symbolized by the avatarhood of *Savitri*. A close perusal of *Savitri* can highlight many aspects of the Bible as it can other scriptures. The author claims that *Savitri* is "a Scripture that includes and transcends the essence of all other Scriptures". (p. 238)

In Book II of *Savitri* the Kingdom of Subtle Matter is referred to as "a world of lovelier forms" or the realm of truth and aesthetics which is blessed by the eternal Light. Once Aswapati crosses over to the kingdom of Subtle Matter he realises its refinement. This material will be more receptive to the Supramental descent than the gross material world. In his article "Shilpa-Yoga and the Kingdom of Subtle Matter", Debashish Banerji explains that this receptivity or readiness of this subtle physical world can be seen metaphorically as clay or a sculptor's stone waiting for the Divine creative process. Aswapati here is the Master-Artist or the Shilpa-Yogin whose spiritual contemplation will leave its stamp on the ready substance. We shall become aware of the intimate relation between Yoga and the aesthetics of the future.

It has often been said that *Savitri* is a chronicle of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and yet a number of points seen in the biographical context should be elucidated. How do certain

* It has now appeared as a publication of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry.

elements of the legend help in the unfolding of the symbol? How should the first half of *Savitri* be read? Georges Van Vrekhem explores such issues in his article “Sri Aurobindo and Aswapati in *Savitri*”. The author states that the twenty-two cantos highlighting Aswapati’s Yoga are a perfect rendition of Sri Aurobindo’s own Sadhana. He calls for a distinction between Sri Aurobindo and the legendary figure of Aswapati in the first three Books of *Savitri* for several important reasons.

Mangesh Nadkarni’s article “Aswapati’s Travels Through the Worlds—an Overview” offers to the readers a comprehensive idea of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga as recorded in the fifteen cantos of Book II. The author defends these cantos against critics’ complaints that these lack poetic value. He explains that in these fifteen cantos there is a concentration of experiences, which the normal senses cannot grasp readily. The style here is bare and forthright in order to convey the very sense of the spiritual experience.

The journey from time to eternity is one of the most powerful aspects of *Savitri*. The announcement of Satyavan’s death reminds us of the limitations of human life. Our imperfections can propel us towards a higher realization of our capabilities. This is the unique achievement of *Savitri*, argues Daniel Albuquerque in his article “Life and Time in *Savitri*”. Our awareness of inner growth is a means for the Divine to manifest itself in this world. We are rewarded with time in this life so as to develop our inner being, such is the significance of the one year or time cycle given to Satyavan.

True poetry helps us to experience the sublime and *Savitri* draws us close to mantric and experiential poetry, states C.V. Devan Nair in his article “*Savitri*: Assault of Ether and Fire”. He elucidates Savitri’s complete surrender of will to the Divine will and this self-sacrifice leads to the liberation of the human race. Savitri’s devotion turns the epic into an excellent example of bhakti poetry.

P. Marudanayagam takes up a comparative study of Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* and Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* in his article “Lucretius and Sri Aurobindo”. Both the epics deal with common themes, especially death. In spite of the thematic similarity the philosophy of Lucretius is distinctly different from Sri Aurobindo’s in many ways. He cherished the nihilist ideal of existence and negated love in human life. In contrast to these ideas *Savitri* proves that love is divine in its origin. While a holocaust is the Roman poet’s vision of the future Sri Aurobindo promises the transformation of the earth and human consciousness.

The story of the composition of *Savitri* itself is a fascinating story. It can run into several volumes providing researchers with invaluable insights into the epic—how it acquired fresh significance with every new draft. Richard Hartz in his article “The Genesis of *Savitri*” tells as about the efflorescence of *Savitri* from a simple narrative of 800 lines to an epic thirty times bigger in size. Just as Aswapati’s Sadhana “compelled her mortal birth” so, observes Hartz, Sri Aurobindo’s Sadhana made the epic *Savitri* descend on earth and manifest itself.

Both in the West and in India, Sri Aurobindo is not acknowledged to be a great poet by many critics. Shradhdhavan responds to this kind of indifference by asserting that a special intuitive faculty is required for approaching *Savitri*. She speaks of the mantric

quality of the poetry in the first half of the first canto in Book One. The author proves that the only parallel to this can be found in the composition of the Rig-Veda. The multi-layered significance of *Savitri* is revealed slowly to the determined reader.

William C. Flick's article "Imagery and Structure in the First Canto of *Savitri*" offers an in-depth analysis of the first canto. There is an intimate relationship between the imagery and the structure. The author's stylistic analysis reveals the brilliant techniques used by the poet. The major themes here are 'Time vs. Timelessness, World and Nature vs. Spirit and God', 'Darkness and Sleep vs. Light and Wakefulness' and these endow the first canto of Book One with a mantric quality.

Lotika Ghose's study of *Savitri* is one of the earliest works to appear on the subject (1949). She traces out the Greek influences in Sri Aurobindo's poetry. She points out that Sri Aurobindo does not veil his mystic realisations and conveys them directly to us. Defending Sri Aurobindo's poetry, she says that the limited perceptions of readers are responsible for their lack of appreciation. She sees (quite justifiably), *Savitri* as the culmination of the long poetic career of the Master. Her distinction as a critic lies in defending a Yogin's right to create poetry, since the poetic form becomes a vehicle of wondrous symbols and spiritual realizations.

Images and metaphors in the epic are not merely an embellishment but form an integral part of the poetry. Asoka K. Ganguli explores the evocative power of images in his article, "Symbolism in *Savitri*". The symbols help us to visualise the grandeur of other worlds. There are many categories of images in *Savitri* which serve to express the complex ideas of the poet. It can be concluded that not a single image is superfluous.

Many are the influences that have been incorporated into *Savitri*. This goes to prove that Overmind aesthesis does not discard the great literary achievements of the past. The future poetry of Sri Aurobindo assimilated the best elements and produced a great and complex epic. Ranajit Sarkar's article, "The Call of Saraswati: *Savitri* in relation to Sanskrit poetry", proves the impact of Valmiki, Vyasa, Kalidasa, the early Vedas, and the Upanishads on *Savitri*. According to the author, the blank verse of *Savitri* is to some extent indebted to both Kalidasa and the Upanishads. The Mantra of the Real in the epic has some roots in the vision of the Vedas.

In his article "*Savitri*: Some Aspects of its Style", Goutam Ghoshal shows how the poet has dispensed with the traditional invocation with a unique technique. This article, divided into four parts, deals with certain striking aspects of *Savitri* and delves deep into them. The second part focuses on the Canto 'The Issue' while the third part switches over to Book Five. The writer defends the apparently vague or colourless passages and brings out their inherent dramatic and poetic quality.

In "Sri Aurobindo The Poet-Jeweller" this reviewer tries to show how Sri Aurobindo elevates gemstones and precious metals to a high level of symbolism. Apart from the special literary effect created by these prized commodities, there is also a powerful mystic significance. The seers of yore as well as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have unravelled to us the inner spiritual powers and influence wielded by these stones and metals. These become a means for depicting the abstract and ineffable shades of spiritual

experience in *Savitri*.

In her article in Sanskrit entitled, “The Legend of Savitri According to the Mahabharata” Usha Desai points out that the original text of this Mahabharata legend has been gradually adulterated by various vernacular translations over the passage of time. These versions have snipped off the original dimensions of a spiritually conscious individual who fought with Yama to save man from his dark destiny. The author wants us to turn to the original text to gauge its nobility. According to her, it is the magnificent power of the ancient Sanskrit tale of Savitri, and not the regional versions, that impressed Sri Aurobindo.

Toru Dutt’s “Ancient Ballads of Hindustan” is one of the interesting specimens of early nineteenth century Indian Writing in English. In her Savitri ballad she projects Yama as a sublime god who represents Love and is the upholder of the worlds. It is this interpretation of Death that runs parallel to Sri Aurobindo’s vision of transformed Death in *Savitri*.

In his article “Some Perspectives of the Savitri Upakhyana”, R.Y. Deshpande tells us about the different levels at which the story can be read and interpreted. According to the author: “It has a religio-ethical purport for the maintenance of the social order, it has literary artistic bearings, it has the truth-driven dharmic connotations to uphold the sublimity of righteous conduct, it has far-reaching spiritual implications as if it foresees the sound resonant prospects that are awaiting the human race in the evolutionary future.” (p. lxii)

“Representative Facsimiles of *Savitri* from Different Periods of Composition” by Richard Hartz helps us to gain valuable insights into the composition of *Savitri*. The facsimiles presented in this article are representative of the thousands of pages of ms. of *Savitri* and depict the development of the epic between 1916 and 1950.

One of the chief merits of this edited anthology lies in highlighting, probably for the first time, the complex aspects of the epic. Most of the articles are original publications and offer brilliant contributions to the ever-widening field of *Savitri*-scholarship. The articles here not only escape the bane of intellectual aridity but also help us taste the *rasa* of poetry and mysticism. This is the reason why each article was focused upon in this review. The intention is to provide readers with a foretaste of the veritable feast awaiting them.

At the beginning of this article there was a question about the second volume of *Perspectives of Savitri* measuring up to the standards set by the first volume. As the review draws to a close we can offer our opinion. The meticulous erudition, sincere aesthetics and depth of perception that marked volume I of *Perspectives of Savitri* are fortunately present in the second volume. The editor is warmly congratulated for undertaking this stupendous task. He says in the introduction that “these two volumes of *Perspectives of Savitri* will form a foundation to launch specialized themes in future.” This assurance makes us look forward to the books and monographs that will be written.

The first volume of *Perspectives of Savitri*, despite its weight and price, has found ready buyers. The second volume will surely meet with such a happy fate.

RITA NATH KESHARI