

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LVI

No. 5

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

*Sri Aurobindo*

THERE ARE GREATER DESTINIES... (Poem)	...	363
PSYCHIC BEING	...	365
SOME LETTERS	...	372

*Arjava*

HIERATIC (Poem)	...	376
-----------------	-----	-----

*The Mother*

A COLUMN OF LIGHT	...	377
TWO RESPONSES	...	378

*Nolini Kanta Gupta*

ON SAVITRI	...	380
------------	-----	-----

*Narad (Richard Eggenberger)*

TO HOUSE ETERNAL DAY (Poem)	...	386
-----------------------------	-----	-----

*Abani Sinha*

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS	...	387
---------------------------	-----	-----

*Peter Heehs, Amal Kiran, Lalita*

INTERVIEW OF 8 SEPTEMBER 1979	...	388
-------------------------------	-----	-----

*Allan Stocker*

THE ROAD BACK TO THE BELOVED	...	394
------------------------------	-----	-----

*Nirodbaran*

ABOUT THE MOTHER	...	395
------------------	-----	-----

*Arun Vaidya*

FOUNDING OF AUROVILLE—The City of Dawn	...	397
--	-----	-----

*Richard Hartz*

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI	...	404
----------------------------	-----	-----

*Georges Van Vrekhem*

THE LIFT BOY AND THE HEARSE	...	412
-----------------------------	-----	-----

<i>Debashish Banerji</i>		
NIRODBARAN’S SURREALIST POEMS	...	416
<i>Kati Widmer</i>		
INTIMATE PORTRAITS (Poem)	...	417
<i>A Student</i>		
TO A TEACHER	...	419
<i>Manmohan Ghose</i>		
THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE (Poem)	...	420
<i>Monoranjan Debnath</i>		
HOW I SAW THE DIVINE MOTHER	...	422
<i>Kailas Jhaveri</i>		
REMEMBRANCE OF THE MOTHER	...	424
<i>Goutam Ghosal</i>		
<i>THE POST OFFICE</i> BY TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO’S		
VISION OF THE FUTURE DRAMA	...	428
<i>R.Y. Deshpande</i>		
ISLAM’S CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE	...	431
<i>Haridas Chaudhuri</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO AND MAYAVADA	...	439
<i>Nilima Das</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	...	443
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>		
INTRODUCTION TO MAGGI LIDCHI-GRASSI’S NOVEL <i>THE LEGS OF THE TORTOISE</i>	...	445

## THERE ARE GREATER DESTINIES...

THERE are greater destinies mind cannot surmise...  
There is an infinite truth, an absolute power.  
The Spirit's mightiness shall cast off its mask;  
Its greatness shall be felt shaping the world's course.  
It shall be seen in its own veilless beams,  
A star rising from the Inconscient's night,  
A sun climbing to Supernature's peak.  
Abandoning the dubious Middle Way  
A few shall glimpse the miraculous Origin  
And some shall feel in you the secret Force  
And they shall turn to meet a nameless tread,  
Adventurers into a mightier Day.  
Ascending out of the limiting breadths of mind,  
They shall discover the world's huge design  
And step into the Truth, the Right, the Vast.  
You shall reveal to them the hidden eternities,  
The breath of infinitudes not yet revealed,  
Some rapture of the bliss that made the world,  
Some rush of the force of God's omnipotence,  
Some beam of the omniscient Mystery.  
But when the hour of the Divine draws near,  
The Mighty Mother shall take birth in Time  
And God be born into the human clay  
In forms made ready by your human lives.  
Then shall the Truth supreme be given to men.  
There is a being beyond the being of mind,  
An Immeasurable cast into many forms,  
A miracle of the multitudinous One.  
There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,  
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.  
It has no home on earth, no centre in man,  
Yet is the source of all things thought and done,  
The fount of the creation and its works.  
It is the originer of all truth here,  
The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,  
Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,  
The Immense that calls to man to expand the Spirit,  
The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,  
A channel for the little he tastes of bliss.  
Some shall be made the glory's receptacles

And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.  
 These are the high forerunners, the heads of Time,  
 The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,  
 The high transfigurers of human clay,  
 The first-born of a new supernal race.  
 The incarnate dual Power shall open God's door,  
 Eternal supermind touch earthly Time.  
 The superman shall wake in mortal man  
 And manifest the hidden demigod  
 Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force  
 Revealing the secret deity in the cave.  
 Then shall the earth be touched by the Supreme,  
 His bright unveiled Transcendence shall illumine  
 The mind and heart, and force the life and act  
 To interpret his inexpressible mystery  
 In a heavenly alphabet of Divinity's signs.  
 His living cosmic spirit shall enring,  
 Annulling the decree of death and pain,  
 Erasing the formulas of the Ignorance,  
 With the deep meaning of beauty and life's hid sense,  
 The being ready for immortality,  
 His regard crossing infinity's mystic waves  
 Bring back to Nature her early joy to live,  
 The metred heart-beats of a lost delight,  
 The cry of a forgotten ecstasy,  
 The dance of the first world-creating Bliss.  
 The Immanent shall be the witness God  
 Watching on his many-petalled lotus-throne,  
 His actionless being and his silent might  
 Ruling earth-nature by Eternity's law,  
 A thinker waking the Inconscient's world,  
 An immobile centre of many infinitudes  
 In his thousand-pillared temple by Time's sea.  
 Then shall the embodied being live as one  
 Who is a thought, a will of the Divine,  
 A mask or robe of his divinity,  
 An instrument and partner of his Force,  
 A point or line drawn in the infinite,  
 A manifest of the Imperishable.

SRI AUROBINDO

## PSYCHIC BEING

THE psychic is not by definition, that part which is in direct touch with the supramental plane,—although, once the connection with the supramental is made, it gives to it the readiest response. The psychic part of us is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with the Divine. In its origin it is the nucleus pregnant with divine possibilities that supports this lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. There is this divine element in all living beings, but it stands hidden behind the ordinary consciousness, is not at first developed and, even when developed, is not always or often in the front; it expresses itself, so far as the imperfection of the instruments allows, by their means and under their limitations. It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality,—that which we call usually the psychic being. It is always this psychic being that is the real, though often the secret cause of man's turning to the spiritual life and his greatest help in it. It is therefore that which we have to bring from behind to the front in the yoga.

The word 'soul', as also the word 'psychic', is used very vaguely and in many different senses in the English language. More often than not, in ordinary parlance, no clear distinction is made between mind and soul and often there is an even more serious confusion, for the vital being of desire—the false soul or desire-soul—is intended by the words 'soul' and 'psychic' and not the true soul, the psychic being. The psychic being is quite different from the mind or vital; it stands behind them where they meet in the heart. Its central place is there, but behind the heart rather than in the heart; for what men call usually the heart is the seat of emotion, and human emotions are mental-vital impulses, not ordinarily psychic in their nature. This mostly secret power behind, other than the mind and the life-force, is the true soul, the psychic being in us. The power of the psychic, however, can act upon the mind and vital and body, purifying thought and perception and emotion (which then becomes psychic feeling) and sensation and action and everything else in us and preparing them to be divine movements....

\*

The psychic being in the old systems was spoken of as the Purusha in the heart (the secret heart—*hṛdaye guhāyām*) which corresponds very well to what we define as the psychic being behind the heart centre. It was also this that went out from the body at death and persisted—which again corresponds to our teaching that it is this which goes out and returns, linking a new life to former life. Also we say that the psychic is the divine portion within us—so too the Purusha in the heart is described as Ishwara of the individual nature in some place.

The word soul is very vaguely used in English—as it often refers to the whole non-physical consciousness including even the vital with all its desires and passions. That

was why the word psychic being has to be used so as to distinguish this divine portion from the instrumental parts of the nature.

\*

It appears X supposed that by the psychic being I meant the enlightened ego. But people do not understand what I mean by the psychic being, because the word psychic has been used in English to mean anything of the inner mental, inner vital or inner physical or anything abnormal or occult or even the more subtle movements of the outer being, all in a jumble; also occult phenomena are often called psychic. The distinction between these different parts of the being is unknown. Even in India the old knowledge of the Upanishads in which they are distinguished has been lost. The Jivatman, the psychic being (Purusha Antaratman), the Manomaya Purusha, the Pranamaya Purusha are all confused together.

\*

I do not know what is exactly meant by this phrase—it is too vague and limited for a description of the psychic. *Antaḥkaraṇa* usually means the mind and vital as opposed to the body—the body being the outer instrument and *manah-prāṇa* the inner instrument of the soul. By psychic I mean something different from a purified mind and vital. A purified mind and vital are the result of the action of the awakened and liberated psychic being but it is not itself the psychic.

Again, it depends on what is meant by *ahambhāva*. But the psychic is not a *bhāva*. It is a Purusha. *Ahambhāva* is a formation of Prakriti, it is not a being or a Purusha. *Ahambhāva* can disappear and yet the Purusha will be there.

By liberated psychic being I mean that it is no longer obliged to express itself under the conditions of the obscure and ignorant instruments, from behind a veil, but is able to come forward, control and change the action of mind and life and body.

If it is perhaps sometimes spoken of as purified and perfected, what must be meant is the psychic action in the mind, vital and the physical instruments. A purified inner being does not mean a purified psychic, but a purified inner mental, vital and physical. The epithets I used for the psychic were “awakened and liberated”.

Spiritual individuality is rather a vague term and might be variously interpreted. I have written about the psychic being that the psychic is the soul or spark of the Divine Fire supporting the individual evolution on the earth and the psychic being is the soul-consciousness developing itself or rather its manifestation from life to life with the mind, vital and body as its instruments until all is ready for the union with the Divine. I don't know that I can add anything to that.

\*

Purusha in Prakriti is the Kshara Purusha—standing back from it is the Akshara Purusha.

Ego-sense and Purusha are two quite different things—ego-sense is a mechanism of Prakriti, Purusha is the conscious being.

The psychic being evolves, so it is not the immutable.

The psychic being is especially the soul of the individual evolving in the manifestation the individual Prakriti and taking part in the evolution. It is that spark of the Divine Fire that grows behind the mind, vital and physical as the psychic being until it is able to transform the Prakriti of Ignorance into Prakriti of knowledge. These things are not in the Gita, but we cannot limit our knowledge by the points in the Gita.

\*

No, the intuitive self is quite different, or rather the intuitive consciousness that is somewhere above the mind. The psychic stands behind the being—a simple and sincere devotion to the Divine, single-hearted and immediate sense of what is right and helps towards the Truth and the Divine, an instinctive withdrawal from all that is the opposite are its most visible characteristics.

\*

A distinction has to be made between the soul in its essence and the psychic being. Behind each and all there is the soul which is the spark of the Divine—none could exist without that. But it is quite possible to have a vital and physical being without a clearly evolved psychic being behind it. Still, one cannot make general statements that no aboriginal has a soul or there is no display of soul anywhere.

The inner being is composed of the inner mental, inner vital, inner physical,—but that is not the psychic being. The psychic is the inmost being and quite distinct from these. The word ‘psychic’ is indeed used in English to indicate anything that is other or deeper than the external mind, life and body, anything occult or supraphysical, but that is a use which brings confusion and error and we entirely discard it when we speak or write about yoga. In ordinary parlance we may sometimes use the word ‘psychic’ in the looser popular sense or in poetry, which is not bound to intellectual accuracy, we may speak of the soul sometimes in the ordinary and more external sense or in the sense of the true psyche.

The psychic being is veiled by the surface movements and expresses itself as best it can through these outer instruments which are more governed by the outer forces than by the inner influences of the psychic. But that does not mean that they are entirely isolated from the soul. The soul is in the body in the same way as the mind or vital—but the body it occupies is not this gross physical frame only, but the subtle body also. When the gross sheath falls away, the vital and mental sheaths of the body still remain as the soul’s vehicle till these too dissolve.

The soul of a plant or an animal is not altogether dormant—only its means of expression are less developed than those of a human being. There is much that is psychic in

the plant, much that is psychic in the animal. The plant has only the vital-physical evolved in its form, so it cannot express itself; the animal has a vital mind and can, but its consciousness is limited and its experiences are limited, so the psychic essence has a less developed consciousness and experience than is present or at least possible in man. All the same, animals have a soul and can respond very readily to the psychic in man.

The ghost is of course not the soul. It is either the man appearing in his vital body or it is a fragment of his vital that is seized on by some vital force or being. The vital part of us normally exists after the dissolution of the body for some time and passes away into the vital plane where it remains till the vital sheath dissolves. Afterwards it passes, if it is mentally evolved, in the mental sheath to some mental world and finally the psychic leaves its mental sheath also and goes to its place of rest. If the mental is strongly developed, then the mental part of us can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred round the true psychic being—for they then share the immortality of the psychic. Otherwise the psychic draws mind and life into itself and enters into an internatal quiescence.

\*

The soul is described as a spark of the Divine Fire in life and matter, that is an image. It has not been described as a spark of consciousness.

There is mental, vital, physical consciousness—different from the psychic. The psychic being and consciousness are not identical.

When the soul or “spark of the Divine Fire” begins to develop a psychic individuality, that psychic individuality is called the psychic being.

The soul or spark is there before the development of an organised vital and mind. The soul is something of the Divine that descends into the evolution as a divine Principle within it to support the evolution of the individual out of the Ignorance into the Light. It develops in the course of the evolution a psychic individual or soul individuality which grows from life to life, using the evolving mind, vital and body as its instruments. It is the soul that is immortal while the rest disintegrates; it passes from life to life carrying its experience in essence and the continuity of the evolution of the individual.

It is the whole consciousness, mental, vital, physical also, that has to rise and join the higher consciousness and, once the joining is made, the higher has to descend into them. The psychic is behind all that and supports it.

\*

The psychic is the spark of the Divine involved here in the individual existence. It grows and evolves in the form of the psychic being—so obviously it cannot have already the powers of the Divine. Only its presence makes it possible for the individual to open to the Divine and grow towards the Divine Consciousness and when it acts it is always in the sense of the Light and the Truth and with the push towards the Divine.

\*



This is the function of the psychic—it has to work on each plane so as to help each to awaken to the true truth and the Divine Reality.

\*

The psychic being is the soul evolving in course of birth and rebirth and the soul is a portion of the Divine—but with the soul there is always the veiled Divine, Hrishikesha.

\*

It [the psychic] is constantly in contact with the immanent Divine—the Divine secret in the individual.

\*

The psychic is the support of the individual evolution; it is connected with the universal both by direct contact and through the mind, vital and body.

\*

The contribution of the psychic being to the sadhana is: (1) love and bhakti, a love not vital, demanding and egoistic but unconditioned and without claims, self-existent; (2) the contact or the presence of the Mother within; (3) the unerring guidance from within; (4) a quieting and purification of the mind, vital and physical consciousness by their subjection to the psychic influence and guidance; (5) the opening up of all this lower consciousness to the higher spiritual consciousness above for its descent into a nature prepared to receive it with a complete receptivity and right attitude—for the psychic brings in everything right thought, right perception, right feeling, right attitude.

One can raise up one's consciousness from the mental and vital and bring down the power, Ananda, light, knowledge from above; but this is far more difficult and uncertain in its result, even dangerous, if the being is not prepared or not pure enough. To ascend with the psychic for the purpose is by far the best way. If you are thus rising from the psychic centre, so much the better....

\*

The psychic being is the soul, the Purusha in the secret heart supporting by its presence the action of the mind, life and body. The vital is the *prāṇamaya puruṣa* spoken of in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, the being behind the Force of Life; in its outer form in the Ignorance it generates the desire-soul which governs most men and which they mistake often for the real soul.

The Atman is the Self or Spirit that remains above, pure and stainless, unaffected

by the stains of life, by desire and ego and ignorance. It is realised as the true being of the individual, but also more widely as the *same being* in all and as the Self in the cosmos; it has also a self-existence above the individual and cosmos and it is then called the Paramatma, the supreme Divine Being. This distinction has nothing to do with the distinction between the psychic and the vital: the vital being is not what is known as the Atman.

The vital as the desire-soul and desire-nature controls the consciousness to a large extent in most men, because men are governed by desire. But even in the surface human nature the proper ruler of the consciousness is the mental being, *manomayaḥ puruṣaḥ prāṇa-śarīra-netā* of the Upanishad. The psychic influences the consciousness from behind, but one has to go out of the ordinary consciousness into the inmost being to find it and make it the ruler of the consciousness as it should be. To do that is one of the principal aims of the yoga. The vital should be an instrument of the consciousness, not its ruler.

The vital being is not the I—the ego is mental, vital, physical. Ego implies the identification of our existence with outer self, the ignorance of our true self above and our psychic being within us.

In a certain sense the various Purushas or beings in us, psychic, mental, vital, physical are projections of the Atman, but that gets its full truth only when we get into our inner being and know the inner truth of ourselves. On the surface, in the Ignorance, it is the mental, vital, physical Prakriti that acts and the Purusha is disfigured, as it were, in the action of the Prakriti. It is not our true mental being, our true vital being, our true physical being even that we are aware of; these remain behind, veiled and silent. It is the mental, vital, physical ego that we take for our being until we get knowledge.

\*

1. The soul and the psychic being are practically the same, except that even in things which have not developed a psychic being, there is still a spark of the Divine which can be called the soul. The psychic being is called in Sanskrit the Purusha in the heart or the Chaitya Purusha. (The psychic being is the soul developing in the evolution.)

2. The distinction between Purusha and Prakriti is according to the Sankhya System—the Purusha is the silent witness consciousness which observes the actions of Prakriti — Prakriti is the force of Nature which one feels as doing all the actions, when one gets rid of the sense of the ego as doer. Then there is the realisation of these 2 entities. This is quite different from the psychic being. It is felt in the mind, vital, physical—most easily in the mind where the mental being (Purusha) is seated and controls the others (*manomayaḥ puruṣaḥ prāṇa-śarīra-netā*).

3. Prajna, Taijasa, etc. are a different classification and have to do, not with the different parts of the being, but with three different states (waking, dream, sleep—gross, subtle, causal).

I think one ought not to try to relate these different things to each other—as that

may lead to confusion. They belong to different categories—and to a different order of experiences.

\*

The psychic being is described in the Upanishads as no bigger than the size of one's thumb! That of course is a symbolic image. For usually when one sees anybody's psychic being in a form, it is bigger than that. As for the inner being, one feels it big because the true mental or the true vital or even the true physical being is much wider in consciousness than the external consciousness which is limited by the body. If the external parts seem to occupy the whole consciousness, it is when one comes down into the physical and feels all the activities of Nature playing on it—even the mental and vital movements are then felt through the physical and as things of a separate plane. But when one lives in the inner being then one is aware of a consciousness which begins to spread into the universal and the external is only a surface movement thrown up by the universal forces.

\*

Yes, the psychic being has a form....

\*

The soul is not limited by any form, but the psychic being puts out a form for its expression just as the mental, vital and subtle physical Purushas do—that is to say, one can see or another person can see one's psychic being in such and such a form. But this seeing is of two kinds—there is the standing characteristic form taken by this being in this life and there are symbolic forms such as when one sees the psychic as a new-born child in the lap of the Mother....

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters On Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 288-307)

## SOME LETTERS

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

*I want to do only those things that are positively useful from your point of view. Here are some for your consideration.*

*(1) Is it not useless to speak without being spoken to, except for work?*

You can speak if there is need.

*(2) I sometimes tell people that I received a letter from you. This is naturally egoistic and not useful. What should I do?*

It is better not to do it. Besides these things held in silence have more force.

*(3) Should listening to criticisms about others be avoided?*

It would be better. If people criticise, don't accept or don't pay any attention.

*(4) What about expressing delight while moving about—say, a little dancing or moving of the hands?*

Not much importance.

*What is the nature of an intuitivised vital?*

The vital controlled and transformed by the intuition has the spontaneous right sense of things instead of groping and getting things by the wrong end due to passion, desire etc.

*Can it happen that after the psychic has powerfully come in front, it can be overridden by the vital and forced to recede?*

It may and does retire from the front or gets clouded over, but once it has been in front it is never relegated back behind the veil altogether and it can always return to the front with comparative ease.

*What is the nature of Time in the intuitive consciousness?*

Time is to the Intuition an extension of consciousness in which happenings are arranged and has not the same rigidity that it has to the intellect.

24 March 1933

*My vital imagination is of the “ambition” type—the desire to show to others the capacity for Yoga or something like that. Even the imagination comes, “You will be just next to Sri Aurobindo and Mother and all will see your superiority.” Do the hostiles stimulate egoism like this?*

Certainly; if they can bring pride or ambition or vanity into the spiritual aspiration, they are very glad—it is one of their chief weapons against those who are too interested and active in the sadhana for them to break the will towards Yoga.

*What is the nature of the egoism of the vital? Why is it so elusive and slippery? Why does it not listen to reason or mental force?*

But that is the nature of the vital impulse or instinct. It is a force that acts for its own ends without regard to conscious reason. When the vital reasons, it is only to justify its own movements to the mental being in man, but it does not act for any mental reason — only for its own will in Life.

*Can there be hostile formations to create impatience?*

Yes—they can be made to serve that object.

*Is it proper to ask questions regarding the intuitive mind or is it premature?*

It depends on the questions. If it is for the intuitive *mind*, not for the Intuition proper which is the immediate step towards Overmind, it need not be premature.

25 March 1933

*I did not know the difference between the intuitive mind and Intuition. I thought that if psychicisation was done up to the physical, the higher mind would come and the process of intuitivisation begin. After that would come the cosmic consciousness and then overmind.*

All that is not of the right order. The overmind is the basis of the total cosmic consciousness, but the cosmic consciousness itself can be felt on any plane, not only above mind, but in mind, life, matter. As for the real order of the higher planes, I will give you them another time when I have a little more leisure.

26 March 1933

*After pranam I thought Mother looked a little tired physically. Then the following ideas came: (1) Why should Mother take the trouble of reading all the details of the*

*departmental notebooks? The person in charge could examine them. (2) There is a hurry for the morning Pranam, so why not ring the bell for work at 7.45 instead of 7.30 and carry over the 15 minutes to midday or evening.*

In the evening the workmen want to go early—many having a distance to travel—in the afternoon they would lose 15 minutes rest. Otherwise it would be more convenient.

27 March 1933

*Nowadays in the evening many workmen go home only at 6.20 or so, as it is not yet dark. In the afternoon they could work up to 12.15 or start again at 1.15 instead of 1.30. Shall I talk to C about it?*

After inquiring from C and reflection, it seems safer not to do it.

Undated

*There was not sufficient sleep last night, as I awoke frequently. During one of these waking periods there was a physical sex-effect quite in unconsciousness.*

It often comes as a result of strain or *tamas*—the nerves under the strain of bad sleep may be the cause.

*Several faint images of past places, happenings, relatives and dreams passed by, but I did not take notice of them.*

That is the best thing—not to take notice.

28 March 1933

*I got a little angry with a workman and was rather antipathic towards others, for they have been taking much advantage of my leniency, my carelessness and a little familiarity with them, which I am not easily able to give up.*

Yes, that is always the reaction of these people to familiarity—they take liberties.

*In the book The Mother, what is the meaning of “false adaptation” when you say that all false adaptation in work is offensive and foreign to the temper of Mahasaraswati? Is it something like a mason doing a coolie’s work?*

Well, yes—it means misapplication of any kind and fitting things in where they do not really fit—whether with regard to ideas, activities, or anything else.

*A little later you say, "Only when the Four [great Powers of the Mother] have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body...". What does it mean?*

At any rate a sufficient *foundation* of the harmony in a sufficiently transformed Nature for still greater things to come in without perturbation of the Nature.

29 March 1933

*Is it possible to progress only by receiving inwardly from you, without communication by letters etc.?*

It is a little dangerous to rely on the inner action only. It is so mixed and one can easily go off into a series of errors or on the wrong way altogether.

30 March 1933

*Is it not possible to get rid of as much sleep and inertia as possible, so that the body and mind can work more for you? Sleep and inertia are bondage. When will you get rid of them in me?*

Sleep need not be inertia. It is only tamasic sleep that is inertia.

31 March 1933

*(To be continued)*

SRI AUROBINDO

## HIERATIC

(Symbols of the Inner Vital World)

UNDER the amethyst tree  
In a cavern of ocean  
Pale limbs of the daughters of the sea  
Weave their mystical motion.

There was no rumour from the land  
Of reef's wave-grapple:  
Their leader shed from her right hand  
The gleam of a ruby apple.

Each other moon-pale maid  
Bore, heaped and mellow,  
Pomegranates carved from lunar jade  
On topaz salvers yellow.

No date for steps they dance,  
For song no dimming;  
Time will reive not their beauty but enhance  
Joy's glyph those feet are limning.

November 17, 1934

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: This lyric is very attractive. You have a remarkable gift for what might be called occult colour.



## A COLUMN OF LIGHT

July 21, 1914

THERE was no longer any body, no longer any sensation; only a column of light was there, rising from where the base of the body normally is to where usually is the head, to form there a disk of light like that of the moon; then from there the column continued to rise very far above the head, opening out into an immense sun, dazzling and multicoloured, whence a rain of golden light fell covering all the earth.

Then slowly the column of light came down again forming an oval of living light, awakening and setting into movement—each one in a special way, according to a particular vibratory mode the centres above the head, in the head, the throat, the heart, in the middle of the stomach, at the base of the spine and still farther down. At the level of the knees, the ascending and descending currents joined and the circulation thus went on uninterruptedly, enveloping the whole being in an immense oval of living light.

Then slowly the consciousness came down again, stage by stage, halting in each world, until the body-consciousness returned. The recovery of the body-consciousness was, if the memory is correct, the ninth stage. At that moment the body was still quite stiff and immobile.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 204)*

---

The secret of the terrestrial evolution is the slow and progressive liberation of this latent indwelling spirit, the difficult appearance, the tardy becoming [of a] divine Something or Someone already involved with all its potential forces in a first formal basis of supporting substance, its greater slowly emerging movements locked up in one initial expressive power of Matter. Man the thinker and seeker would not be here if he were not an embodied portion of an all-conscious Infinite that is superconscient above him but lies also hidden in the inconscience of the material universe. The development of forms is not the most important or the most significant part of the evolutionary process; it is one sign of the thing that is being done, but it is not its essence. Material form is only a support and means for the progressive manifestation of the Spirit. If all were chance or play of inconscient or inconsequent Force, there would be no reason why man with all his imperfections should not be the last word of this feat of unconscious intelligence or this haphazard miracle. It is because the Divine Spirit is there and his manifestation the meaning of the movement that a new power must emerge in the series that started from Matter.

Sri Aurobindo

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 226)*

## TWO RESPONSES

December 8, 1916

THIS was our conversation today morning, O Lord:

Thou didst wake up the vital being with the magic wand of Thy impulsion and say to it: "Awake, bend the bow of thy will, for soon the hour of action will come." Suddenly awakened, the vital being rose up, stretched itself and shook off the dust of its long torpidity; from the elasticity of its members it realised that it was still vigorous and fit for action. And with an ardent faith it answered the sovereign call: "Here I am, what dost Thou want of me, O Lord?" But before another word could be pronounced, the mind intervened in its turn and, having bowed down to the Master as a mark of obedience, spoke to him thus: "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am surrendered to Thee and that I try my best to be a faithful and pure intermediary of Thy supreme Will. But when I turn my gaze to the earth, I see that however great men may be, their field of action is always terribly restricted. A man, who in his mind and even in his vital being is as vast as the universe or at least as vast as the earth, as soon as he begins to act, becomes enclosed in the narrow bounds of a material action, very limited in its field and results. Whether he be the founder of a religion or a political reformer, he who acts becomes a petty little stone in the general edifice, a grain of sand in the immense dune of human activities. So I do not see any realisable action worthy of the whole being's concentrating on it and making it its purpose of existence. The vital being delights in adventure; but should it be allowed to fling itself into some lamentable adventure unworthy of an instrument conscious of Thy Presence?"—"Fear nothing," was the reply. "The vital being will not be allowed to set itself in motion, it will not be asked of thee to contribute all the effort of thy organising faculties, except when the action proposed is vast and complete enough to fully and usefully employ all the qualities of the being. What exactly this action will be, thou wilt know when it comes to thee. But I am warning thee even now so that thou mayst be prepared not to reject it. I also warn both thee and the vital being that the time for the small, quiet, uniform and peaceful life will be over. There will be effort, danger, the unforeseen, insecurity, but also intensity. Thou wert made for this role. After having accepted for long years to forget it completely, because the time had not come and thou too wert not ready, wake up now to the consciousness that this is indeed thy true role, that it was for this thou wert created."

The vital being was the first to awake to consciousness and, with the enthusiasm natural to it, exclaimed: "I am ready, O Lord, Thou mayst rely upon me!" The mind, weaker and more timid, though more docile too, added: "What Thou wilt, I will. Thou knowest well, O Lord, that I belong entirely to Thee. But shall I be able to prove equal to the task, shall I have the power of organising what the vital being has the capacity to realise?" "It is to prepare thee for this that I am working at the moment; this is why thou art undergoing a discipline of plasticity and enrichment. Do not worry about anything:

power comes with the need. Not because thou hast been confined, even as the vital being, to very small activities at a time when this was useful, to allow things which had to be prepared the time for preparation—not because of this, I say, art thou incapable of living outside these smallnesses in a field of action consonant with thy true stature. I have appointed thee from all eternity to be my exceptional representative upon the earth, not only invisibly, in a hidden way, but also openly before the eyes of all men. And what thou wert created to be, thou wilt be.”

As always, Lord, when the voice of the depths fell silent, Thy sublime and all-powerful benediction enveloped me completely.

And for a moment the Master and the instrument were but one: the Unique, eternal, infinite.

THE MOTHER

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 320-22)

## TALKS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

By NIRODBARAN

Volume 1 — 514 pp., Rs.250.00, ISBN 81-7058-634-8

Volume 2 — 517 pp., Rs.250.00, ISBN 81-7058-635-6

(Now reprinted with the entire content comprised in 2 volumes)

‘Talks with Sri Aurobindo’ is a thousand-page record of Sri Aurobindo’s conversations with the disciples who attended him during the last twelve years of his life. The talks are informal and open-ended, for the attendants were free to ask whatever questions came to mind. Sri Aurobindo speaks of his own life and work, of the Mother and the Ashram, of his path of Yoga and other paths, of India’s social, cultural and spiritual life, of the country’s struggle for political independence, of Hitler and the Second World War, of modern science, art and poetry, and of many other things that arose in the course of conversation. Serious discussion is balanced with light-hearted banter and humour. By recording these human touches, Nirodbaran has brought out the warm and intimate atmosphere of the talks.

Available at SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Pondicherry 605 002

Please see “New Publications” for ordering information.

## ON SAVITRI

(1)

*SAVITRI*, the poem, the word of Sri Aurobindo is the cosmic Answer to the cosmic Question. And Savitri, the person, the Godhead, the Divine Woman is the Divine's response to the human aspiration.

The world is a great question mark. It is a riddle, eternal and ever-recurring. Man has faced the riddle and sought to arrive at a solution since he has been given a mind to seek and interrogate.

What is this universe? From where has it come? Whither is it going? What is the purpose of it all? Why is man here? What is the object of his existence?

Such is the mode of human aspiration. And Ashwapati in his quest begins to explore the world and see what it is, the way it is built up. He observes it rising tier upon tier, level upon level of consciousness. He mounts these stairs, takes cognisance of the modes and functions of each and passes on enriched by the experiences that each contributes to his developing consciousness. The ascent he finds is from ignorance to knowledge. The human being starts from the darkest bed of ignorance, the solid basis of rock as it were, the body, the material existence. Ignorance here is absolute inconscience. Out of the total absence of consciousness, the being begins to awake and rise to a gradually developing—widening, deepening and heightening—consciousness. That is how Ashwapati advances, ascends from a purely bodily life and consciousness, to the next rung of the ladder, the first appearance and expression of life-force, the vital consciousness—energies and forms of the small lower vital. He moves on, moves upward, there is a growing light in and mixed with the obscurity; ignorance begins to shed its hard and dark coatings one by one and gives place to directed and motivated energies. He meets beings and creatures appropriate to those levels crawling and stirring and climbing, moved by the laws governing the respective regions. In this way Ashwapati passes on into the higher vital, into the border of the mental.

Ashwapati now observes with a clear vividness that all these worlds and the beings and forces that inhabit them are stricken as it were with a bar sinister branded upon their bodies. In spite of an inherent urge of ascension the way is not a straight road but devious and crooked breaking into by-lanes and blind alleys. There is a great corruption and perversion of natural movements towards Truth: falsehoods and pretensions, arrogance of blindness reign here in various degrees. Ashwapati sought to know the wherefore of it all. So he goes behind, dives down and comes into a region that seems to be the source and basis of all ignorance and obscurity and falsehood. He comes into the very heart of the Night, the abyss of consciousness. He meets there the Mother of Evil and the sons of darkness. He stands before

...the gate of a false Infinite,  
An eternity of disastrous absolutes...

Here are the forces that pull down and lure away to perdition all that man's aspirations and the world's urge seek to express and build of Divine things. It is the world in which the forces of the original inconscience find their primitive play. They are dark and dangerous: they prey upon earth's creatures who are not content with being vassals of darkness but try to move to the Light.

Dangerous is this passage for the celestial aspirant:

Where the red Wolf waits by the fordless stream  
And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice...

He must be absolutely vigilant, absolutely on his guard, absolutely sincere.

Here must the traveller of the upward way—  
For daring Hell's kingdoms winds the heavenly route—  
Pause or pass slowly through that perilous space,  
A prayer upon his lips and the great Name.

But there is no escape. The divine traveller has to pass through this region. For it lies athwart his path to the goal. Not only so, it is necessary to go through this Night. For Ashwapati

Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,  
In destruction felt creation's hasty pace,  
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain  
And hell as a short cut to heaven's gates.

Ashwapati now passes into the higher luminous regions. He enters regions of larger breath and wider movement—the higher vital and then into the yet more luminous region of the higher mind. He reaches the heavens where immortal sages and the divinities and the gods themselves dwell. Even these Ashwapati finds to be only partial truths, various aspects, true but limited, of the One Reality beyond. Thus he leaves all behind and reaches into the single sole Reality, the transcendental Truth of things, the status vast and infinite and eternal, immutable existence and consciousness and bliss.

A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space,  
An Everlastingness cut off from Time...  
A stillness absolute, incommunicable ...

Here seems to be the end of the quest, and one would fain stay there ever and ever in that status

...occult, impenetrable,—  
Infinite, eternal, unthinkable, alone.

Ashwapati was perhaps about to be lured into that Bliss but suddenly a doubt enters into him—there is a hesitation, a questioning; he hears a voice:

The ego is dead; we are free from being and care,  
 We have done with birth and death and work and fate.  
 O soul, it is too early to rejoice!  
 Thou hast reached the boundless silence of the Self,  
 Thou hast leaped into a glad divine abyss;  
 But where hast thou thrown self's mission and self's power?  
 On what dead bank on the Eternal's road?

Ashwapati veers round. A new perception, a new consciousness begins to open within him. A new urge moves him. He has to start on a new journey, a new quest and achievement. The world exists neither as a Truth nor as an illusion in itself. It exists in and through the Mother of the worlds. There is a motive in its existence and it is her will that is being worked out in that existence. The world moves for the fulfilment of a purpose that is being evolved through earth-life and human-life. The ignorant incomplete human life upon earth is not the be-all and end-all of the life here. That life has to evolve into a life of light and love and joy perfect here below. Nature as it is now will be transmuted into a new pure and radiant substance. Ashwapati is filled with this new urge and inspired by this new vision. He sees and understands now the truth of his life, the goal that has to be achieved, the great dream that has to be realised here upon earth in and through matter. He sees how nature has been labouring ceaselessly and tirelessly through aeons through eternity onward. He is now almost impatient to see the consummation here and now. The divine Voice however shows him the wisdom of working patiently, hastening slowly. The Voice admonishes him:

I ask thee not to merge thy heart of flame  
 In the Immobile's wide uncaring bliss...  
 Thy soul was born to share the laden Force;  
 Obey thy nature and fulfil thy fate:  
 Accept the difficulty and godlike toil,  
 For the slow-paced omniscient purpose live....  
 All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.

But the human flame once kindled is hard to put down. It seeks an immediate result. It does not understand the fullness of time. So Ashwapati cries out:

Heavy and long are the years our labour counts  
 And still the seals are firm upon man's soul  
 And weary is the ancient Mother's heart....  
 Linger not long with thy transmuting hand

Pressed vainly on one golden bar of Time...  
 Let a great word be spoken from the heights  
 And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.

This great cry of the human soul moved the Divine Mother and she granted at last its prayer. She answered by bestowing of her motherly comfort on the yearning thirsty soul:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.  
 One shall descend and break the iron Law...  
 A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,  
 A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;  
 Nature shall overleap her mortal step;  
 Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.

And She herself came down upon earth as Ashwapati's daughter to undertake the human labour and accomplish the Divine work.

(2)

The Divine Mother is upon earth as a human creature. She is to change the mortal earth into an immortal paradise. Earth at present is a bundle of material inconscience. The Supreme Consciousness has manifested itself as supreme unconsciousness. The Divine has lost itself in pulverising itself, scattering itself abroad. Immortality is thus entombed here below in death. The task of the incarnate Supreme Consciousness is to revive the death-bound divinity, to free the human consciousness in its earthly life from the obscurity of the material unconsciousness, re-install it in its original radiant status of the Divine Consciousness.

Such is Savitri's mission. This mission has two sessions or periods. The first, that of preparation; the second, that of fulfilment. Savitri, the human embodiment was given only twelve months out of her earthly life and in that short space of time she had to do all the preparation. She knew her work from her very birth, she was conscious of her nature and the mission she was entrusted with. Now she is facing the crisis. Death is there standing in front. What is to be done, how is she to proceed? She was told she is to conquer Death, she is to establish immortal life upon mortal earth. The Divine Voice rings out:

Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death.

Yes, she is ready to do it, but not for herself, but for her Love, the being who was the life of her life. Savitri is the Divine Consciousness but here in the mortal body she is

clothed in the human consciousness; it is the human consciousness that she is to lead upward and beyond and it is in and through the human consciousness that the Divine Realisation has to be expressed and established. The human Savitri declares: If Death is conquered, it is for the sake of Satyavan living eternally with her. She seems to say: What I wish to see is the living Satyavan and I united with him for ever. I do not need an earthly life without him; with him I prefer to be in another world if necessary away from the obscurity and turmoil of this earth here.

My strength is taken from me and given to Death,  
 Why should I lift my hands to the shut heavens...  
 Why should I strive with earth's unyielding laws  
 Or stave off death's inevitable hour?  
 This surely is best to pactise with my fate  
 And follow close behind my lover's steps  
 And pass through night from twilight to the sun...

But a thunderous voice descends from above shaking Savitri to the very basis of her existence.

And what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows  
 The work was left undone for which it came?

Thus a crisis very similar to that which Ashwapati had to face now confronts Savitri also. Both of them were at the crossroads away from the earth in the pure delights of the heavens or in the world labouring on earth's soil. Savitri's soul was now revealed to her in its fullness. She viewed the mighty destiny for which she had come down and the great work she had to achieve here upon earth, not any personal or individual human satisfaction or achievement but a cosmic fulfilment, a global human realisation. The godhead in Savitri is now fully awake, established in its plenitude—the Divinity incarnate in the human frame. All the godheads, all the goddess-emanations now entered into her and moulded the totality of her mighty stature.

Here begins then the second stage of her mission,—her work and achievement, the conquest of Death. Only the Divine human being can conquer Death. Savitri follows Death step by step revealing gradually the mystery of death, his personality and his true mission, although the dark God thinks that it is he who is taking away Satyavan and Savitri along with him, to his own home, his black annihilation. For Death is that in its first appearance, it is utter destruction, nothing-ness, non-existence. So the mighty God-head declares in an imperious tone to the mortal woman Savitri:

This is my silent dark immensity,  
 This is the home of everlasting Night,  
 This is the secrecy of Nothingness



Entombing the vanity of life's desires....  
 Hopest thou still always to last and love?

Indeed Death is not merely a destruction of the body, it is in reality nothingness, non-being. The moment being, existence, reality manifested itself, established itself as a material fact, simultaneously there came out and stood against it, its opposite non-being, non-existence, non-reality; against an everlasting 'yes' there was posited an everlasting 'no'. And in fact, this everlasting No proves to be a greater effective reality, it has wound itself around every constituent atom of the universe. That is what has expressed itself in the material domain as the irreversible degradation of energy and in the mortal world it is denial and doubt and falsehood—it is that which brings about failure in life, and frustration, misery and grief. But then Savitri's vision penetrated beyond and she saw, Death is a way of achieving the end more swiftly and more completely. The negation is an apparent obstacle in order to increase, to purify and intensify the speed of the process by which the world and humanity is being remodelled and recreated. This terrible Godhead pursues the human endeavour till the end; until he finds that nothing more is to be done; then his mission too is fulfilled.\* So a last cry, the cry of a desperate dying Death, pierces the universe and throws the final challenge to Savitri:

O human claimant to immortality,  
 Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force,  
 Then will I give back to thee Satyavan.  
 Or if the Mighty Mother is with thee,  
 Show me her face that I may worship her;  
 Let deathless eyes look into the eyes of Death...

Death's desire, his prayer too is fulfilled. He faces Savitri but this is not the Savitri against whom he fought. Whose is this voice?

I hail thee almighty and victorious Death,  
 Thou grandiose Darkness of the Infinite....  
 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...

What happens thereafter is something strange and tremendous and miraculous. Light

\* We are reminded here of a parallelism in Goethe's conception of the role of Satan (the Negative Principle) in human affairs. Satan is not merely a destroying devil, he is a constructive angel. For it is he

*Who must goad and tease  
 And toil to serve creation.*

whenever

*Man's efforts sink below his proper level.*

flashed all around, a leaping tongue of fire spread out and the dark form of Death was burnt—not to ashes but to blazing sparks of light:

His body was eaten by light, his spirit devoured.

Thus Death came to his death—not to death in reality but to a new incarnation. Death returned to his original divine Reality, an emanation of the Divine Mother.

A secret splendour rose revealed to sight  
Where once the vast embodied Void had stood.  
Night the dim mask had grown a wonderful face.

In that domain of pure transcendent light stood face to face the human Savitri and the transformed Satyavan.

*(To be concluded)*

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

*(Collected Works, Vol. 4, pp. 237-53)*

---

## TO HOUSE ETERNAL DAY

I CROSSED the world to touch Her feet  
So many seas away,  
Her smile, Her look, Her love to meet  
Whom all the Gods obey.

The road to Her is steep and long  
And often we delay  
The giving of ourselves, the strong  
Surrender of the Way.

Silently She works and swift,  
Moulding human clay  
To bear the puissant wings' uplift  
And house eternal day.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(2)

Mother Divine,

I have been discharged from the Nursing Home since about a week.

This morning I went to Dr. Sanyal for consultation about my eczema. He gave me to understand that what he was more concerned about was a “suppressed T.B.” in me and that I must submit fully to his way of treatment if I have to take any treatment from him at all. Of course, this he said in his characteristic amiable way which always impresses me.

While in Nursing Home, I confess, that I showed some preference for vegetables and fruits to protein and starchy foods. I have a notion—I do not know whether it is right or wrong—that much protein and starchy food aggravate eczema. And it is the eczema that makes me suffer so much!

Thus, I have been put between the horns of a dilemma, from which you alone, Mother, can deliver me. If you think that my notions and feelings are wrong, I am prepared to give them up and submit totally to Dr. Sanyal’s treatment. Pray, let me know your solution of the problem.

With pronam and happy submission.

Your child and servant,

ABANI SINHA

6.10.62

In the effect of food on the body 90% belongs to the power of the thought. If you follow with confidence the treatment of Sanyal, it will cure you.

With blessings

The Mother

## INTERVIEW OF 8 SEPTEMBER 1979

**Participants: Amal Kiran (A), Lalita (L) and Peter Heehs (P)**

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

L: Very shortly afterwards Mother called me for her manicure, and that gave me a wonderful chance to be alone with her for one hour or one and a half hours. She would give me her hand, like that and then she would look at me for some time and then close her eyes and pass into a deep trance. After finishing one hand, somehow something told me that I must not disturb her. So I just sat there quietly for a few minutes. She would wake up after a long time, “Oop”, she would say like that and give me the other hand. Sometimes when she had some visions about me or something connected to my past life, she would tell me. Or sometimes if I had some dream vision or something, I would ask her about it and she would explain things to me. But each time I told her that I did not know the ABC of sadhana, Mother said, “You don’t bother about it, I am doing the sadhana, you just carry on quietly with my work, that’s all.” And she gave me work after work after that, lots of it. You must have read in my Reminiscences how many types of work she gave me. Stitching her gown, her sandals, her blouses, sari, underwear, everything.

P: Is this because you have some skill in stitching and manicure?

L: No, I don’t think so. I was not fond of stitching.

A: Mother just wanted to do something to bring about an inner contact, otherwise why should she have given me the work of managing the furniture department? With all the blooming things in the world, she just told me, “I want you to take care of the furniture department.” There wasn’t a furniture department, there was just a godown, actually, and all the furniture was dumped there and I had no helpers. But the important thing was that I had to go to her every time I had to get a signature. People used to ask for a table, a rack or something or other and I used to get a signature, so I used to take a note to her and she would sign...

P: Where would she be?

A: She would be at the staircase head, upstairs.

P: There was a certain time that you could see her?

A: Yes, in the morning we used to see her. She would appear every morning after the pranam. Then one day in the early morning I felt a great draw towards the Ashram, so I went there, and went up half the staircase and stood on the landing looking up at her room—I mean at the door of the meditation hall. Suddenly She opened the door and looked out and said, “Would you like to come in?” And I said, “Of course I would.” Then I went up to her, she took me in, sat down, and I did my pranam to her, then she said, “You can come every morning at the time Lalita comes and you come first”—or afterwards. I don’t quite remember the order. And then it started, she used to take us all along that middle room—between Sri Aurobindo’s room and the meditation hall—all along the

middle room to her dressing room—where now Nirod's office is, that was her dressing room. There was a mirror, a little dressing table, a pouf on which to sit and something else. She used to go there, she used to sit down on the pouf and we used to bend down, individually. Then she would bring us out, holding us by the hand, to the door again. It was delightful. How she takes one up like that, you know. A time comes when she would just catch you in that way and sort of give herself to you, teach you things, and so on.

L: What is surprising is that Amal told me I was mistaken about the telegram.

A: I told him just now.

L: Yes, but then when Mother asked Amrita, "How is the lady?"

A: Yes, "How is the young lady?"

L: So she knew...

A: She... there was an attack on your life.

L: Without our informing her.

A: We were surprised. Why did she enquire about her and nothing about me?

L: I was a young lady.

A: I don't think it was just out of politeness or manners or anything like that.

L: No, nothing of that.

A: She felt something was wrong.

L: And then when I asked her she said, "The hostile forces did not want you to take to the spiritual life."

A: They wanted to kill her. She was all ready for this life. I wasn't quite ready. There were a lot of intellectual barriers, a lot of questions to ask—though I was very eager for it.

L: I don't think I was ready for it.

A: Yes, I think you were quite ready for it, because you had been already a devotee for years. Whereas for me it was quite new. When I met her I was still an agnostic. And I used to doubt things and criticise things and live like a free-thinker.

P: Before you mentioned that both of you came, when you first went into a sort of an ascetic period, how did that come about?

A: Yes.

P: In the Ashram, when you first came.

A: Yes, what happened?

P: There was a sort of ascetic period.

A: Yes, there was an ascetic period at that time. You could not bring an outsider into an Ashram house. It was a great crime. Not even a tailor, or a cobbler or anybody. An Ashram house was meant only for Ashramites. And if you brought somebody and Mother came to know of it, She would disapprove, "You can't do such a thing." It was, what shall I say? —a kind of guarded preserve.

P: How wide an area did the Ashram then extend to?

L: Oh, not much.

A: Only a few houses, that's all.

P: And all just around the main building.

A: The Guest House was the outpost, as far as I know.

L: The old Guest House.

P: Two blocks away.

A: Yes. The old Guest House was the farthest on this side. On the other side, MacPheeter's house was the farthest. It was about three or five streets away from the Ashram, on the north side.

P: And everything was within that area.

A: Yes, there were only a few houses here and there.

P: So that Ashramites, besides not being allowed to have people in their own houses, were not encouraged to go outside.

A: Not at all encouraged. If you wanted to meet anybody, you could go outside. And that too with great hesitation. To meet outsiders was not advisable at all in those days. Because there was a certain intensity of some kind, you know. A kind of rooting was going on at that time. Nolini himself has referred to that period, a sort of exclusion of the outside world. It was really like that.

P: Well, how did you spend the hours of the day then?

A: We had each of us his work. And then reading was there, Sri Aurobindo's books were there. At that time only the *Arya* was available, and a few small books brought out by the Arya office in Calcutta or somewhere. That was all we had. And then, of course, *The Mother* came out. The book *The Mother*, came out for the first time in 1928, towards the end or the middle of 1928.

P: Oh yes? It is dated, I think, February 21, 1928. [Cannot be checked]

A: February 21st?

P: I thought so.

A: It may have come out. Maybe. But that was the first book brought out after I came here.

P: So you would do studying in your room...

A: Yes, yes. And of course we would go to each other's rooms. But that too was not advised very much. To go to a lady's room was not a common thing at all, only if you had to teach somebody. I used to teach some people, Sahana and somebody else—Tajdar—so I had to go to their rooms and sit and teach.

P: Teach English?

A: Yes.

P: No, I mean, people say at first, looking back, "Oh, things were so much more intense, so much more serious, so much more full of..."

L: That was true.

P: But then I have heard people say also, "Oh it was so much greater and all that, oh, but I wouldn't want those times back again."

A: Why?

P: Because in this case it was so much more difficult also.

A: No, I would personally say that yoga is much more difficult now.

P: The yoga is more difficult?

A: Of course. Because at that time everything conduced to yoga. Now everything seems to scatter your concentration here, and still you have to centre yourself inwardly. There is so much distraction now.

P: Make a comparison. Now here you sit and you type and you answer the telephone and all that. But your work is the same, you are trying to concentrate the same.

A: Yes, but you see the outside life is so common now. There was no outside life then at all. Now we meet and go about and visit the Playground—this and that. And people visiting people, people come to see you, all that was not there at all. We were a small community...

L: I will give one instance.

A: Yes.

L: Amal had a fall, a serious accident. He had injured his knee. I didn't even know of it, till Mother called me once and then she said, "Amal has had an accident, you go and see him." You see how very cut off we were from each other. And Ambu, who was with him, said, "And look at your wife, she doesn't even want to care, she doesn't even care to come and see you." But when Mother told me to go I went.

A: Then she came once or twice and then she found that it was disturbing for her yoga. So she said, "I'm sorry, I will not be able to come," and I said, "You are perfectly free, I don't even expect you." When we came here we made a pact that if she wanted to stay here and I didn't find the place congenial I would go away and she wouldn't force me to stay here. Similarly, if she wanted to go I wouldn't hold her back, "Oh, you are my wife, you have to stay where I am." We left each other absolutely free like that. Because we did not know whether this yoga would suit us, we did not come here for good when we came here. We wanted to see the place, see the yoga and so forth. And we had no particular idea—although that article was there which we had read—but it gave me a very general picture—it was only after we came here that we really felt, when we saw Mother, that it was really home here.

P: What was it about her that made you feel that way?

L: She was wonderful.

A: Yes, the way she used to meet us again and again during the day and when we went to see her for our interviews, the way she talked with us.

P: But she couldn't have fitted in with what a traditional yogi was supposed to be.

A: Yes, because when we came here the sort of idea we had of ancient yogis was completely shattered. But we were very modern people you must remember, so the shattering didn't give us any shock. On the contrary, we were very happy. But still as I say there was this segregation, you know, there was the exclusion of the outside world.

P: What do you think Mother's intention in setting up that segregation was?

L: It was that we must concentrate on the yoga.

A: And even to go and see a girl in the Ashram wasn't correct. I mean, tea with friends, for instance, wasn't encouraged at all.

P: So what were you supposed to be doing instead?

A: We'd meditate, or we'd read.

L: Read or do our work.

A: Or do our work, each had his work to do, everybody had his work.

P: That would take the whole day?

A: I had my drawing and painting work for Mother and sketching the crowns to go with Mother's saris and the borders and all that...

L: He was a very good artist.

A: I was the only artist in the Ashram at that time, good or bad, and Mother picked me out. She had heard a rumour that I had made cartoons of people meditating. And I had, in the early days when the meditation was going on at 7.30 in the meditation hall, upstairs. Every day at 7.30.

P: a.m. or p.m.?

A: a.m. And we used to be there and one of the old sadhaks, who was...

P: So you were only two doors away from Sri Aurobindo then.

A: Yes, yes.

P: And he was participating in the...

A: Yes, he was there sort of supporting the whole thing from behind. And Mother used to sit by herself.

P: How long did this last?

A: Quite a long time.

P: Several years?

A: And one of the old sadhaks was privileged every day—I mean a different sadhak each time—to put his head on Mother's feet and meditate there for the whole time. I remember Purani doing it and others doing it and we used to all sit, there were about sixteen or seventeen of us, I think, altogether.

P: Seventeen only?

A: Most probably, yes.

P: In the whole Ashram?

L: No, no, no. But at the meditation not even so many, perhaps.

A: Yes, I remember Amrita, Purani, Nolini, Chandulal, then...

L: Dr. Babu.

A: Yes, Dr. Babu with the big beard—Dr. Banerjee. Then there were the MacPheeters, and we were there and Dara, his brother Prashanta and one of his sisters, there was a very small group then, and Rajangam, of course. Purushottam, Pujalal, Champaklal, Dyuman, they were all there. There was the whole old circle; how we got admitted there, I don't know but we were present almost from the start of our stay.

P: Others in the Ashram circle weren't there?

A: No, I don't think that all of them were there.

L: No, not all of them.

A: Just at the meetings in the prosperity room, there were only about twenty or twenty-four. Duraiswami's number was twenty-four, mine was fifteen, hers was...

L: Two.

A: Two. René was one and so on.



P: The others were excluded or just didn't want to come?

A: I don't quite remember why the whole Ashram was not gathered there. I don't know, I can't remember. And so when I started it, when I started sitting there, naturally I couldn't meditate properly. I used to keep my eyes open and see how others were meditating and each one had his own way of doing it. So I made a series of sketches including my own self, you know.

L: Very amusing sketches.

A: Yes, very amusing sketches, with certain captions.

L: Like Purani pushing the supermind down his throat.

A: No, Purani used to sit there and I used to watch him. His neck used to expand that much, really expand that much, this great power was coming down into his head and he would try to bear it, you know. I could see the tension in the effort to absorb it and his neck used to become like this. So I said, Purani trying to swallow the Supreme or something like that...

L: No, no, pushing the supermind down his throat.

A: Something like that, yes, and for each one I had a thing like that.

L: Mine—my nose or something.

A: And for myself also I had described the posture—craning my neck to reach the Supermind or something like that.

L: Very amusing.

A: And there was a chap here, a Mohamedan chap, Prashanta, who became Asuric after a while and he used to meditate like this with his neck, so I said, "in a state of dislocated devotion". And Mother had heard a rumour of that. Then one day at the prosperity meeting she asked me, "I would like you to draw all the flowers I give you—draw and paint them." And I said, "Mother, how do you know that I can draw and paint?" She said, "It is quite clear from your hands," she said. "Look at your hands, you have a painter's hands." And so I started and that was a very important thing for me because Mother used to examine all my drawings. And hundreds of them are there, she kept them with her. And all those flower-combination sentences—each of them I had typed under a painting. That too she had. She used to wrap them up in a silk cloth and keep all of them safe. I don't know where they are now.

L: They must be there, somewhere.

P: Did she give you instruction, at all?

A: Yes, yes. And I used to notice something very peculiar, the things which I used to consider very finely done, she would sometimes pass over. But those which I had done with great dedication—something subtle had come into the hands—even if they were not technically very good, she used to pause at them and praise them. So I knew how she used to look at things.

P: How do you think she was aware of that quality just in the lines of the drawing?

A: Of course, she would know immediately. You see the whole picture was surrounded by a certain atmosphere of attitude. It was very interesting to see how she could at once get an impression, an insight. And I knew immediately. The pictures I was

very proud of she wouldn't look at. Also because I was proud, it may simply be that. But those pictures which I did—I remember my condition at that time—with a great devotion she used to admire a great deal. But of course she wants expression of the inner being in all that we do. And this furniture department went on, went on, went on and I had to hire outside coolies—the rickshaw-wallas—to carry the furniture. Sometimes I had to shoulder things myself and walk on the road and set up the rooms.

*(To be continued)*

---

## THE ROAD BACK TO THE BELOVED

THERE is an eternal longing in our hearts to be reunited with Love. Some try to express this yearning in words, music, dance, or other creative expression. The end result is still no more than a shadow of what awaits us when we find Love, or the source of Love, the Beloved.

Our lives express this Mystery. Who we are beneath the surface is what we seek to become, even though we only catch short glimpses of this boundless Presence.

These booklets and these audio tapes in our present way of living may serve as signposts along the way. They are outlines and maps of recent travels for those who feel the song they sing.

Life is a journey, into what seems to be a distant world. However, when we awaken to the inner Silence, a way is opened. May all who are ready to take this journey, beckon to the call of the One who leads us home, the Beloved.

ALLAN STOCKER

## ABOUT THE MOTHER\*

Friends,

I have been asked to speak about the Mother. How to speak about one whose movement is inscrutable even for the keenest and most vast intelligence? I will begin by an episode in my own life. Many years ago when I had just entered yogic life, an interesting incident took place, which set my feet firmly on the path. It happened as far as I can remember after an interview with the Mother. She asked me how my aspiration was formulated. I could not understand what She meant. The language was too yogic or philosophic for my medical brain to understand. She therefore put it in a simpler form. When I replied that what I wanted most was Ananda, She smiled and said that Ananda was very difficult to bring down. However there was no harm in asking for it. That very afternoon when I had gone for my work and was looking at the blue sky overhead, a sudden downpour of Ananda came like a cascade upon me and made me feel like dancing, so overpowering it was! Not knowing how to contain it I sat down to write some poetry and no sooner had I started than the whole experience stopped. So you see, my friends, her movement may be inscrutable to the human mind but its effect is very real and palpable.

The realisation of Sri Aurobindo's ideals is a cosmic necessity. Nature finds many instruments to fulfill her purpose. But the most glorious manifestation is, when Divine Nature herself consents to wear a human cloak in order to uplift humankind. Such was our Mother. God is Sat-Purusha, the pure Existent and his Divine Nature is Chit-Shakti, Consciousness-Force, which is here the Mother. Indeed so complete was her identity with Divine Nature that She could declare, "Since the beginning of creation wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of consciousness, I was there." We know her as the Shakti of Sri Aurobindo—the Avatar. He said that with the Mother's help he covered ten years of Sadhana in one year. About her wisdom, knowledge, power, compassion, love, administrative efficiency, executive qualities, artistic ability etc., I need not deliberate. The Ashram is a living testimony for these things.

This year marks the 125th year of the Mother's birth. Let this be an occasion to consecrate ourselves more fully to her Will. The one unfailing means of success in the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo is to open to the Mother's force and let it work in one's being and nature with happy consent and willing acceptance.

When Sri Aurobindo wrote about the Divine Mother in *Savitri*, I am sure He had our Mother in mind. I end by reading some of these lines.

At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,  
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;  
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.

\* A talk delivered on 18 February 2003 at Sri Aurobindo Society Beach Office Hall Pondicherry. It was a part of the function organised to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of the Mother under the auspices of Sri Aurobindo Society Gujarat Region Samarpan Committee Vadodara.

Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;  
 The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;  
 She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.  
 The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,  
 A power of silence in the depths of God;  
 She is the Force, the inevitable Word,  
 The magnet of our difficult ascent,  
 The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,  
 The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,  
 The joy that beckons from the impossible,  
 The Might of all that never yet came down.  
 All Nature dumbly calls to her alone  
 To heal with her feet the aching throb of life  
 And break the seals on the dim soul of man  
 And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.  
 All here shall be one day her sweetness's home,  
 All contraries prepare her harmony;  
 Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes,  
 In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,  
 Her clasp will turn to ecstasy our pain.  
 Our self shall be one self with all through her.  
 In her confirmed because transformed in her,  
 Our life shall find in its fulfilled response  
 Above, the boundless hushed beatitudes,  
 Below, the wonder of the embrace divine.

NIRODBARAN

---

### A NOTE

In the March issue of *Mother India* there is a note entitled *Our Mother* by Yvonne Artaud (p. 204) about the Mother "disincarnating" herself and projecting "her head with force to the left side". Her note seems to be inconsistent in several respects. She was not present at the time of the Mother's passing away. For an authentic account reference may be made to Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya's account in his *I Remember...* (pp. 313-25).

ANONYMOUS

# FOUNDING OF AUROVILLE—THE CITY OF DAWN

## An Important Landmark in the Mother's Work

To create a platform for the Truth Consciousness seeking to manifest in the world, first the Ashram was formed. It provided diverse elements of mankind for the march of transformation of collective consciousness as well as a nucleus form for the intense practice of Integral Yoga and conducive of rapid progress. The Mother founded Auroville on February 28, 1968 as the continuation and expansion of the same objective with greater global participative elements and to deal with the issues of human unity. The name 'Auroville' means 'City of Dawn'. Under the endorsement of UNESCO, 121 countries participated in its inauguration. Each nation sent its soil with a young man and woman as its representatives to put its soil in an urn in the amphitheatre that is in front of the Matrimandir as a symbol of human unity on a global scale.

The Mother gave Auroville its charter as a set of living principles to be practised and upheld:

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.
3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.
4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

The Mother had proclaimed, "Auroville wants to be the first realisation of human unity based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where men of all countries would be at home." Sri Aurobindo provided the genesis of the ideal of human unity and an insightful context, which is the inspirational and guiding force at Auroville:

"With the present morality of the human race a sound and durable human unity is not yet possible; but there is no reason why a temporary approximation to it should not be the reward of strenuous aspiration and untiring effort. By constant approximations and by partial realisations and temporary successes Nature advances."<sup>1</sup>

"A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed

and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development.

“A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of cooperation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life.

“There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the [human] race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the [human] race. ...In this direction lies the eventual road. No doubt, if this is only an idea like the rest, it will go the way of all ideas.

“But if it is at all a truth of our being, then it must be the truth to which all is moving and in it must be found the means of a fundamental, an inner, a complete, a real human unity which would be the one secure base of a unification of human life. A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.”<sup>2</sup>

“The indwelling deity who presides over the destiny of the [human] race has raised in man’s mind and heart the idea, the hope of a new order which will replace the old unsatisfactory order and substitute for it conditions of the world’s life which will in the end have a reasonable chance of establishing permanent peace and well-being.

“This would for the first time turn into an assured fact the ideal of human unity which, cherished by a few, seemed for so long a noble chimera; then might be created a firm ground of peace and harmony and even a free room for the realisation of the highest human dreams, for the perfectibility of the race, a perfect society, a higher upward evolution of the human soul and human nature. It is for the men of our day and, at the most, of tomorrow to give the answer.”<sup>3</sup>

The Mother was very emphatic about the importance of human unity for the human race to collectively seek the Supramental Truth:

“... The most important [idea] one is that the unity of the human race can be achieved neither through uniformity nor through domination and subjection. A synthetic organi-

sation of all nations, each one occupying its own place in accordance with its own genius and the role it has to play in the whole, can alone effect a comprehensive and progressive unification which may have some chance of enduring. And if the synthesis is to be a living thing, the grouping should be done around a central idea as high and wide as possible, and in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, would find their respective places. That idea is to give man the conditions of life necessary for preparing him to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow. All urges of rivalry, all struggle for precedence and dominion should disappear giving place to a will for harmonious organisation, for clear-sighted and effective collaboration....”<sup>4</sup>

It is so exhilarating to note that this ideal is being progressively transformed into reality, which is the basis of Auroville and it acts as a perpetual beacon of encouragement and pointer for the residents, associates and affiliates to persevere. It is believed that, during their ongoing activities whether working on a project, meetings, deliberations, planning, or organizing an event they remain humbly cognizant of how vast and how high their aim is and strive towards it. However, divergent points of view based on personal perceptions intertwined with cultural heritage and life experiences, and the zeal of commitment towards the ideal do create “real life” obstacles as well as opportunities to unify at a deeper level of Universal Truth seeking to manifest. The Mother, in her infinite wisdom, had cautioned us, “For all to agree, each one must rise to the summit of his consciousness: it is on the heights that harmony is created.”<sup>5</sup> The same thrust is repeated but with an emphasis on aspirations for the Divine alone in one of her later messages. During her Yoga of Physical Transformation when she was battling with the contraries deep rooted in the subconscious to transit to the state of equanimity and to have blissful harmony as the outcome, her cellular aspiration was constantly and evermore for the Divine alone:

“Beyond all preferences and limitations, there is a ground of mutual understanding where all can meet and find their harmony: it is the aspiration for a divine consciousness.”<sup>6</sup>

Was not the Mother battling the contraries deeprooted in the subconscious of humanity? Was she not striving for the supramental harmony on earth for mankind? Did she not repeatedly advise to get the Matrimandir constructed as soon as possible? Could it be that the Matrimandir was meant to be the anchor for the divine aspiration? Her body had only one single prayer—always the same:

Make me worthy of knowing Thee,  
Make me worthy of serving Thee,  
Make me worthy of being Thee.<sup>7</sup>

Her Christmas message of 1972 is for the world at large but it is so relevant to all those involved with Auroville:

We want to show to the world  
 that man can become a true  
 servitor of the Divine.  
 Who will collaborate in all sincerity ?<sup>8</sup>

To make uncommon things happen, we all know that uncommon efforts are needed. Yes, the Pyramids of Egypt are great constructions but they required exceptional engineering knowhow along with the decades of uncommon forced labor under the autocratic dominance. In the last century to counter Hitler's advancing dominance, the US government upon advocacy of Einstein undertook the "Manhattan" project. To make the first-ever Atom Bomb in a race against time, a team of scientists and mathematicians of unprecedented caliber participated in this project. More Nobel laureates from both the disciplines were called upon to participate in this single mission than ever before. Yes, the outcome was a glorious success. Maybe because the project was directed by an exceptional project manager, Robert Oppenheimer, who could manage the Himalayan Egos of the members of such a team, have them stay focused on the issues at hand and have them work in a synergistic and interrelated manner to overcome all the known and unforeseen obstacles of atomic physics in a timely manner. Alternatively, maybe because he could successfully channel their commitment, brilliance, and contributions to the common cause. Or maybe mainly the stellar participants were selfdirected and singular in their purpose and participation to achieve the goal and did not let their personalities and personal theories come in the way of the goal: To harness the energy within matter to make an atom bomb before Hitler did. It is obvious that without the collaborative work as the mode of operation, the "Manhattan" project would have failed in its mission. Auroville is the first spiritual project of its kind in the history. It is not just to build a township but to create a human collaboration process for collective transformation of human consciousness for the manifestation of Divine Truth leading to the new race of Overman and ultimately the Supramental Being on earth. The mission here is to become divine and live on earth. This mission transcends all great missions and requires nothing less than ever increasing collaboration for human unity to become divinity. In the light of the enormous scope of this mission, is it not expected to encounter resistance, obstructions, and difficulties from deep within and their outward manifestations? We may note that the Auroville development period paralleled the Mother's Yoga of the Body in which the subconscious was a major challenge to the transformation process. Sri Aurobindo had clearly demarcated the path required for us to follow:

"A divine life upon earth, the ideal we have placed before us, can only come about by a spiritual change of our being and a radical and fundamental change, an evolution or revolution of our nature. The embodied being upon earth would have to rise out of the domination over it of its veils of mind, life and body into the full consciousness and possession of its spiritual reality, and its nature also would have to be lifted out of the consciousness and power of consciousness proper to a mental, vital and physical being



into the greater consciousness and greater power of being and the larger and freer life of the spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

Human frailty may surface in this transformational process creating its own challenges and delaying the progress but the march continues steadily, even if slowly towards the objective of unification with the spirit and its realisation in collective endeavors and community-dwelling for harmony to prevail. After all, the direct and indirect participants of Auroville do represent humanity, which is even now far from perfect and still struggling to establish harmony within to manifest it in the collective domain. If humanity were more open to the Divine Consciousness, more willing to adhere to the principles of Integral Yoga, and more ready and willing to follow the light of the Supramental Truth then maybe all the direct and indirect participants as affiliates, associates and well-wishers of Auroville would be better instruments and workers of the Divine. If this were the case then perhaps the Auroville work could have progressed faster; and time, talent, and resources deployed would have found a greater level of success in reflecting the manifestation of Bliss, Beauty, and Truth. Auroville is a great reminder that the fault lies not with the circumstances but within ourselves. Auroville is the greatest opportunity for the human spirit to progress in seeking the divine Truth. It provides in a concrete manner an uncommon experience to reflect that aspiration and above all it demonstrates the descent and functioning of the Supreme’s light to enable us to work collectively in collaboration and to live collectively in harmony with accentuated individuality.

Auroville has been supported from within and with help from around the world. Since the very beginning, Auroville has received the unanimous endorsement of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1983. Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations in India and abroad have funded various development programs, and donations have been received from foundations in Europe and the USA, from Auroville International Centres, and regularly from private donors\* around the world. The natives and residents themselves have also made, and continue to make, a major contribution of their resources and energy to the undertaking of Auroville, which is the symbol of mankind’s hope and aspiration for the future. All the participants of Auroville in their respective roles are the harbingers of the new dawn of our civilisation.

As the Ashram is the expression of the Mother’s dream, Auroville is an expansion of its theme and it embodies her vision of the unity of humanity.

“There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.

“In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones. In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organize. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.

“Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one’s capacities and not by social or financial position.

“For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one’s livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one’s capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one’s subsistence and for the field of his work.

“In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.

“The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal, for mankind does not yet possess the necessary knowledge to understand and accept it nor the indispensable conscious force to execute it. That is why I call it a dream.

“Yet, this dream is on the way of becoming a reality.

“That is exactly what we are seeking to do at the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo on a small scale, in proportion to our modest means. The achievement is indeed far from being perfect but it is progressive; little by little we advance towards our goal, which, we hope one day we shall be able to hold before the world as a practical and effective means of coming out of the present chaos in order to be born into a more true, more harmonious new life.”<sup>10</sup>

The Mother had emphasized several times that the Matrimandir (literally, Temple of the Mother—the central globe structure with a meditation hall) is the soul of Auroville in the symbolic spiritual sense. Ananda Reddy’s interpretation of the Matrimandir foundation stone is very insightful:

“What astounds me, thinking philosophically, is that the Mother has given the Matrimandir the foundation of AUM, chiseled in hard granite, with her name signed underneath. For no other building has the Mother given AUM for its foundation. In one of her writings, she gave the significance of AUM as “the signature of the Lord”. What does it mean? The scriptures say that from AUM the world was created. We have here a second AUM in Matter, in the foundation of the Matrimandir—which itself is the symbol of the

Supramental action of the world. That places the true importance of the Matrimandir not only in the presence of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's symbols and of the crystal, but deep in its very foundation. It turns the Matrimandir literally into the cradle of a New Creation, from Matter upwards, just as the first one had been from the Spirit downwards."<sup>11</sup>

ARUN VAIDYA

### References

1. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 467.
2. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 577-78.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 586.
4. *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1954.
5. *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 198.
6. *Agenda*, Vol. 13, (17 November 1972).
7. *Notes on the Way*, CWM, Vol. 11, p. 330.
8. *Agenda*, Vol. 13, (27 December 1972).
9. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 558.
10. *Bulletin of Physical Education*, August 1954.
11. *Auroville Today*, No. 143, December 2000, p. 4.

## A GREATER PSYCHOLOGY

An Introduction to the Psychological Thought of Sri Aurobindo—Edited by A.S.Dalal  
Pages: 426; Rs. 225.00; ISBN 81-7058-659-3

An overview of Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought. The first part, comprising three-fourths of the book, is an anthology of Sri Aurobindo's writings on topics such as "The nature of consciousness", "The make-up of the human being", "Self and ego", "The subliminal and the subconscious", "The psychic being", "Sleep and dreams", "The psychology of faith", "Cosmic consciousness", "The psychology of collective development" and "Growth towards a greater psychology". The second part consists of essays by the editor "that further illuminate various aspects of Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision". A glossary of terms is included.

THIS EDITION IS FOR SALE ONLY IN INDIA.  
OVERSEAS BUYERS MAY PURCHASE THE INTERNATIONAL EDITION  
FROM PENGUIN PUTNAM, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

Available at SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Pondicherry 605 002

Please see "New Publications" for ordering information.

## THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of April 2003)

### *Savitri and the Record of Yoga*

9

THE vision that in 1927 was replacing in Sri Aurobindo's experience the Krishna-Kalidarshana of the earlier period of the *Record of Yoga* is referred to in two brief but highly significant entries. On 26 January, Sri Aurobindo noted:

Some modification of the universal Darshana—simultaneous vision of Parameswara-Parameswari in all.<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, on the 1st of February, a further development was recorded. Here “Parameswara-Parameswari” was abbreviated in the cryptic style typical of the *Record*:

A step forward in Darshana (Aditi holding P<sup>a</sup>-P<sup>i</sup> in all living things, less vividly in all objects). This is not yet entirely universalised but it is increasing.<sup>2</sup>

After this tantalising entry the diary breaks off until April, when there are entries for two weeks and then another gap until the last series of dated entries, those of 24-31 October. In the nine printed pages of dated *Record* after 1 February there are no further references to Darshana, Aditi, Parameswara or Parameswari.

But on a few pages of the notebook that contains most of the entries for 1927, Sri Aurobindo also made some diagrams related to Aditi and Parameswara-Parameswari. A somewhat freely edited version of these diagrams was first published in 1959 in *The Hour of God* under the editorial title “The Divine Plan”; a verbatim transcript of the manuscript is now available as part of the *Record of Yoga*. In the first of these diagrams, four “absolutes” are listed. The first two are designated “Tat” and “Sat”. These are defined as the “Absolute Transcendent” and the “supreme self-contained absolute Existence”. The third is Aditi, “the indivisible consciousness force and Ananda of the Supreme”, also called Adya-Shakti. The fourth absolute is represented by the equation “Parameswara of the Gita = Parameswari of the Tantra”.<sup>3</sup>

*Parameśvara* is the Supreme Lord. *Parameśvarī* is the feminine form of the same word, not literally translatable into English. The equation of these two would represent the “complete union of the two sides of the Duality”,<sup>4</sup> the perfect “Two-in-one” referred to in *The Synthesis of Yoga* as realisable at “a certain spiritual and supramental level”.<sup>5</sup> Aditi or Adya-Shakti (the “original Power” mentioned in *Savitri*)<sup>6</sup> who stands above them is the “transcendent Mother”<sup>7</sup> about whom Sri Aurobindo wrote in his book *The Mother* in 1927.<sup>8</sup> Sometime after that, clarifying some terms in *The Mother*, he explained about the transcendent Mother:

This is what is termed the Adya Shakti; she is the Supreme Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her—the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.<sup>9</sup>

The “supramental Ishwara” corresponds evidently to “Parameswara” in the *Record of Yoga*, who is inseparable from “Parameswari”. In this light, we may take the latter to be for Sri Aurobindo at this stage in his Yoga the same as the “supramental Mahashakti”,<sup>10</sup> the supreme form of the universal Mother. Corresponding to the vision of Aditi holding P<sup>a</sup>-P<sup>i</sup> we read in *The Mother* that the Supreme is manifested as Ishwara-Shakti through the original (*ādyā*) transcendent Shakti:

The one original transcendent Shakti, the Mother stands above all the worlds and bears in her eternal consciousness the Supreme Divine.... The Supreme is manifest in her for ever as the everlasting Sachchidananda, manifested through her in the worlds as the one and dual consciousness of Ishwara-Shakti and the dual principle of Purusha-Prakriti...<sup>11</sup>

Some ten years after this was published, Sri Aurobindo began to introduce into *Savitri* a vision related to what he had recorded in his diary and elaborated on in diagrams and in *The Mother*. It is here that we find the full revelation of what lay behind the almost algebraic notations in the *Record of Yoga*, whose brevity should not mislead us into underestimating the significance of the experiences recorded. From the late 1920s onwards, *Savitri* gradually became Sri Aurobindo’s chosen vehicle for giving a poetic account of his inner life. But its revision and immense expansion during this period consisted largely of the incorporation of experiences he had had many years earlier. Some of these had been noted in the *Record of Yoga* at the time. The present instance is a case in point, which will serve as an example for the purpose of this series of articles before returning to the story of how the later books of the epic were revised in the 1940s.

The passage in question comes just before Aswapati, ascending through the worlds, reaches the overmental planes which in the final text of *Savitri* are described in “The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge” (Book Two, Canto Fifteen). In the late 1930s, there was not yet a separate Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. But the fourth section of the first book, referred to in Sri Aurobindo’s letters as “the Worlds”, had already become the longest section and was rapidly growing. Passages that would develop into each of the cantos of Book Two were taking shape. The last five of these cantos deal with the planes of consciousness that bridge the enormous gulf between mind and Supermind. Thus they are of the utmost importance for the symbolisation in *Savitri* of the transformation envisaged in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga. Yet their place in the scheme of Part One is not immediately obvious because Sri Aurobindo does not, except at the end with the word “Overmind”, employ here the terms used in his prose accounts of the same subject. Moreover, he introduces details whose explanation cannot easily be found in

other writings of his. A brief look at what precedes the tremendous vision now found at the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen is therefore necessary if we wish to have some idea of why this vision comes where it does and what it signifies from the point of view of the development of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experience.

Aswapati's ascension through the planes of the spiritual mind begins with a "triple realm of ordered thought"<sup>12</sup> which in the finished poem is described in "The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind" (Book Two, Canto Eleven). From all that is said in *Savitri* about this realm whose "deities shape our greater thinking's roads",<sup>13</sup> we can gather that it corresponds to what in other writings of the 1930s and '40s Sri Aurobindo termed the "Higher Mind". In one of the chapters he added to *The Life Divine* when he revised the *Arya* text for the first edition, published in 1939-40, he defined this Higher Mind as "a luminous thought-mind, a mind of spirit-born conceptual knowledge".<sup>14</sup> Here he also applied to it the expression "greater mind" used in *Savitri*:

An all-awareness emerging from the original identity, carrying the truths the identity held in itself, conceiving swiftly, victoriously, multitudinously, formulating and by self-power of the Idea effectually realising its conceptions, is the character of this greater mind of knowledge. This kind of cognition is the last that emerges from the original spiritual identity before the initiation of a separative knowledge, base of the Ignorance; it is therefore the first that meets us when we rise from conceptive and ratiocinative mind, our best-organised knowledge-power of the Ignorance, into the realms of the Spirit; it is, indeed, the spiritual parent of our conceptive mental ideation, and it is natural that this leading power of our mentality should, when it goes beyond itself, pass into its immediate source.<sup>15</sup>

In this and other passages where Sri Aurobindo explains the nature of the Higher Mind, there seems at first sight to be no suggestion of the three levels described in *Savitri*. But on a careful reading of the first sentence quoted above, we notice that three movements can be distinguished: first, a transmission of truths from the original identity; second, a conceiving of the multiplicity of possible ramifications of these truths; third, an effective formulation and realisation of these conceptions. In Book Two, Canto Eleven of *Savitri*, where the kingdoms of the greater mind appear in ascending order, the last of these functions belongs to the "Masters of things actual", who "give a mould" to "all that Spirit conceives". The second function is carried out by the "architects of possibility", to whose vision the "invisible multitude" of cosmic forces is unveiled. The first is the prerogative of the "sovereign Kings of Thought" who, acting as "Intercessors with a luminous Unseen", convey to the world the "imperatives of the creator Self".<sup>16</sup>

In the *Record of Yoga*, in the entry of 19 October 1920, Sri Aurobindo wrote of a "logos vijñana"<sup>17</sup> which "has to deal with three movements":

1. Actualities—representative
2. Potentialities (including and harmonising with the actualities, or separate).

### 3. The imperatives of the infinite—absolute, imperative, identific.<sup>18</sup>

The term *logos vijñāna* also occurs in a chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga* published in the *Arya* on 15 October 1920, in the same month as the above entry in the *Record*. At that time, Sri Aurobindo had not clearly distinguished all the planes between mind and Supermind or adopted the terms “Higher Mind, “Illumined Mind”, “Intuition” and “Overmind” to designate these planes.<sup>19</sup> Those who read the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* without knowing this are likely to be perplexed, especially if they are unaware that Part Four of the book was never revised and updated in its terminology as Parts One and Two were in the 1930s and ’40s. On the other hand, once the terminology is understood, these chapters are found to contain a detailed account of certain stages of the ascent into higher planes of consciousness for which the *Record of Yoga* is the only other available source.

Keeping in mind that the word “supramental” in unrevised texts from the *Arya* may indicate simply the supra-intellectual and need not mean what is above the Overmind—a term that had not yet been coined—we see that in the passage mentioning “logos Vijnana” in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, this expression can be understood to refer to what Sri Aurobindo later called the Higher Mind. For the “higher *buddhi*” with which it is identified, termed the “supramental reason” (elsewhere the spiritual or divine reason), is the first faculty we meet when we rise above the limitations of the intellect and the intuitive mind.<sup>20</sup>

The first well-organised action of the supermind in the ascending order is the supramental reason, not a higher logical intellect, but a directly luminous organisation of intimately subjective and intimately objective knowledge, the higher *buddhi*, the logical or rather the logos Vijnana. The supramental reason does all the work of the reasoning intelligence and does much more, but with a greater power and in a different fashion.<sup>21</sup>

In the preceding chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, this first faculty of the higher knowledge was said to have three levels, mentioned here in descending order:

The supramental thought... has three elevations of its intensity, one of direct thought vision, another of interpretative vision pointing to and preparing the greater revelatory idea-sight, a third of representative vision recalling as it were to the spirit’s knowledge the truth that is called out more directly by the higher powers.<sup>22</sup>

The “representative vision” which is the least direct of these modes of knowledge is, as the word “recalling” suggests, related to the faculty of *smṛti*. This means literally the “remembering” of the truth. *Smṛti* included for Sri Aurobindo a suggestive and a discriminative working of intuition:<sup>23</sup>

The suggestive intuition acting on the mental level suggests a direct and illumining



inner idea of the truth, an idea that is its true image and index, not as yet the entirely present and whole sight, but rather of the nature of a bright memory of some truth, a recognition of a secret of the self's knowledge. It is a representation, but a living representation, not an ideative symbol, a reflection, but a reflection that is lit up with something of the truth's real substance. The intuitive discrimination is a secondary action setting this idea of the truth in its right place and its relation to other ideas.<sup>24</sup>

In the entry on "logos vijnana" in the *Record of Yoga*, we have seen that the word "representative" is associated with "actualities". This association is also found in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, where Sri Aurobindo observes with regard to the "representative action" of the spiritual reason that it "formulates to us mainly the actualities of the existence of the self in and around us".<sup>25</sup>

On a higher scale, there is an "interpretative action" of this faculty which is "less insistent on actualities" and "opens out yet greater potentialities in time and space and beyond".<sup>26</sup> In Sri Aurobindo's experience this was related to inspiration, a means of knowledge whose nature is best evoked by the Sanskrit word *śruti*, literally the "hearing" of the truth. Thus, he speaks of "an inspiration or interpretative seeing of possibilities and potentialities not less true than actual or realised things".<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the "direct thought vision" characteristic of the highest elevation of the first plane of *vijñāna* is evidently a manifestation of the faculty of *dr̥ṣṭi* or revelation, the "sight" of the truth, by which its very face and body, as it were, become immediately present to the consciousness. This is described in *The Synthesis of Yoga* as a "revealingly imperative power of the spirit's knowledge by identity".<sup>28</sup>

After listing the three elevations of this higher thought-plane and noting the relation of the "representative vision" to the suggestive and discriminating intuition, of the "interpretative vision" to the faculty of inspiration and of the "direct thought vision" to the revelatory power, Sri Aurobindo goes on to observe that even this distinction between three levels is, in practice, an oversimplification. For in the actual process of the sadhana,

as we ascend, the lower first calls down into itself and is then taken up into the higher, so that on each level all the three elevations are reproduced, but always there predominates in the thought essence the character that belongs to that level's proper form of consciousness...<sup>29</sup>

This explains the rationale of the remarkably complex terminology used in the *Record of Yoga* in 1918-20 for the numerous gradations of what Sri Aurobindo was then referring to as "logistic vijnana", "logistic ideality" or "logistic". "Logos vijnana" was introduced only at the end of this period and was applied both to the highest level and to the whole of a simplified but less symmetrical system of the gradations of the first plane of *vijñāna*. In the light of the scheme in which all three elevations are repeated on each of the three levels, we can perhaps glimpse what Sri Aurobindo might have meant when he dictated



in the 1940s a line near the beginning of the first paragraph about the “triple realm” in Book Two, Canto Eleven of *Savitri*:

A triple flight led to this triple world.<sup>30</sup>

A possible explanation of this “triple flight” is that the first flight of steps consists of the intuitive logistic *vijñāna* of the *Record of Yoga* in its three forms, uninspired, inspired and revelatory.<sup>31</sup> The second flight is formed, similarly, by the intuitional inspired, pure inspirational and revelatory inspired logistis.<sup>32</sup> The third flight would begin with what Sri Aurobindo referred to as “the intuitive, inspired and revelatory forms of the intuitive revelation” constituting the “lowest scale” of the “tertiary logistis”.<sup>33</sup> Then comes a similar series on the next scale, that of the “inspired revelatory logistis”.<sup>34</sup>

This leads, finally, to the “full revelatory in the three orders”,<sup>35</sup> which may be identified with “logos vijñana” in the higher sense, also called the “drashta logos”.<sup>36</sup> Since this in its dealing with actualities, potentialities and imperatives is the definitive expression of the “luminous reason”,<sup>37</sup> it is likely to be what Sri Aurobindo, when he wrote of this plane in *Savitri*, regarded as the “triple world” of the godheads of the greater or higher mind, viewing the lower gradations as if they were a long stairway forming a “triple flight” to reach it.

The first known draft of the passage that developed into “The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind” was written in 1937-38, nearly twenty years after Sri Aurobindo had recorded his experiences of this plane in his Yogic diary. Already, the key words “actual”, “potencies” and “imperative” occur at the beginnings of the descriptions of the godheads of the three levels. The passage concerned with these godheads begins in this draft, transcribing it here as it was first written before revision:

First stood the measurers of fragmented Space,  
Archmasons of the eternal Thaumaturge,  
The Masters of the actual and the hours  
Who give a finite shape to infinite things.

Above these appeared a “subtler archangel race”, about whom Sri Aurobindo wrote in the first version (using the word “potencies” in place of the “potentialities” mentioned in the *Record of Yoga*):

Their gaze observed the endless potencies  
That work behind the screen of Time’s results,  
The visible shape and rigid cast of things.

On this level, she who has been all along “the invisible Magnet” drawing Aswapati towards the heights is perceived behind her workings. Here, however, she is seen in an abstract form which may be satisfying to the intelligence, but is not enough for the soul:

The whims of the unseizable Mother's moods,  
 The leaps and wave-throbs of her vast sea-heart  
 Were turned to a theorem of ordered beats  
 And robbed of their sweet bewitching mystery.

The ascent continues. At last the summit of this luminous thought-world is reached:

But on the high step of the triple base  
 Appeared a hierarchy of calm-eyed Thoughts,  
 Interpreters of the indecipherable  
 Silence and stillness of imperative Vasts.

In the final text of *Savitri*, these “imperative Vasts” have been replaced by the “imperatives of the creator Self”. Here we can see even more clearly the parallel with Sri Aurobindo's diary entry of 1920, where the “logos vijnana” in its highest action deals with the “imperatives of the infinite—absolute, imperative, identific”:

In a sublimer and more daring soar  
 To the wide summit of the triple stairs  
 Bare steps climbed up like flaming rocks of gold  
 Burning their way to a pure absolute sky.  
 August and few the sovereign Kings of Thought  
 Have made of Space their wide all-seeing gaze  
 Surveying the enormous work of Time:  
 A breadth of all-containing Consciousness  
 Supported Being in a still embrace.  
 Intercessors with a luminous Unseen,  
 They capt in the long passage to the world  
 The imperatives of the creator Self  
 Obeyed by unknowing earth, by conscious heaven;  
 Their thoughts are partners in its vast control.<sup>38</sup>

(*To be continued*)

RICHARD HARTZ

### *Notes and References*

1. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1260.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1264.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 1349.
4. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 126.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
6. *Savitri* (1993), p. 528.

7. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 22.
8. *The Mother* was first published in 1928. Drafts for it are found in notebooks containing writings of 1927.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 36.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
12. *Savitri*, p. 264.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
14. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 939.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 939-40.
16. *Savitri*, pp. 266, 268-69, 271.
17. "Logos" is "the all-creating Word" (*Savitri*, p. 265), the ancient Greek philosophical concept of "the universal reason... at work in the cosmos" (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 406).
18. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1241.
19. Sri Aurobindo explicitly stated that "when the last chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* were written in the *Arya*, the name 'Overmind' had not been found, so there is no mention of it" and that the distinction between Overmind and Supermind "has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind" (*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 369).
20. The intuitive mind, a transitional stage between the mental reason and a higher consciousness, must not be confused with Intuition proper on its own higher plane. Sri Aurobindo wrote about Intuition that "in coming into the mind it gets mixed with the mental movement and forms a kind of intuitive mind activity which is not the pure truth, but something in between the higher Truth and the mental seeking" (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 264).
21. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 855.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 835-36.
23. See *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 17, where the "suggestive intuition" and "intuitive discrimination" of *The Synthesis of Yoga* are termed "intuition" and "viveka".
24. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, p. 815.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 823.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 860.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 849.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 836.
30. *Savitri*, p. 265.
31. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, pp. 1033, 1058, 1132, 1134, 1144, 1162, 1202-3, etc. Since Sri Aurobindo was writing for himself and was developing his terminology as he wrote, the terms used for these levels of consciousness in the *Record of Yoga* are not fixed according to a predetermined system. They have to be understood according to the context and chronology, and the equivalence of similar terms such as "intuitional" and "intuitive" or "inspirational" and "inspired" has to be assumed. The words "logistic" and "logistic" were introduced in 1919, but are often implied rather than explicit. Most forms of "ideality" described earlier may be assumed to be those of the logistic *vijñāna*.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 1029, 1033, 1058, 1064, 1068, 1134, etc.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 1115.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 1052, 1059, 1202.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 1152.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 1199. *Draṣṭā* means "seer" and is connected with *dr̥ṣṭi*, "sight" or revelation.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 1199-1200, 1202.
38. *Savitri*, p. 271. The word "capt" in the fourth line from the end of this passage is not found in English dictionaries. It seems to have been coined by Sri Aurobindo from the Latin verb *captare*, to seize (a frequentative form of *capere*, to take, from which English words such as "captive", "captor" and "capture" are derived). In the manuscript in which the line first appears, it was written in the left margin as "Capting [or, possibly, Capturing] the imperatives of cosmic Mind". In a subsequent version in which the wording had become what it is now, Sri Aurobindo wrote above "capt" an alternative, "caught", which may be taken as a gloss on the meaning.

## THE LIFT BOY AND THE HEARSE

IN July 1953 someone asked the Mother: “*Douce Mère*, if one sees a catastrophe coming, can one change it by an effort?” The Mother answered: “It depends upon the nature of the event. There are many possibilities.... It depends also on the plane in which one sees. There is a plane where all the possibilities are present, and in that plane, all the possibilities being present, there is also the possibility of changing those possibilities. If one foresees a catastrophe in that plane, one can also have the power of preventing it. In other cases one is forewarned, but nevertheless one cannot exert any influence upon the event. And even in such a case everything depends upon the plane in which one sees.

“Once the story of a case of this kind was reported to me, a case in which the fact of seeing prevented something from happening. An American gentleman had taken a room in one of those big American hotels where they have lifts; you do not go down a staircase, you take the lift to go up and down. Now it so happened that early in the morning, before waking up, he had a dream which he remembered clearly. He had seen a boy dressed as a lift boy making the same gesture a lift boy makes when he invites you to step in. That is how the boy stood there. The gesture, however, did not point to a lift, but to a hearse! A hearse is the kind of carriage ... No doubt, you must have seen them here occasionally, they are used to take the dead to the cemetery; when they are not cremated, they are carried on a bier with black draperies, etc. So what was there was that kind of carriage, a hearse for carrying the dead. And the boy was inviting him to get into that carriage. When he came out of his room, the boy was there with the lift to take him down— exactly the same boy: the same face, the same dress, the same gesture. He remembered the hearse—he did not get into the lift. He said: “No, thank you!” and he took the staircase. And before he reached the ground floor, he heard a terrible noise, the lift had crashed and all in it were killed.

“It was because of the dream that he had not got in, for he had understood. This means that in such a case, when one has the vision, one can avert a catastrophe.”<sup>1</sup>

\*

Nine years later, in a conversation<sup>2</sup> with the Mother in February 1962, the following question was asked: “When the events are already there in the subtle physical, and when one perceives them, is it not too late to change their happening? Can one still intervene?”

The Mother answered with “an example that I always give and that is very interesting.” She added that the person in question had told her the incident himself.

Long ago, she said, the French newspaper *Le Matin* carried every day a small picture showing “*un garçon de lift*”—she had been told the story in English—pointing to something or other, most probably the date, an advertisement or an announcement. The boy resembled a bellhop. (Bellhops are young men who work in a hotel, where they carry the guests’ luggage and run all kind of errands.) The man in question was travelling and stayed in a big hotel, but the Mother did not remember anymore in which town.

Very early in the morning the man had had a dream: he had seen a bellhop who looked exactly like the one in *Le Matin* and who invited him to enter... a hearse. After having had this dream, he left his room with the intention to take the lift; one may suppose that he wanted to go down to the restaurant and have breakfast. But there he saw a boy who looked like the bellhop in his dream and in the newspaper, dressed in the same kind of uniform, and who invited him to enter the lift. It gave him a shock. He declined to enter the lift, saying, "No, thank you very much!" The lift crashed and the people in it died. "He told me that from that time onwards he believed in dreams!" said the Mother.

We keep in mind that the story was told to the Mother by its hero himself. In this second version he is no longer an American, but he still speaks in English. The hotel is no longer described as "a big American hotel" and the French newspaper *Le Matin* appears in the picture. The figure of the bellhop or bellboy is still common in advertisements; it is also often used in front of restaurants to present the menu or recommend a tasty dish to the passers-by. Bellhops in chic hotels wear a uniform that generally consists of a round cap, a short jacket with two rows of buttons, and pants with a broad stripe on both sides. (I must say that I do not find "lift boy" in the dictionaries, whether English or American. In the latter language a "lift" is of course called an "elevator". However, the term "lift boy" leaves no doubt about what it stands for.) These details will prove of interest in what follows.

\*

In the nineteen-seventies Louis Pauwels and Guy Breton gave a series of talks for the French radio station *France-Inter*. The subject of their talks, which they gave alternately, was amazing but true events in occultism and history. Guy Breton was a historian, famous for his series of books *Les histoires d'amour de l'histoire de France*, a title which needs no translation. Louis Pauwels was no less famous as a novelist and the co-author of *Le matin des magiciens*, translated into English as *The Morning of the Magicians* (it should actually be *The Dawn of the Magicians*); he was also the animator of the revue *Planète*, which initiated a kind of intellectual movement, in many countries seeing reality as magical.

Pauwels and Breton's radio talks were published in several volumes, some of which I read years ago. Great was my amazement when, remembering the Mother's narrations about the lift boy and the hearse, in their *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1982) I read the story, written by Guy Breton, about *Les trois rêves de l'auteur de 'Quo Vadis?'* (The Three Dreams of the Author of *Quo Vadis?*)

This story went as follows. In July 1901 one of the tourists in Biarritz, a French town on the Atlantic Ocean and near the Spanish frontier, was an elegant Polish gentleman in his fifties. Everybody treated him with respect and many with veneration, for he was Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), the author of the novel *Quo Vadis?*, translated into twenty-two languages. Of the French translation, published one year before, no less than a hundred-thousand copies were printed.<sup>3</sup>

Sienkiewicz befriended a charming young woman from England and regularly went

out walking with her. He spoke fluent English, for he had travelled in the United States as a newspaper correspondent—from which we may deduce that he spoke with an American or American-Polish accent. One morning he told her, “I am not in the habit of giving importance to dreams, but last night I had a dream that has left a feeling of unease and that will not go away. I was somewhere in a street where there was a hearse, and behind that hearse stood a young man with blond hair and very light-coloured eyes, and he was dressed in a uniform with metal buttons. I still see him very clearly.” “Did he say something to you?” asked his English companion. “No. He smiled at me, looking straight into my eyes, and invited me with a gesture to step into the hearse. I awoke very depressed.”

The young English woman was interested in “metaphysical science” and when in London sometimes attended lectures by members of the Society for Psychical Research. She advised the Polish author to note down his dreams without omitting the least detail. Sienkiewicz did as he was told.

The next morning they met again on the beach. Sienkiewicz looked worried. “You won’t believe me”, he said, “but last night I had the same dream as the night before. There was the young man as I have described him to you, dressed in the same way, and inviting me with a smile to enter into the hearse. I stepped back, but he came towards me and tried to grab my hand. It was horrible! I woke up in a sweat. Do you think this means that I am in danger?” His companion tried to calm him down.

The following morning Sienkiewicz was still more depressed. “You are not going to tell me that you had the same dream once again?” asked the young woman. “Yes, exactly the same dream,” he said. “That dreadful hearse is haunting me!” “Well, today I am not going to leave you alone,” said his charming companion. “We are going to walk along the beach, and tonight we will have dinner together.” And so they did. When the next day they met in front of Sienkiewicz’s hotel, he joyfully exclaimed that the dream had not come back. “Then of what have you dreamed?” she asked. His answer was, “Of you!”

Sienkiewicz stayed in Biarritz for some more time; the dream did not come back anymore. Then he left for Paris, where his *Quo Vadis?* was being made into a play. There he took a room in a hotel in the Rue Rivoli.

When at noon he wanted to go down for lunch and use the lift, it was waiting for him with its grille open.<sup>4</sup> Sienkiewicz started walking towards it, but suddenly stopped in his tracks, terrified, for the lift boy, an adolescent with blond hair and light-coloured eyes, who looked straight at him while inviting him to step into the lift, was exactly the same he had seen in his dreams: the same blue uniform, the same metal buttons, the same strange smile, the same gesture ... Shocked, Sienkiewicz turned on his heels and ran towards the staircase, hurrying down the stairs as fast as he could. When down on the ground floor he stumbled into the reading room and slumped into a chair. Then there was such a deafening noise that, in his state of shock, he lost consciousness for a while. When he came to, there was a huge commotion in the lobby and he was told that the lift had crashed. The bodies of the victims of the accident were laid out on the carpeted floor. Among them Sienkiewicz recognised the blond lift-boy in the blue uniform with the

metal buttons.

Guy Breton did not have this story from hearsay, it was based on solid sources. In fact, Breton and Pauwels always had to justify their amazing anecdotes and narrations, for at the end of each sequel the producers of the radio station *France-Inter* had programmed a questioning by a third person called *l'incrédule*, meaning the unbeliever, sceptic or doubter. This sceptic invariably asked for the sources of their “amazing but true” stories. In the case of the premonitory dreams of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Breton’s sources were the Polish author himself, who had written the story “without omitting a single detail”; another source was one Anton Niedermeyer, who had published the same story in his *Souvenirs*.

Taking into account that the Mother narrated the story more than half a century after the facts, and from memory, I think that there can be no doubt that the person she remembered as having had the premonitory dream(s) was Henryk Sienkiewicz. He was a foreigner, spoke English, was travelling, stayed in a hotel, saw the premonitory dream(s) and was so impressed by it/them that he took it/them seriously, was struck by the identical situations in the dream situation and in reality when intending to step into the lift, recognised the lift boy, took the staircase instead of the lift, and the lift crashed killing the people in it. This is such a complex body of correspondences that, in my view, it amounts to proof.

When did the Mother meet Sienkiewicz? I would opt for the period of her marriage to Henri Morisset between 1901, the year in which Sienkiewicz had the dreams, and 1905. Henryk Sienkiewicz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in this year, and the Mother, if she had met him at a later date, might have remembered that. Perhaps she even met him in 1901, shortly after the event had taken place.

The Mother, then Madame Morisset, led a rather busy social life in those years at the side of her painter-husband, while being an artist in her own right. The reader who is knowledgeable about her life will remember that the Mother has mentioned many meetings with painters, sculptors and musicians, and with writers the like of Anatole France (another Nobel Prize winner) and Edouard Shuré. It is true that her occult activity in Parisian circles and groupings intensified after her visits to Tlemcen and her divorce from Morisset. But the visit of the clairvoyant Madame Fraya to the Morisset studio, vividly remembered by her son André, and the description of some of her occult experiences at the time, indicate that even during her first marriage she was known to some as a person with special, occult capabilities.

In the conversation of 1962 mentioned above, the Mother said that the man who had had the premonitory dream had come to her for an explanation. “My explanation was that he had been warned by an entity,” she said. “The image of the bellhop [or lift boy] makes one think that there was an intelligence acting as an intermediary. It does not seem to be his own subconscious. Or it was his subconscious that knew, because it had seen in the subtle physical what was going to happen. But why did his subconscious produce an image of this kind? I do not know. Perhaps there was something in his subconscious that *knew*—for it was already there, it was already there in the subtle physical: it existed. The



accident existed already before it happened, the law of the accident.”

Considering who the Mother was and how encompassing was her occult and spiritual knowledge, words like these make one rather prudent in the interpretation of facts and dreams, our own as well as those in the life of others.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM

### *Notes and References*

1. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1953*, pp. 190-91.
2. *L'Agenda de Mère*, 27 February 1962.
3. *Quo Vadis?* is a novel about early Christianity at the time of the Roman emperor Nero. In 1951 the novel was made into a Hollywood film.
4. At that time lifts did not have automatically closing doors. They had grilles which had to be opened and closed by hand; this is what made the presence of a lift boy necessary. One still finds lifts with a grille in very old hotels and high-rise buildings.

---

## NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

### **Sleepless Earth's Firstborn**

FROM the crest of your turban which is that snake,  
 Whose loud, victorious garlanded hood  
 Pours into the bleeding sky its dark injection,  
 Its acrid poison? From the white courtyard  
 Of the King Cobra's temple black fog  
 Lifts at the touch of the descending sun.  
 Did it arrive on a chariot of shadowless wings,  
 The unaccompanied light of the Time-victorious Person—  
 Into the hell-pit of earth?  
 Slowly,  
 Resistless in streaming freedom's flow,  
 In the murmurous wind moves one who is fearless  
 To where stands her life's marble staircase:  
 The lotus-fragrant child of the Ganga here bathes—  
 Sleepless earth's firstborn.

*(To be continued)*

DEBASHISH BANERJI



## INTIMATE PORTRAITS

### I the Woman\*

I THE woman  
—Womb and embryo  
Begetting  
The explosions—  
Do not refuse  
Nor  
Do I let my illusions fall

I dream and I act  
And let myself go  
With instinct and no guilt  
I execute

And search for  
Balance  
Ways  
Truth  
Substance

I look and I find  
And take the right to live  
Feelings  
New  
Old  
Those still to come—  
Feelings invincible  
Sensitive  
Of myth-makers and players  
Intuitive

Unexpected  
Eternal  
Inexplicable  
...  
I enjoy and I repeat  
The feeling of the exquisite hour

I learn and dream on  
I give and give in  
...  
Unnamed  
I seek names to fit  
And add the labour in  
Chance  
Circumstances  
Deeds

Glimmers catch my heart  
And reflections fill the eyes  
—There comes the within  
There goes the without—  
A play of  
One two many  
They come go and are  
Enacted  
In step with the future

I search

\* *I the Woman* was written almost twenty years ago. It was a (naïve, confused and rather serious, no doubt!) past self of mine who wrote it, sketching itself through statements befitting the apprentice-aspirant that was I then and it gave shape to an Intimate Portrait that the present self feels almost obliged to use. Needless to say, I would like to expand further on the subject and I hope one day I will.

For me womanhood is a state of Shakti, an attribute of it. It is certainly something quite apart and distinctly different from the narrow biological or social genre-thing we usually associate the word with. It is a force and a means and it contains those finer and active points which enrich and move our humanity forward. It is an evolutionary movement. Through the practice of an applied womanhood the aspects of the Great Mover, our Mother, can come forth and be made living.

Even though  
There is so much I cannot express  
—All that in my mind

Heart  
Body  
Entangled and unknown  
Does not find an end—  
Only this counts:

I the woman am here  
Now to live to love to do  
Create  
...  
Like a lake I am—  
With high windows and exits  
Seasons and lotuses

My beauty hides  
In private and public  
Moments—

Unseen focal points  
Meetings and moods

Over my lake  
Mountains loom  
And the moon often draws near  
With light and secrets  
Strung and set aside  
One by one  
—Pearls secured  
In a pretty box—  
Mine  
To  
Have  
...  
A collector-gatherer

I the woman  
Seek and amass  
The lot of my Womanhood.

KATI WIDMER

## A STUDENT WRITES TO A TEACHER

I DO not know exactly what to elaborate about myself in the context of our education. It is true that “academic” would be a very deficient adjective when it comes to describing the kind of education we are offered here, considering the multitasking our students undertake with balancing sports education, entertainment, music, art, pottery, carpentry, nature studies, dancing, languages, sciences, and any other hobby that can be incorporated in the curriculum. In this respect I do admit having taken full advantage of the kaleidoscopic opportunities offered and having enjoyed all of them (to the displeasure maybe of some of my teachers).

I am not sure if a list of all that I got to do in this school could describe my student life here in itself but I have still provided a list of some of the things I enjoyed doing most (lest the list be too long):

Nature walks, Birdwatching, Riding and taking care of horses, Children, Sports (swimming, running, jumping, throws, gymnastics, volleyball, basketball, football, boxing), Solving puzzles (and attending a puzzles class in our last year), Free system in eavp-5, Learning languages (German, Sanskrit, Tamil, some Russian and Indian language scripts), Poetry in school, Some years of maths classes, Science classes, *The Life Divine* class, Learning to draw, Clay modelling, Calligraphy, Painting, Playing piano, Guitar, Dancing (odissi, kathak), Learning to sing, Camping, Boating and nights out with the lake batch, Handling snakes, Doing stunts for the 2nd December, Theatre, Starting up an organisation for dealing with waste segregation in some of our departments and working with the residents in a few streets...

Besides this, to add something about myself, I would like to say that I love people and life and all the beautiful things in the world—but nonetheless I could not escape feeling something amiss with our education or the approach to it. We have the books and the explanations but no ‘living’ answer to why we are here... I mean, that at the end of my school days I still ask myself what in the world I am here for or what the 6 billion others are doing. I haven’t the living conviction of an answer, or an answer I cannot argue with. What has this got to do with the school one may ask. It’s just that I felt this was what it was supposed to help us with—especially when I joined the free system in eavp-5 against much opposition—nobody felt that we should simply enjoy what we do and do what we enjoy (I mean educative material) and look for our own answers—we had to stick to some loose curriculum (which defeats the purpose of looking for any individual answers).

I must certainly apologise for writing such a long letter (when you probably expected a note) and for writing it more as to a friend than as to a teacher.

## THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

How did I lose you, sweet?  
I hardly know.  
Roughly the storm did beat,  
Wild winds did blow.  
I with my loving arm  
Folded you safe from harm,  
Cloaked from the weather.  
How could your dear foot drag?  
Or did my courage sag?  
Heavy our way did lag,  
Pacing together.

I looked in your eyes afraid,  
Pale, pale, my dear!  
The stones hurt you, I said,  
To hide my fear.  
You smiled up in my face,  
You smothered every trace  
Of pain and languor.  
Fondly my hand you took,  
But all your frail form shook;  
And the wild storm it struck  
At us in anger.

The wild beast woke anew;  
Closely you clung to me.  
Whiter and whiter grew  
Your cheek and hung to me.  
Drooping and faint you laid  
Upon my breast your head,—  
Footsore and laggard.  
Look up, dear love, I cried:  
But my heart almost died,  
As you looked up and sighed,—  
Dead-weary, staggered.

There came a rider by;  
Gentle his look.  
I shuddered, for his eye  
I could not brook,

Muffled and cloaked he rode,  
And a white horse bestrode  
    With noiseless gallop.  
His hat was mystery,  
His cloak was history;  
Pluto's consistory  
    Or Charon's shallop

Could not the dusky hue  
    Of his robe match,  
His face was hard to view,  
    His tone to catch.  
"She is sick, tired. Your load,  
A few miles of the road,  
    Give me to weather."  
He took as 'twere a corse  
Her fainting form perforce.  
In the rain rider, horse,  
    Vanished together.

Come back, dear love, come back!  
    Hoarsely I cry;  
After that rider black  
    I peer and sigh:  
After that phantom steed  
I strain with anxious heed,  
    Heartsick and lonely.  
Into the storm I peer  
Through wet woods moaning drear.  
Only the wind I hear,  
    The rain see only.

MANMOHAN GHOSE

(From *Songs of Love and Death*, 1926)

## HOW I SAW THE DIVINE MOTHER

WHEN I studied in college a classmate of mine told me about the Mother and he gave me a book from which I learned something about her. For further knowledge about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo I used to go to a nearby Sri Aurobindo Society Centre. Gradually I became very much interested to have the Darshan of the Mother, to see her with my physical eyes. It was in the year 1971 that I began writing letters stating, “Mother, I want to see you.” In reply a blessing packet with a very tiny letter from Nolini Kanta Gupta would come to me every time. In that letter Nolini-da would write, “Blessings from the Mother—Nolini.” Almost everyday, I used to write a letter praying, “Mother, I want to see you.”

At that time we were very poor. I had no financial means to bear the expenditure of the journey to Pondicherry. But as the blessings from the Mother would come to me regularly, a firm belief grew in me that, by any means, I would have the Mother’s Darshan. In the meantime, I used to go to my School-Headmaster who had had the opportunity to have the Darshan of both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Almost every evening I would go to him to quench my thirst for knowing more about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The headmaster was a very learned man. One day he told me a story. Let us hear the story in his own words.

“In November 1948 I was going to Pondicherry with my wife and children by Madras Mail. At Rajmundry Station a monk wearing grey clothes and a *Comondoloo* in his hand boarded our Second-class compartment. In those days there were four classes in the train. First class, Second class, Inter class and Third class. The said monk took a seat beside me. After a while I asked the monk where he was going. The monk said, ‘Pondicherry.’ Then I asked him, ‘Why are you going to Pondicherry.’ ‘For Darshan,’ the monk replied. ‘For whose Darshan?’ I enquired. ‘Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,’ the monk answered firmly. Then I asked him, ‘I suppose you are a student of another school. Then, why are you interested to have the Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo?’ The monk remained silent for a minute or two. Then he firmly said, ‘It is the greatest opportunity for a man to see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo face to face.’”

After hearing this story my aspiration to see the Mother became very ardent. At last the opportunity came. I got casual service for two months. Then my B.Com. examination was ensuing and I could not fill up my Examination Form for want of money. In this situation the Principal called me and asked, “Would you do service? The PWD Executive Engineer requested me to send four brilliant and needy boys. I want to send you as the first candidate.” I at once agreed to the proposal. I got Rs. 200 as my remuneration. I told my father about my desire to go to Pondicherry for the Mother’s Darshan. My father gladly gave me permission.

With other elder members of the Centre I reached the Ashram on 13 August 1973. Our lodging arrangement was made by the Society in some rented house, not in an Ashram guest-house. In those days there were very few guest-houses and these were already filled. I had no money at all because I had given all money to my elder members. They

gave me a dining pass so that I might get my food from the dining room. On that day I went to the Ashram Playground for meditation, or was it a cinema show? After coming out from the Playground I could not find the house where we were staying, because all roads were alike. Then it was about 8.30 p.m. I was knocking at this door and that door, but in vain. Then I requested a person who was passing by to find my house. But I could not tell him the exact address and name of the house. He was also knocking at the houses where mostly Bengalees were residing; again in vain. Then he consoled me, telling me not to worry. I told him about what I had heard, that in that house marriage ceremonies were also held. Then he was able to find it. The person who helped me in finding my residence was a Keralite Ashramite. I have forgotten his name now.

After coming over to Pondicherry I heard from one of the elder members of our group that the Mother would not give Darshan on account of her ill health. Many became upset on hearing this news. But I was not upset at all. For I was sure that I would get the Mother's Darshan and I told others my view. They just laughed at me. They further told me that the Mother would not give any special Darshan to anybody. But my mind was very firm about the Mother's Darshan.

On 14th August, in the evening a notice was put up on the Ashram notice board, stating that the Mother would give Terrace Darshan on 15th August at 6 p.m. Now I have forgotten the exact time. It might have been 5.30 or 5.45 p.m. With the notice everyone became very glad.

At last the most memorable moment in my life came. I stood on the footpath of the road just opposite to the terrace where the Divine Mother would appear. There was heavy shower for half an hour before the Darshan. The rain stopped just five minutes before. It seemed as if nature cleaned the atmosphere and cooled down the earth to invoke the Divine Mother embodied in a physical body. There was pin-drop silence. About three thousand aspirants thronged the street and were also on the terraces of the adjacent buildings.

The Mother appeared on the Terrace from her room. The moment I had a glimpse of the Divine Mother, tears filled the eyes and rolled down my cheeks. I began chanting, "Om Sri Aurobindo Mira, Om Sri Aurobindo Mira." I felt that my earthly life became successful and meaningful. I saw the Divine Mother with my physical eyes. At once I remembered, "It is the greatest opportunity for a man to see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo face to face."

MONORANJAN DEBNATH

## REMEMBRANCE OF THE MOTHER

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

As I was turning the corner, an idea struck me that it could be used for the Lord's Day on the 29<sup>th</sup>. So, I called up John Kelly, an Aurobindonian, to ask him whether he could lend me \$75. He said: "Certainly, when do you want it?" I told him to kindly come the next day afternoon at lunchtime to my office. He came and gave me the amount. So, I went and bought the gown. I then went to a Japanese store to buy beautiful wrapping papers to wrap all my gifts. America is known for the art of beautiful wrappings. And since all this was for the Divine Mother, what would I not do to give her the very best?

I went with all these gifts to Eric. He laughed and said "Kailas, I thought it was only one packet. You have brought so many! I won't have place in my suitcase even for my own clothing." I replied: "Please don't worry Eric. Have the joy of carrying all these gifts for the Mother. In Pondicherry, you don't need much clothing. Just four pairs of shorts and shirts and one pair of formal clothing will do. Just think when will I find another chance of sending all this to the Mother."

He said: "I understand you. But you have wrapped all your gifts. What will I do when the customs officers ask me to open them?" I said: "The customs won't even bother you. You are carrying it for the Divine Mother. Besides, I have made the list of everything. You can show it to them. And if they ask for duty, I will pay it. Please Eric, be positive and think of the Mother. She will help you." He said: "I will take them for you, but I don't even know if I will be able to see her at this crowded time." I replied: "Of course, she will see you. I will write to her." He said: "You can use your influence." I said: "I cannot boast of my influence, but she is the Divine Mother. If you sincerely aspire, she will certainly see you."

When he arrived, he saw Usha and she helped to carry the things to the place from where Vasudhaben took them to the Mother's room. That day, the Mother's afternoon was scheduled for Counouma, Navajata, Amrita and others; but they were kept waiting outside while the Mother took each packet in her hands and asked like a child: "What is in this one?" She sprinkled the perfume on herself, admiring the names and asked Vasudhaben to keep even the empty bottles carefully. You can imagine my delight when I heard all this. It was as if I were concretely there.

Then, Vasudhaben asked Usha: "Why did Kailas send two gowns? There are so many people here who make gowns for the Mother on these occasions." When I received this information from Usha, my heart sank. A distressing thought came to my mind: "Have I wasted the Mother's money for my own ego?" You know, the Mother had sent me the deluxe edition of *The Mother*, signed by her with her blessings. I had read the chapter on money where Sri Aurobindo says that all money belongs to the Divine and one is only a trustee. For me, the Mother was Divine and I had used it only for her. But, of course, I aspired to be so close to her, nearer than near can be!

Well, she is the Divine Mother. She knows us fully. She decided to use the cherry blossom gown on her birthday for meditation and the *jari* brocade gown with some



alterations for the balcony darshan on the 29<sup>th</sup>. She explained to Vasudhaben that the brocade border design should be preserved. It was Usha and her friends who made the alterations.

A letter to this effect had arrived. And as if to relieve me quickly of my anxiety and fill my heart with her delight, I was sent home that day during my lunch break. I say 'I was sent' because normally I never went home during the lunch break. I found the letter waiting for me. I was delighted that though I was not in Pondicherry, I would be closest to the Mother on both days and be included for her blessings.

Whenever I saw something pretty or something that the Mother could use for herself, I sent it by air. Once I sent her a fruit cake that was so delicious that I wanted her to taste it. I sent it by air. But somehow, when it reached her, it was a bit spoiled. But so great was her love and so poignant her consideration of my thought and labour, that she insisted on tasting it. It pained me to know this and thereafter I never sent her anything cooked or perishable.

In the meantime, Chinmoy had come to America and I was invited to meet him at Sam and Eric's house. He was just a shy young man and did not even lift his eyes when I was introduced to him. He simply gave me the gift the Mother had sent for me. It was the most precious gift, I hardly felt worthy of it. I took it with utter reverence. As I touched it and communed with it in a concentrated look, I felt that a unique current passed through me, leaving me with supreme Bliss.

I have passed days and nights meditating with it, and had many experiences; these I cannot reveal. The gift not only gave me confidence in my spiritual destiny, but mystic wings to fly with, too. I treasure the memory of it.

I now longed to come to the Ashram. Outwardly, I was at peace and extremely happy, but inwardly, there was a search and a battle going on. For, I wanted a complete identification with the Mother's Consciousness and to know her will in all its purity. At the centre of my being I was united with her. Nothing and nobody could break that union. But many things in me had to undergo that fire of purification. I had to be constantly alert and to put everything before her. She was keeping her watch over me.

My birthday was fast approaching. And I had asked her impatiently: "What is the duration of this 'Not yet?'" But, whenever I asked her if I could come to the Ashram, her answer was always, "Not yet." She had to saturate me with the experiences of material, vital and mental opulence in America, and the cry had to come from within: 'Enough!'

I prayed: "I spread the little white velvet carpet of my soul and light a golden candle at its centre. Roses in all shades of colour are strewn all around. Wouldst thou not accept my worship, O Mother Supreme?"

Her reply came for my birthday on a beautiful card with a painting of flowers signifying seeking for all support in the Divine.

"Kailas my dear child, I have received all your letters and especially the detailed report about your meetings with Chinmoy. It is just what I expected. And Dr. Sanyal did well in drawing my attention to it.

It is quite true that the Mother's Consciousness is everywhere. But each thing,

especially each human being, has its own ego which coats and distorts the One Consciousness.

So it is always better to avoid the 'intermediaries' and to follow the inner guidance which will become more and more clear if you seek it with absolute sincerity.

Before receiving your letter, I intended to write to you: 'Look for a job, there is one waiting for you.'

But with all these new developments, the perception is no longer clear. Let us however wait sometime more. And if no clear road opens before you I may ask you to come here, although the life is hard and dry for those who have had the habit of American comforts.

I have verified the date of your birth. It is indeed the 11<sup>th</sup> June. I am sending you my special blessings for that day with the will that your way should become clear in front of you.

Listen to no exterior voice and have faith in the inner guidance.

With my love and blessings."

I used to go to the quiet countryside over the week-ends, seeking to be alone with her, in the beauty of the wilderness, or by a lake or a river, I used to be lost in the beauty and peace of Nature, feeling her Presence, and would return home charged with her energy and bliss. For me, it was like an experience of living at her feet in the Ashram.

When Dr. Sanyal came for his operation, I visited him everyday of his stay in the house of Mr. Tata who in the late '40s was the first to publish books of Sri Aurobindo in America, and later went to him in the hospital. He used to tell me that the Ashram atmosphere was quite different and one had to live there to know the difference. This inculcated in me a strong urge to visit the Ashram again.

With the gift that the Mother had sent me, I had received certain powers, two of which were that I could know what was going on in another person's mind, and the second was that I could grant a person's wish, both of which were proven. I was not satisfied with these unusual experiences. On the contrary, they accentuated my search for the Truth and an unalloyed self-existent Bliss. And I wanted to learn my lessons directly from the Mother.

Now, just see how the Divine responds to our inner aspiration and works things out in His own unique way. My boss wanted to give me more time to write brochures. So, he hired a secretary for the office work. She was from a southern state of America and could not tolerate my presence since I was from Asia. She was an elderly lady with her problems and used to drink. Whenever she had trouble with her files, she blamed it on me. My boss was compassionate, but I could not stand such lies. The time had come for one of us to leave. Naturally, my boss called me and explained: "Look, you are young, intelligent and very efficient. You will never have trouble getting the job you like. But she is old and has problems. You are from India and have a wider spiritual outlook. Be compassionate towards her if I ask you to leave."

I said: "Very well. I will leave this job. But until I find another suitable job, I need social security. Would you tell them when they enquire that due to no fault on my part I have been asked to leave?" He said: "Certainly. Not only that, I will highly recommend

you for any work you would like to do.”

Well, on a friendly note we parted. Believe me, it was not easy to leave that office where I was loved and respected. But I was not disturbed. For, I knew that nothing ever happened in my life that was not divinely willed. Besides, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “All life is Yoga,” obscure in the beginning but gradually becoming quite clear to us as we review our life in retrospect. We find that everything in our life is useful and leads us towards the discovery and the final fulfillment of the godhead seated within us.

All I had done so far was to work for the development of my mind, life and body. I used to do asanas for twenty minutes in the morning at home and went to a club for swimming and tennis in the evenings. All this was a preparatory and perhaps tentative training. But the integral Yoga demanded the growth of the being ‘into the truth and power of the Spirit, and by the direct action of that power to be made a fit channel of its self-expression’. For this one must reject all that belongs to the lower nature; all that stands in the way of opening oneself to the spiritual truth. It is quite a stupendous programme but equally fascinating.

Well, one day, I found an advertisement in the newspaper. An Indian cargo ship, Jal Jawahar, was leaving in July and there were a few berths available. An idea came to my mind: “Was it for this that I was relieved of my attachments?” I was always anxious to go to Pondicherry and see the Mother again. I thought that here was a fine chance. I was on social security; this lasts for six months, and if I went to India with four months remaining in hand, I would have enough time to settle again on my return. So, I called them and asked: “How long is this offer valid?”

They asked: “Well, how long do you need?” I said: “I have to write to India and receive an answer from there.” They said: “Okay, we will keep it open for you till the last date of the ship’s departure. Is that alright?”

I was extremely thankful and gave them my name, address and the telephone number. I wrote a letter to the Mother, explaining the situation and asked her whether I could come. If her answer was “No”, she should send me a telegram. But if her answer was “Yes,” she need not reply. Well, I did not receive any reply. So, I got everything packed and sailed forth. When the letter came to the Mother’s hands, it was too late and she laughed: “Kailas did not wait for my reply.”

It was so wonderful on the ship with the wide expanse of the sea and the sky. There were only twelve passengers, and though I had booked for a seat in a double cabin, there was nobody to share it as if I was divinely left alone to read, to meditate, to be with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and to prepare for my meeting with the Mother. I had one month of an absolute splendour with the sky and the peace in the vastness of the ocean. Did I need to wait for an answer? Was it not a splendid “Yes” with everything arranged for me? I was in utter ecstasy, alone with the Eternal and the Infinite.\*

*(To be continued)*

KAILAS JHAVERI

\* The statement on p. 158 of the February 2003 issue of *Mother India*, line 11 from bottom, should be read as: “12 December 1950.”

## **THE POST OFFICE BY TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF THE FUTURE DRAMA**

In the first chapter of *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo draws our notice to the new kind of drama associated with mystic poetry in the lyrical form:

...it is not likely that the poetic imagination will ever give up the narrative and dramatic form of its creative impulse; a new spirit in poetry, even though primarily lyrical, is moved always to seize upon and do what it can with them,—as we see in the impulsion which has driven Maeterlinck, Yeats, Rabindranath to take hold of the dramatic form for self-expression as well as the lyrical in spite of their dominant subjectivity. We may perhaps think that this was not the proper form for their spirit, that they cannot get there a full or a flawless success; but who shall lay down rules for creative genius or say what it shall or shall not attempt? It follows its own course and makes its own shaping experiments. And it is interesting to speculate whether the new spirit in poetry will take and use with modifications the old dramatic and narrative forms, as did Rabindranath in his earlier dramatic attempts, or quite transform them to its own ends, as he has attempted in his later work.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo wrote *The Future Poetry* between 1917 and 1920 and as such he was surely thinking of *The Post Office* (written in 1912); translated in 1914 by Devabrata Mukherjee as a 'later work'. The translation by Mukherjee has not been approved of by many, but somehow it has a kind of lyrical flavour within its natural speech style. *The Post Office* indicates the inward turn in drama. The structure of the play and the speeches form an interesting symbolic texture. Unlike the hazy ideas in Maeterlinck's plays, the mystic symbolism in *The Post Office* shapes out smoothly. Interpretations may vary, but the basic idea of the quest for the beyond is unmistakable.

Amal is sick and confined to his room. He has a passion for the sky and far-away provinces. As the curdseller passes by his house, he is fascinated by the tune of his call and yearns to be his companion in a long walk, with the yoke on his shoulder. Yeats was right when he wrote in the Preface to the Macmillan edition : "The deliverance sought and won by the dying child is the same deliverance which rose before his imagination."<sup>2</sup> Amal, the mystic poet in the nursery class, imagines the entire journey of the curdseller: a man walking the long, long road, moving across the river and over the hills and the red road, and then into the village under the big trees. The inward journey is indicated with the help of a natural dialogue between Madhav and Amal.

Madhav: And where will you go?

Amal: Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.

The dialogue between Amal and the Dairyman is another example of the fusion of natural speech and poetry, a poetry which speaks of an indefinable thrill.

Dairyman: Dear, dear, teach you the tune: what a notion!

Amal: Please do. I love to hear it. I can't tell you how queer I feel when I hear you cry out from the bend of that road, through the line of those trees! Do you know I feel like that when I hear the shrill cry of kites from almost the end of the sky?

It is a nameless movement in Amal's heart. When he says, "I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road," the word "homesick" sounds like a blank fore-knowledge, a half-conscious memory of the future.

Somehow Tagore has mixed up this quest for the beyond with Death, which is eagerly coveted. Amal's frequent references to the king and his call and his letter, have an obvious symbolic function. In this King symbolism, there is a memory of 'the Prince of this world' (John 14:30). The King, the Watchman tells Amal, "sends tiny notes to little boys." Tagore might be remembering here his own boyhood, when he could hear the voice of the Divine. Like mystic poetry, the drama is playing hide-and-seek with the Reality. The play is neither a spiritual drama, nor a 'borderline' romance. Sri Aurobindo would have related Amal's emotion to 'a blank prescience' that yearns 'towards distant change.'<sup>3</sup> The playwright sees things through the boy's lens and makes him suffer from half-thought.

Nature is wisdom; Nature opens our eyes to strange things. Early in the play, Tagore ironises the eyeless scholar through Madhav's words—"Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else." When Madhav wishes Amal to be such a bookworm, the little boy is taken aghast. He refuses to be learned.

Amal: No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.

Madhav: Listen to that ! See ! What will you see, what is there so much to see?"

Amal: See that far-away hill from our window—I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.

Without life-sense, without the touch of Nature, without a feeling for the book of life, none can 'become'. For Sri Aurobindo too, this becoming is the ultimate value of life. Amal, the inexperienced boy, has a faint awareness of this idea. He has left his doors and windows open to let the many-splendoured world in.

The soul rising from sleep sees and perceives and while the bookworm stoops over the printed words, Amal walks on crossing many streams. The names, Sudha, Badal and Sarat are symbolic of different aspects of Nature. Sudha is expressive of all the glories of Nature; she promises to bring flowers. Badal, the rain cloud and Sarat, the season of

autumn, are two faces of Nature. They are messages of joy and sorrow, which the postmen usually bring for us.

Amal's passion for the beyond becomes more intense in Act II. "But the day I am well off I go with the Fakir, and nothing in sea or mountain or torrent shall stand in my way." He visualizes the footsteps of the King's postman walking down the hills alone. It is poetry dressed in prose: the lantern at night, the waterfall changing to a stream at the foot of the mountain, the fields of rye and sugarcane, the snipe wagging their tails and their bills dipped in the mud. These are just paints with the help of words. He makes us see.

In a significant speech Amal appears to be a bit restless. This restlessness is followed by a kind of fear.

Say, Fakir. I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all on a sudden...

This is the fear of leaving without seeing the King's face. The fear passes away and Amal starts feeling well again. He has grown a love for the unknown King. Love has brought contentment.

I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.<sup>4</sup>

Death is peaceful, eventless. All the characters form the chorus. The oil lamp is blown out and the starlight streams in. Sudha is Grace. She brings in the flowers for the departing soul.

GOUTAM GHOSAL

#### *Notes and References*

1. *The Future Poetry*, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 7.
2. Preface to *The Post Office*, Macmillan Pocket Tagore edition, Madras, 1986.
3. *Savitri*, p. 2.
4. All Quotations from *The Post Office* are from Macmillan Pocket Tagore edition, 1986.

# ISLAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

## **The Cities of Destiny**

ARNOLD TOYNBEE presents a certain look of history by studying what he calls the Cities of Destiny. Babylon, Troy, Athens, Alexandria, Constantinople, Rome, Paris, London, Berlin, New York are surely the cities that shaped destiny in a definite manner. One such city of destiny in the glory of the Muslim civilization is undoubtedly Baghdad founded in 764 by the second Caliph al-Mansur. Perhaps it continues to be so even today though not carrying the fame of the Arabian Nights it had in the centuries past. If we have to see the best of the Islamic contribution to life and culture, and science in our context, we must go back to its golden era during the reign of the early Abbasids. They were the descendents of Abbas, an uncle of Mohammad, and mostly governed the vast empire from Baghdad. In fact, they were the leaders not only of Islam but also of the Muslim community for a long time. Here is an early fascinating account of the city in its prime glory:

“The city of Baghdad formed two vast semi-circles on the right and left banks of the Tigris, twelve miles in diameter. The numerous suburbs, covered with parks, gardens, villas and beautiful promenades, and plentifully supplied with rich bazaars, and finely built mosques and baths, stretched for a considerable distance on both sides of the river. In the days of its prosperity the population of Baghdad and its suburbs amounted to over two millions! The palace of the Caliph stood in the midst of a vast park several hours in circumference. Besides a menagerie and an aviary, it comprised of an enclosure for wild animals reserved for the chase. The palace grounds were laid out with gardens adorned with plants, flowers, trees, reservoirs and fountains, surrounded by sculptured figures, all with exquisite taste. On this side of the river stood the palaces of the great nobles. Immense streets, none less than forty cubits wide, traversed the city from one end to the other, dividing it into blocks or quarters, each under the control of an overseer or supervisor, who looked after the cleanliness, sanitation and comfort of the inhabitants. The water exits both on the north and the south were like the city gates, guarded night and day by relays of soldiers stationed on the watchtowers on both sides of the river. Every household was plentifully supplied with water at all seasons by the numerous aqueducts which intersected the town; and the streets, gardens and parks were regularly swept and watered, and no refuse was allowed to remain within the walls. An immense square in front of the imperial palace was used for reviews, military inspections, tournaments and races; at night lamps lighted the square and the streets. There was also a vast open space where the troops whose barracks lay on the left bank of the river were paraded daily. The long wide estrades at the different gates of the city were used by the citizens for gossip and recreation or for watching the flow of travellers and country folk into the capital. The different nationalities in the capital had each a head officer to represent their interests with the government, and to whom the stranger could appeal for counsel or help. Baghdad was a



veritable City of Palaces, not made of stucco and mortar, but of marble. The buildings were usually of several stories. The palaces and mansions were lavishly gilded and decorated, and hung with beautiful tapestry and hangings of brocade or silk. The rooms were lightly and tastefully furnished with luxurious divans, costly tables, unique Chinese vases and gold and silver ornaments. Both sides of the river were for miles fronted by the palaces, kiosks, gardens and parks of the grandees and nobles, marble steps led down to the water's edge, and the scene on the river was animated by thousands of gondolas, decked with little flags, dancing like sunbeams on the water, and carrying the pleasure-seeking Baghdad citizens from one part of the city to the other. Along the wide-stretching quays lay whole fleets at anchor, sea and river craft of all kinds, from the Chinese junk to the old Assyrian raft resting on inflated skins. The mosques of the city were at once vast in size and remarkably beautiful. There were also in Baghdad numerous colleges of learning, hospitals, infirmaries for both sexes, and lunatic asylums." (Ya'qubi, the contemporary geographer, *Geographical Encyclopaedia*) "Baghdad" apparently means "Garden of Dat", a popular Muslim dervish of the times.

Located 33.4°N latitude and 44.4°E longitude Baghdad, on the Tigris River, is slightly north of the ancient city of Babylon on the Euphrates. Like Babylon in its day, Baghdad was a trade hub for several centuries. It also bears traces of the ancient Greek occupation in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great. As recognition of its achievements we must mention that not only poets and administrators occupied well-regarded positions in official circles, but mathematicians, astronomers, astrologers, and translators of the works of Greek antiquity were as much respected.

Along with Baghdad we may also look at Basra and Kufa. These were two competing cities during the Caliphate period. Caliph Umar founded Basra in 636 for military purposes. But during the Mongol raids in the 14<sup>th</sup> century it suffered heavy destruction. The modern harbour-city rebuilt in 1914, 10 km up the river, was first destroyed during the 1980-86 Iran-Iraq War and later again by the united forces during the Gulf War in 1991. Kufa was a former Mesopotamian city, near the Euphrates River, south of Baghdad. For a time Kufa, founded in 638, was the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate; but it also witnessed the murder of Ali, the fourth Caliph. While it was a major centre of Arab learning, political and religious unrest continued to affect it adversely. It was repeatedly plundered in the tenth century and soon lost its importance. Kufa now remains an uninhabited ruin surrounded by a desert. Baghdad thus lives as the only city of a rich cultural heritage of the Caliphate glory. Its achievements as an intellectual metropolis are far more than of its rivals, Kufa and Basra. Indeed, with its famed Academy of Wisdom Baghdad must be considered as a landmark event in civilizations of the world.

"Men of letters and of science had gathered in Baghdad," writes Gaston Wiet, "either through cultural affinity or because they had been summoned to the Caliph's court for their worth or their competence. After the translating of ancient works of learning was done as perfectly as possible, the Caliph urged his subjects to read the translations and encouraged them to study them. Consequently, the scientific movement became stronger under the prince's reign. Scholars held high rank, and the Caliph surrounded himself



with learned men, legal experts, traditionalists, rationalist theologians, lexicographers, annalists, metricians, and genealogists. He then ordered instruments to be manufactured. Astronomical observation was begun in Baghdad in an observatory in the Shammasiya section, on the left bank of the Tigris, east of Rusafa. The staff set to work measuring the ecliptic angle and fixing the position of the stars. In addition, the Caliph ordered that two terrestrial degrees be calculated in order to determine the length of the solar year. The engineer Ibrahim Fazari, who helped plan the founding of Baghdad, was the first in the Arab world to make astrolabes. The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris has perhaps the oldest instrument of this type, one dating from the year 905. It was probably made in Baghdad, since it has on it the name of an heir apparent to the Caliphate, a son of the Caliph Muktafi." (Baghdad: *Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate*)

Here we may go back a step in time and see these connections with the later day Islamic contributions to life, and science in particular. In the third century A.D. Jundishapur in Persia was an important city that was founded by Shapur I of the Sassanian dynasty. While he maintained power in the West, he also built the Persian economy on a solid foundation. He commissioned eminent scholarly works and soon his Jundishapur became a centre of ancient sciences with Greek, Sanskrit and later Syriac learning, adding greatly to the existing knowledge. "A school was set up, on the model of those at Alexandria and Antioch, in which medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and logic were taught, mostly from Greek texts translated into Syriac, but also elements of the Indian and Persian sciences were included. This school, which lasted long after the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate, became an important source of ancient learning in the Islamic world."

While the life of learning in the Muslim system has a fairly notable place, its religious spirit is always the foremost factor. This could be so dominating that even the material tools would be pressed into use for its purposes. Qibla is a good example of it. A Muslim offers his prayers, wherever he is in the world, five times a day facing towards Mecca. This is the command from the Quran and he must abide by it. But finding the right direction to pray—the qibla, or "sacred direction"—is not a straightforward matter. "It has even been a source of controversy. Some of the mosques in Cairo reflect two different qibla values at 10 degrees from each other, with the outside walls aligned to one and the inside walls to the other. In North America, some Muslims pray to the northeast, in the direction of the great-circle route (the shortest path along the planet's surface) to Mecca, whereas others pray to the southeast." To correct even for the curvature of the earth the Muslim scientists evolved sophisticated mathematical techniques. "Two recently discovered instruments have proved that Islamic mathematicians were even further ahead of their time than anyone knew. These Mecca-centered world maps, cast in brass, indicate the direction and distance to Mecca from any point in the mediaeval Muslim world, and they do so with a type of map projection that was unknown in the West until the 20th century." When studied, these maps give us a wealth of information showing also the quality of the researchers of the time. Says Berggren, "Not only do we know what to look for now, but we know it is worth looking."

But coming back to the matters of the world, we may have a hurried look at a few

more cities. Take Bukhara of 2500 years ago transformed into a Muslim city with its architectural set of buildings displaying the best of the mediaeval creations. "Mosques and minarets, madrassahs and cultural complexes keep amazing the people with their beauty, perfect harmony and genius of design." Its mausoleums in their "austerity, almost devoid of decoration, form a remarkable visual spread of architectural history." A town of greater archaeological interest is perhaps Samarra stretching over 40 km along the banks of the Tigris. There were already settlements long before the Abbasid period, but it became its capital in 836. The Abbasid caliph al-Mutassim decided "to set up a new city on the bank of the Tigris following clashes between his Turkish troops and the local population of Baghdad. He sought a residence for the court, and a base for the Abbasid army outside of Baghdad and was attracted by a region known for its hunting, but otherwise poor in natural resources." Archaeological evidence indicates the quality of an artistic civilization that existed then. "The art of Samarra with decoration on plaster is bold, marked with holes, and is elegantly winding with deep, sinuous grooves. There are two women dancers who approach each other and pour wine into a goblet. The flowers and the various animals recall the classic art of the Hellenic east. But of particular interest is a solemn figure, draped in a robe decorated with a wheel motif, whose shoulders are covered with a striped hood. The primordial character of its revelation, and its confidence that it was expressing the Truth at the heart of all revelations, permitted Islam to absorb ideas from many sources, historically alien yet inwardly related to it. This was especially true in regard to the sciences of Nature, because most of the ancient cosmological sciences—Greek as well as Chaldean, Persian, Indian, and Chinese—had sought to express the unity of Nature and were therefore in conformity with the spirit of Islam." The reign of al-Mutawakkil (847- 861) had a great effect on the appearance of the city, for "he seems to have been a lover of architecture. In a list of his building projects, which appears in several different versions, the new Congregational Mosque and up to 20 palaces are mentioned, in cost totalling between 258 and 294 million dirhams. The new Congregational Mosque, with its spiral minaret, built between 849 and 851, formed part of an extension of the city to the east, extending into the old hunting park. Three courses for horseracing were built east of the main city. Two have an out-and-back course 80 m wide and 10.42 km long with a spectators pavilion at the start, and the fourth a pattern of four circles around a central pavilion (5.3 km). Under al-Mutawakkil the city centre seems to have reached its greatest extent as described in its heyday by Ya'qubi. There were seven parallel avenues. The avenue adjacent to the Tigris accommodated the quays for the river transport. The reign of al-Mutawakkil was fundamental to the history of Abbasid Samarra. The expenditure on architecture, a high but not precisely calculable percentage of the state budget, stimulated the economic development of the city. But the drain on the treasury also played a role in the decade of troubles following al-Mutawakkil's death, which led to the making and unmaking of four Caliphs and military action in Samarra in three phases. Perhaps more significant was the isolation of the Caliph with his army in Samarra, leaving the Caliph exposed to forceful attempts by the soldiery to ameliorate their lot."

In contrast to these cities we may look at the historical Samarkand with a slightly

different point of view. It is interesting to see that it occupies a pretty noteworthy position in the field of mediaeval astronomy. In its observatory star positions were measured to a fraction of a degree. In the 13th and 14th centuries al-Tusi and his successors pushed limits of the Ptolemaic world-view to new vistas and gave to the Islamic astronomy a place of precision and pride. Let us contrast this situation against the astronomy of the ancient Greek philosophers. According to them the heavenly objects by their very nature are assumed to follow a flawless path so that, the circle being a geometrical figure of perfection, they move in circular orbits. But there were factual difficulties and, to account for the observed non-uniform motion, numerous and clumsy corrections had to be made. This resulted in the introduction of epicycles or wheels moving within complicated wheels, thus spoiling the sheer beauty of the ideal or the heavenly system. In the wake of the Arab measurements it however started becoming imperative to revise these ideas. But in the meanwhile another factor had entered in and there arose rather strange conflicts between science and religion. The clash was between the obstinate but powerful Christian dogma and the desirable element of objective secular knowledge present in findings of the mediaeval astronomers. History had to take another turn to resolve it.

In this context let us read the following description. "In the foothills overlooking Afrosiyab History Museum to the north-east are the remains of a remarkable 15th-century observatory, the crowning achievement and path to disaster of Tamerlane's grandson, astronomer-king Ulugh Beg. Samarkand is the mirror of the World, the Garden of the Soul, the Jewel of Islam, the Pearl of the East, the Center of the Universe. Lying in the river valley of the Zerafshan and flanked by Pamir-Altai mountain spurs, this fabled oasis at the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum desert has never lacked breathless admirers. Another name, City of Famous Shadows, reveals Samarkand as witness to the full sweep of Central Asian history. Up to 40,000 years ago, natural bounty drew Palaeolithic man to the area. The city proper claims equity with Rome and Babylon, for archaeologists date urban settlement at least to the sixth century BC. Until the 16th century, Samarkand was always the first city of Transoxiana in population, commerce and culture, for fertile earth rewarded the farmer and trade routes west to Persia, east to China and south to India met here to form a major Silk Road crossroads and emporium. Among conquerors to cast their shadows were the Macedonian Alexander the Great, the Mongol Genghis Khan and, above all, Tamerlane, whose capital of fluted domes and sky-blue mosaic excites the traveller even today. The traditional founder of the city has always been the Persian prince Siyavush who built a citadel here shortly after marrying the daughter of Afrosiyab in Samarkand, but its growth has for centuries depended largely upon its strategic location, uniquely placed on the crossroads to Merv, Gurganj, Herat, Kabul and Samarkand. The early town was taken by the Persian Achaemenids in the sixth century BC, by Alexander the Great in 329 BC and by the empires of the Hephthalite and the Kushan. By Sogdian times the town was known as Numijent, later to be renamed after the Sanskrit word for monastery, *Vikhārā* and was a major city in the Sogdian confederation but it was still merely a younger brother to the thriving merchant towns of Paikend, Romitan and Varaksha until the storm of Islam arose."

The captivating Bibi Khanum Mosque built by Tamerlane is without parallel in grandeur or decor throughout the Muslim world. Since his teenage, Tamerlane knew much about military training and took part in civil wars. In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the conqueror, having firmly established himself as an absolute ruler, had chosen Samarkand as his capital. "His rule and the rule of his descendants—Sharhruh, Ulugh Beg and Babar—were marked by the growth of productive forces, the development of irrigation, crafts, trade and flourishing of the literature, science and art."

Ulugh Beg was born in 1394 in Sultania. Even as a child he was taken by his grandfather Tamerlane to the war-fronts. But he had also something else in him, something more significant; there existed in him the rare Man of Science. When he was 15 years old he became the ruler of Samarkand. Even as he ruled the state for more than 40 years, it was difficult for him to combine the state affairs with science. "The great scientist liked to devote himself to science, but he needed the throne too: if he were not a sultan emir how could he build the expensive observatory, erect madrassahs, pay hundreds of scientists for their work? Ulugh Beg's mother Gavharshodbegim didn't want her son to be a scientist and she said that the world was not governed by science, by books, but only by power... Ulugh Beg became a great scientist; he tried to send human ideas to the stars and to get the new knowledge from so long a distance. He compiled the catalogue of stars, which is very popular even today... Samarkand became the center of art and science. But a lot of his emirs didn't support his policy and they tried to plunder the state treasure, to begin the war between cousins and between the father and the son. Historians of the time wrote that Ulugh Beg had been beheaded by his own son's decree at a spot some ten or twelve miles from Samarkand."

Babar Zahir-Iddin (1483-1530), the founder of the great Mogul dynasty in India, was a Barlos Turk descended on the male side from Tamerlane and on the female side from Genghis Khan, "the great Mongol scourge of Asia". According to one commentator "the Mongol hordes breezed through the Persian city Nishapur in 1221 and spared not even a dog or cat. The invaders' redecorating programme consisted of razing all the buildings and leaving pyramids of skulls in their place." Babar had in him more of Genghis and practically nothing of Ulugh, the scientist-ruler. "From 1494 to 1504 for ten years he vainly endeavoured to maintain his position, but was expelled by more powerful neighbours and eventually sought refuge in the mountain fortresses of Kabul, which became his headquarters until 1525. Dismal political conditions in India contributed to the success of his plans. Babar's defeats and victories are recorded in his frank and intimate memoirs (the *Babar-Nama*). His chief ambition was to recover the vast territories which had once formed part of Tamerlane's mighty Empire." At his death in 1530 Babar controlled the greater part of Northern India. But he did not bring with him any Islamic tradition of science which Ulugh Beg and his scholars had established. While the famous Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan staffed his new observatory in Beijing with Muslim scientists, the Moguls in India didn't do anything of the sort. What remains of the three-century Mogul Empire in India today are gigantic monuments or else saddening ruins of Time. One cannot understand the psychology of destroying or mutilating sculptures of the so-called

ancient "heathen" art or demolishing places of worship that did not arise from the Islamic faith. But then this very psychology proved detrimental for the promotion of free thought and liberal ways of life although it gave rise to another vigorous form of music and art. Could it be that it was also disadvantageous for the progress of science? More importantly perhaps a strong vital force in the absence of intellectual development can become retrograde, even Asuric, and cause havoc to the noble spirit of man.

On the other hand Ulugh Beg's observatory, built around 1420, means something vastly significant to the world of science. It had the largest sextant for measuring the angular distances of the stars. Babar describes the building as it still stood in the early sixteenth century: "Ulugh Beg Mirza's observatory is an instrument for writing astronomical tables. This stands three storeys high, on the skirt of the Kohik upland. By its means the Mirza worked out the Gurkhani Tables, now used all over the world instead of earlier such compilations.... The so-called sextant obviously would have extended well above the ground and likely was closer to being a quadrant. Fragments of the curved measuring track have survived with markings for around 20 degrees; this is about the highest point that likely observations would have been made. The sextant would have been used to measure the angle of elevation of major heavenly bodies, especially at the time of the winter and summer solstices. Light from the given body, passing through a controlled opening, would have shone on the curved track, which is marked very precisely with degrees and minutes. It is not clear whether more than the sun and moon could have been measured in this fashion, since planets, for example, would not have cast sufficient light. The observatory was equipped with a variety of other instruments, which probably accounted for the largest part of its scientific measurement. While only written lists and not the actual instruments have survived, one can at least get a feel for what some might have been like (among them armillary spheres) from those to be seen today atop Kublai Khan's observatory in Beijing... Amongst Ulugh Beg's buildings inside the town are a college and a hospice (*khanaqah*). The dome of the hospice is very large: few so large are known anywhere else in the world. Near these two buildings he constructed an excellent hot bath... He had the pavements in this made of all sorts of stone. There is no bath like this in Khurasan or anywhere else in Samarkand... To the south of the college is his mosque, known as the Carved Mosque because its ceiling and walls are all covered with carved *islimi* and pictures made of inlaid woods..."

About the achievements of astronomers of the Ulugh Beg observatory: "One of the most important measurements carried out by them was the obliquity of the ecliptic. The ecliptic is the circular path described by the sun in the course of a year and its obliquity is the angle at which it cuts the equator. Establishing this precisely is important for a variety of other astronomical measurements and calendrical calculations. The astronomers in the classical world had errors on the order of 7'-10'. Arab astronomers achieved for the most part much greater precision; in the case of Ulugh Beg, the error was only -0' 32". His results for the calculation of the movement of the planets are also impressively close to those obtained by modern means. Some consider his most significant achievement to be the compilation of a catalogue of the stars and their locations. This was the first

such catalogue based on new direct observation.”

“Babar goes on to describe Ulugh Beg’s observatory and some of the splendid gardens and pavilions that he had built, one of them apparently decorated with porcelain specially ordered from China. His conscious efforts to honour his grandfather included donation of the huge Quran stand that can still be seen in the Bibi Khanum Mosque and placement of a striking jade cenotaph above Tamerlane’s grave in the Gur-i Amir mausoleum. There is reason to believe that this huge block of jade came as booty from one of Ulugh Beg’s campaigns in Moghulistan in the 1420s. Ulugh Beg was laid to rest in the Gur-i Amir at the feet of his grandfather.” (*Internet write-ups*)

Ulugh Beg’s madrassah became a major centre of learning in the Islamic world, even as its influence spread widely and lasted beyond his death. “The first director of his observatory was Qazi-zade Rumi, who had in fact come to Central Asia from Anatolia and was one of Ulugh Beg’s teachers. Tradition has it that at Ulugh Beg’s behest he was buried in the elegant double-domed tomb constructed for him in the Shah-i Zinde mausoleum complex.” But after the ruler-scientist’s death some of the scholars he had supported left Samarkand for capitals such as Istanbul, which promised more stability.

Our appreciation of Ulugh Beg’s work increases when we remember that he was working nearly two centuries prior to the invention of the telescope. His opus eventually became known in Europe with the publication in London in 1650; these included a Latin translation of his *Chronology* and, fifteen years later, the first of many European editions of his star tables.

(*To be continued*)

R. Y. DESHPANDE



## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAYAVADA

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

THERE is a sense in which none of the ultimate standpoints of thought or representative philosophical positions can be finally refuted. Logical refutation in the usual acceptation of the term can hardly be expected to knock the bottom out of a philosophical theory; to the opponent's mind, it only underlines the necessity of a better and more accurate formulation of his own particular point of view. That is why all such basic metaphysical positions as Realism and Idealism, Monism and Pluralism, Materialism and Spiritualism, and the like, survive up to the present day, all opposition and refutation notwithstanding. Realism repudiates Idealism, and Idealism hits back, and both go on merrily expanding their respective spheres of influence; Pluralism attacks Monism with its "atomic weapons", and Monism seeks to conquer Pluralism in its inclusive embrace; Materialism pours contempt on Spiritualism as idle day-dreaming or wishful thinking, and Spiritualism quietly sets aside Materialism as no better than a kind of enlightened animalism. And thus the same old conflict that started with the history of philosophical reflection perpetually goes on. Every philosophical system, in so far as it embodies an important aspect of Truth, or a definite perspective of Reality, survives by reason of its own inner vitality. Apparently vanquished or finished with, it always re-appears with renewed vigour in ever fresh forms. Every great philosopher realizes that synthesis or harmony is the very essence of philosophical truth. Consequently, every philosophical system endeavours to achieve some sort of synthesis within itself by exhibiting the opposed standpoints as subordinate factors in its own *Weltanschauung*. But the real harmony can hardly be achieved at the logical level, because no rigidly logical scheme of thought or conceptual formulation can fully articulate the integral Truth, or do full justice to the truth of the opposite standpoint.

Mayavada is one such fundamental philosophical position. No conclusive refutation of it is possible at the logical level, because seldom do logical arguments carry conviction to the human heart. There had been critics of Mayavada in the past, there are critics at the present day, and there will be critics in future, but still Mayavada is sure to survive. No intelligent supporter of Mayavada can have any difficulty in finding an answer to every point of criticism that may be made against it. It has its own peculiar standpoint and framework of fundamental assumptions. All refutation, therefore, quite naturally appears to it as external, and, consequently, inspired by a greater or lesser degree of misunderstanding of its own real position. Now, it should be stated at the very outset that Mayavada is not simply refuted but transcended and sublated in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Philosophical criticism is, for Sri Aurobindo, not a purely logical affair, but an evaluation of fundamental metaphysical or spiritual insights in the light of his own integral spiritual experience. He places before us a higher metaphysical insight such as is inclusive, not exclusive, of the truth inherent in Mayavada. He appeals to an integral spiritual realization such as discloses the deepest secret of reconciliation of all philo-

sophical conflicts. The arguments which he advances against Mayavada are, in the last analysis, the negative side of a rational articulation of his supra-intellectual truth-vision. They are indeed perfectly reasonable, but reasonable with a deeper rationality of the reality that transcends the intellect, and as such they embody what has been described by him as “the logic of the Infinite.” It has been said that when in the Upanishadic age of ancient India one seeker of Truth met another, the main question which they put to each other was, not “What is your theory and your argument?”, but “What is your spiritual realization?” That was followed by a comparison and evaluation of different forms of spiritual experience. Sri Aurobindo believes that if a particular form of spiritual experience is found to include within itself and illumine another form of spiritual experience, then the former must be accepted as a greater revelation of the supreme Truth. Self-luminous or self-coherent inclusiveness is indeed the criterion of ultimate truth.

In the present paper, I should like first of all briefly to indicate what according to Sri Aurobindo is the value, importance, or significance of Mayavada. Next, I shall turn to a consideration of the various misunderstandings to which Mayavada has been subjected at the hands of its critics, and then to a critical examination of the various modes of interpretation to which Mayavada has lent itself at the hands of its advocates. I shall conclude with a few observations on Prof. N. A. Nikam’s criticism of Sri Aurobindo’s position.

### **The Significance of Mayavada**

Mayavada represents one of the ultimate standpoints of philosophic thinking. It is noted for its logical charm and simplicity and its speculative boldness, in consequence of which it has a great intellectual appeal. But, what is of much greater importance, Mayavada embodies a very deep spiritual insight into the nature of ultimate reality. The enunciation of Mayavada was indeed a historical necessity in the course of India’s varied spiritual experiments with the Truth. Prior to an integral realization of the Spirit in its multiform richness of content it was of vital importance that the Spirit should have been clearly grasped in its transcendent purity. Mayavada is a clear logical formulation of an unfettered realization of the Spirit, the Self, Brahman, in its aspect of supra-cosmic Transcendence. Only, in its eagerness to perceive Reality in its highest height, it turns a blind eye to its extent or comprehensiveness; in its eagerness to know the Self in its full freedom it fails to take note of its immeasurable opulence. But still, viewed from the perspective of the history of spiritual evolution, it was imperatively necessary that Brahman should have been grasped in its utmost purity before being experienced in its full integrality.

### **Consideration of some misunderstandings about Mayavada**

It has already been observed that Mayavada has been subjected to various misunderstandings at the hands of its critics. In order to form a correct estimate of Mayavada it is essential that its true meaning should be carefully disentangled from all such misunderstandings.



The fundamental contention of Mayavada is that the world is essentially a product of Maya—it is *mithyā* or unreal. It is in the nature of an illusory superimposition on the basis of Brahman which is pure, unobjective, undifferentiated consciousness. But, what is the precise meaning of the term *mithyā* or ‘unreal’? It does not surely mean that the variegated world of our experience is a mere non-entity or void, a metaphysical zero, an *asat* or *shunya*. Shankara’s scathing criticism of the Shunyavada school of Buddhism is clear evidence of that. It is meaningless to suggest that the world which is a positive fact of our experience emerges out of nothing. Nor can it be reasonably held that a mere non-entity or void functions as the positive content of our experience.

Secondly, the world is assuredly not unreal in the sense of being ‘*tuccha*’ or formally self-contradictory like ‘round-square’ or ‘barren mother’. Such self-contradictory entities which owe their origin to some sort of verbal jugglery, and cannot really be even so much as thought of by us, can no more function as the object of our experience than a mere non-entity.

Thirdly, the world is not said to be unreal in the sense of being *alīka*, i.e., imaginary or fanciful like the sky-flower. It cannot obviously be a free creation of our fancy, because it is obtrusively thrust upon us, and is “given” to our perceptual experience.

Fourthly, Mayavada does not imply that the world is a mere externalization or objectification of our subjective cognitions. That is evident from Shankara’s refutation of the Vijnanavada school of Buddhism. Had there been no objectively real facts at all, it would have been impossible even to mistake internal cognitions for external facts. Epistemologically considered, Shankara is an uncompromising realist. He assigns some kind of objectivity even to our ordinary illusory experience. He speaks of *prātibhāsika satya*, and expounds what is known as *anirvacanīya-khyāti-vāda*, having energetically repudiated *asat-khyāti-vāda* and *ātma-khyāti-vāda*. Shankara’s Mayavada must, therefore, be carefully distinguished from all forms of Mentalism or Subjective Idealism. While, according to Berkeley, the essence of a thing consists in being perceived, according to Shankara, the perception of a thing is conclusive proof of its objectivity. Shankara argues much with the emphasis of a modern neo-realist that the object of perception, by reason of the very fact that it is perceived by us, must be admitted to have some kind of reality of its own. He is, however, unyielding on one point, namely, that everything short of Brahman is real only relatively to the standpoint of Ignorance (*Avidya*).

Finally, it should also be noted that the world is not unreal in the sense of being a pure sense-illusion. Shankara makes a clear distinction between the illusory and the phenomenal, the *prātibhāsika* and the *vyāvahārika*, even though both of them may be equally unreal from the standpoint of Brahman. While the illusory is private and short-lived, the phenomenal is universal and relatively permanent. While the illusory is not only useless but also harmful from the practical point of view, the phenomenal is undoubtedly endowed with practical usefulness or pragmatic validity. From this it should not, however, be concluded that Mayavada looks upon the *prātibhāsika* and the *vyāvahārika* as different degrees of truth and reality in the Bradleian sense of the term. They are, as we have already observed, equally unreal from the standpoint of ultimate

reality. The distinction between them is pragmatic, not ontological.

Thus we find that when Mayavada declares the world to be unreal, it does not mean that the world is a void or non-entity (*śūnya* or *asat*), or that it is formally self-contradictory (*tuccha*), or that it is fanciful or imaginary (*alīka*), or that it is a subjective idea (*viññāna*), or that it is a pure illusion (*bhrānti*).

(To be continued)

HARIDAS CHAUDHURI

### SELECTED WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO

CD-ROM EDITION

Price — Rs. 600.00

The CD contains the following writings of Sri Aurobindo:

*The Life Divine; The Synthesis of Yoga; Essays on the Gita; Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol; Letters on Yoga; The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War & Self-Determination; Essays on Philosophy and Yoga; Essays Divine and Human; The Renaissance in India (includes Foundations of Indian Culture); The Secret of the Veda; Upanishads.*

Specially designed programs for Windows and Macintosh allow you to read the texts on your computer screen and to conduct searches on phrases or combination of words. Searching is possible in a single volume or across multiple volumes at the same time. The search capabilities are powerful and fast. The bookmark system allows you to create and control multiple bookmark files and to develop thematic compilations. Bookmarks can be annotated and saved, exported or printed. Page number references are incorporated for the printed volumes of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo and for the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. There are context-sensitive tips and help files.

The CD also includes PDF files of those books that have come out as part of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo. When read with Adobe Acrobat Reader, these files show the exact screen-image of the printed books. Adobe Acrobat Reader is included in the CD.

Available at SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Pondicherry 605 002

Please see "New Publications" for ordering information.

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

*(Continued from the issue of April 2003)*

THE real aim of the arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry—is to speak to the spirit of man through meaningful images, and only the media vary in the different arts, the poet's being the word that is charged with power and purpose. Most people are content to live in the outer mind and senses, but the aim of art and especially of poetry is to help us to live in the soul, to enable us to see into the utter truth of things. And the poet has to find the words and the rhythm that would achieve this aim: "He is, as the ancients knew, a seer and not merely a maker of rhymes, not merely a jongleur, rhapsodist or troubadour, and not merely a thinker in lines and stanzas. He sees beyond the sight of the surface mind and finds the revealing word, not merely the adequate and effective, but the illumined and illuminating, the inspired and inevitable word, which compels us to see also. To arrive at that word is the whole endeavour of poetic style."<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's criticism on poetry is unique and transcending—the thoughts of the inner mind. Sri Aurobindo merely holds the mirror up to man and his work, and the high magnificent face is caught in it and so are the warts:

*Paradise Lost* is assuredly a great poem.... Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement, seldom to an equal sublimity.... His aim too is high, his subject loftier than that of any one of his predecessors except Dante.... to justify the ways of God to man... intellectually is not the province of poetry; what it can do, is to reveal them. Yet just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a scriptural greatness in his account of these things: he has not so seen God and heaven and man or the soul of humanity at once divine and fallen, subject to evil and striving for redemption; here there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry... the fatal danger of a failure of vision.<sup>2</sup>

We can cite some examples of the poets and poetry of the 18th century followed by a grand swerving movement, bridging the Old and New, and on the threshold of the Romantic Age. We meet with thrilled excitement with "poets of the Dawn", "Byron and Wordsworth are the two poets who are the most hampered by this difficulty of finding and keeping to the native speech of their greater self, most often depressed in their elevation, because they are both drawn by a strong side of their nature, the one to a forceful, the other to a weighty intellectualised expression; neither of them are born singers or artists of word and sound... but doubled here by a man of action and passion, there by a moralist and preacher... Both in the deepest centre or on the highest peak of their Inspiration are moved by powers for which their heavily and forcibly intellectualised language of poetry was no adequate means. It is only when they escape from it that they do their rare highest

work. Byron, no artist, intellectually shallow and hurried, a poet by compulsion of personality rather than in the native colour of his mind, inferior in all these respects to the finer strain of his great contemporaries, but in compensation a more powerful elemental force than any of them and more in touch with all that had begun to stir in the mind of the time.... Wordsworth, meditative, inward, concentrated in his thought, is more often able by force of brooding to bring out that voice of his greater self, but flags constantly, brings in a heavier music surrounding his few great clear tones, drowns his genius at last in a desolate sea of platitude. Neither arrives at that amplitude of achievement which might have been theirs in a more fortunate time, if ready forms had been given to them, or if they had lived in the stimulating atmosphere of a contemporary culture harmonious with their personality.”<sup>3</sup>

*(To be continued)*

NILIMA DAS

### *References*

1. *The Future Poetry*, SABCL, Vol. 9, p. 24.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

### **STORIES TOLD BY THE MOTHER**

Part 1, 131 pp., Rs.60.00, ISBN 81-7058-645-3

Part 2, 123 pp., Rs.60.00, ISBN 81-7058-646-1

Almost all of these stories have been culled from the Mother's "Questions and Answers", the English translation of her "Entretiens" in French. The anecdotes were published in French in 1994 under the title "La Mere Raconte", and are now brought out in English, in two volumes. The compiler's note states "These stories are not just stories; they are revelations of living truths conveyed to us by the Mother." "If they bring the reader closer to the Mother, their purpose will be well served."

Available at SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Pondicherry 605 002

Please see "New Publications" for ordering information.

## INTRODUCTION TO MAGGI LIDCHI-GRASSI'S NOVEL *THE LEGS OF THE TORTOISE*

THE eighties have been many things to many people. To me, in the twin fields of literature and entertainment, these years have been overwhelmingly the decade of the resurgence of myth. In this period there has been a remarkable outpouring of the human imagination, recreating our mythology in the written word, on the stage and on television. After K. M. Munshi's novels and plays on Vedic, Epic and Puranic India (*Lopamudra*, *Lomaharshini*, *Bhagwan Parashurama* and *Krishnavatara*), there had been little in post-Independence India to captivate the imagination till Buddhadeva Bose's probing of the intricacies of the human psyche through a reinterpretation of certain episodes from the epics into gripping tales of high adventure and romance in their Hindi novels. But these were isolated, though brilliant efforts to make our myths meaningful today. In the seventies, Gajendra Kumar Mitra's novel, in Bengali, *Panchajanya*, was yet another such solitary gem, speaking of the love of Krishna for Panchali. In the eighties, suddenly, the literary scene—as a matter of fact the best-seller market—came throbbingly alive with a series of 12 novels in Hindi by Ram Kumar Bhramar, each retelling the *Mahabharata* through the lips of one of the major protagonists. In Bengali came the spate of Dipak Chandra's and Kalkut's novels on both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, radically challenging our traditional points of view and seeking to give new meaning to the myths in terms of the present. In Oriya, Pratibha Rai spoke for Draupadi in her novel of that name; in Marathi it was Shivaji Sawant writing Karna's autobiography, the massive *Mrityunjaya*; in Kannada the tears, sweat, blood and mire of Kurukshetra was brought frighteningly alive by S. L. Bhyrappa in *Parva*. On the Bengali stage the agony of Draupadi, husband-less though with five husbands, was unforgettably brought home to entranced audiences in Shaoli Mitra's one-woman performance. And then there was of course, Peter Brook's gargantuan dramatisation of the epic on the international scene, albeit a flawed *tour-de-force*. The most pervasive invasion of a myth, however, took place through television, where the Indian masses—the elite and the petty bourgeois, the intellectual and the *hoi polloi* alike—found the epic characters in their own homes, with interpretations as widely varied as those of Shyam Benegal, Ramanand Sagar and B. R. Chopra.

To the English-speaking world, however, the realm of Indian myth remained a closed book all this while. Peter Brook's effort was available to ever so few. There had not been a single attempt in English after K. M. Munshi to re-create the meaning of the epics, to make the great epic experience living for the modern man, utilising that most powerful of literary forms: the novel. Suddenly, in 1987 appeared *The Battle of Kurukshetra*, the first of Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's trilogy on the *Mahabharata*. Here, through the lips of a most unusual character, Ashwatthama, the son of Drona cursed by Krishna to live in everlasting agony on earth, and with Arjuna as the other speaker, she re-told the epic in a manner which has never been done before.

Maggi Lidchi-Grassi grapples with the existential predicament of the protagonists in the epic holocaust, as they find themselves at the end of the battle. 'For a long time I

thought it was because I had asked for milk’—that is how the trilogy opens. Never had the core of Ashwatthama’s being been thus held open, tortured, bleeding, anguished, struggling to reach at some sense behind all the destruction. She paints an agonisingly gripping picture of a darkling plain where ignorant armies clash by night, and ends the novel with bewildered Arjuna, aghast and dumbfounded at the spectacle of what he is supposed to do, hearing Krishna telling him, ‘Get up and fight, Arjuna’.

Why has the author given this peculiar name to the sequel, *The Legs of the Tortoise*? The reader finds the answer provided in so many words—if he has failed to perceive it so far—in Bheeshma’s last advice to Yudhishtira, two-thirds through the novel: “When desire comes, be as the tortoise... pull in your consciousness... nothing enslaves you more than desire.” This sounds like a paraphrase of the Gita’s urging to cut the tree of desire with the sword of non-desire. But Maggi Lidchi-Grassi goes further, much further. Through Bheeshma’s mouth she brings to us truths voiced by the Vedic seers: “The desire for peace, for unburdening yourself of your kingly duties. To discard that last desire is to allow yourself to be carried by the sacrificial fire in triumphant offering. In that moment, when you cease to strive, desirelessness is complete; you are King.” This is the *viryatāyajna*, the supreme holocaust, the offering by the Aryan, the striver, of all that he is, to the Divine Godhead. But in the last sentence of Bheeshma, the author brings about a superb union of the Vedic vision with the inimitable insight-through-parable which characterises Sri Ramakrishna. His is that story of the children and the wishfulfilling tree, the *kalpataru*, and the lame child who is so entranced by the spectacle of the inveterate wishers that he forgets to wish, as a profound sense of compassion wells up in him for these creatures caught in the mad wheel of desire. He is the free person, the true Lord of himself and thereby of all creation.

It is towards this realisation that the novel moves. Arjuna is the archetypal seeker: the man of action *par excellence* who failed to act at the critical juncture: the dice-game. He is Krishna to Uttara’s Arjuna in making the fleeing prince turn back and face the invading Hastinapura forces. Indeed, as Krishna is the behind-the-scenes chief fighter for the Pandavas, so does Arjuna openly champion Virata and rout the invaders. Yet it is the same paragon of manhood who shakes with ague in Kurukshetra and is paralysed with overwhelming ethical pangs.

In this unique exploration of the human psyche through the matrix of an earth-and-soul-shaking conflict so fresh in the memory of twentieth century man, Maggi Lidchi-Grassi follows a path not unfamiliar to her. In her very first novel, *Earthman* (Gollancz, 1967), she had traced a somewhat similar search of a European in India in this century. To her present novel she brings a mind, a heart and soul that has steeped itself in the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In this exploration, she touches upon, more than once, the vexed question of dharma. Far more than Pilate’s cryptic query, “What is Truth?”, does the question of Draupadi in the Kaurava Court reverberate down the millennia: “Wherein lies dharma?” Is it dharma not to protest against the disrobing of a queen because one must be loyal to the throne? Is it dharma for a husband to pledge his wife in a dice-game? Is it dharma for one husband

to pledge the wife of his brothers as a stake? Is it dharma not to refuse to engage in a game with known cheats? Is it dharma to suffer wrongs without protest? Is it dharma to tell a lie for bringing about the death of a guru? Is it dharma to ask one's opponent how he may be slain? Is it dharma to fight on the side of those one knows to be in the wrong because they happen to be the rulers? Is it dharma to refuse to allow a competitor to compete on account of his caste? Is it dharma to ask five sons to share a wife won by one of them? Is it dharma to agree to have five husbands? Is it dharma to go into exile because one has violated the letter of the undertaking not to break in upon the privacy of a brother with the common wife? Is it dharma to take three wives while observing a vow of celibacy in exile? Is it dharma to slay thousands of forest-dwellers in clearing the jungle for building a palace? Is it dharma to ask for a disciple's thumb as fee for having learnt archery without a guru? Is it dharma to be so attached to one's vow as to disobey the mother's commands to save the dynasty? Is it dharma to abduct three princesses for marriage to one prince without ascertaining their wishes? Is it dharma to refuse to make good the irreparable harm caused thereby and to disobey the orders of one's guru regarding this for the sake of one's vow? Is it dharma to forsake one's new-born son and then approach him in one's own extremity for securing the victory of one's legitimate children? Is it dharma to pressurize a king into giving his daughter in marriage to one's blind nephew? Is it dharma to accept without protest her decision to blind herself for life? Is it dharma to slay a warrior engaged in getting his chariot-wheel out of the rut? Is it dharma for seven chieftains to jointly attack and slay a sixteen-year old? Is it dharma to watch one's grand-uncle decimate one's army despite having experienced the song celestial? Is it dharma to allow one's wife to be disrobed in open court and again assaulted in another king's court? Is it dharma to release the abductor of one's wife and the wife of one's brothers because he is related by marriage? Is it dharma to hit below the belt to attain victory? Is it dharma to slay enemies who are asleep and to slay an embryo?

The *Mahabharata* is precisely about the difference in the dharma Krishna is bringing into being to replace the obsolete version of which Bheeshma remains the last magnificent tragic symbol. With incisive insight Maggi Lidchi-Grassi speaks through Arjuna, 'Greatfather had not chosen. He had been chosen to show that even strictest dharma would not serve, for it was a dharma that was dying... Greatfather's throne sat on the cusp of what was old and what was new. He was faithful to his vows and not his vision....' This, indeed, is the point. Bheeshma, who has given up the throne and progeny and women, is blinded by the very splendour of his vow of renunciation and incapable of looking beyond it to achieve that sense of balance and detachment that so characterised Vyasa. By shutting himself away from knowledge of woman and of progeny he insensibly caused the tragedies of Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, Gandhari, and countenanced the agony of Draupadi which, to him, was essentially a knotty intellectual issue. He failed to protect Chitrangada from a premature death at the hands of a Gandharva monarch; he brought about the early death of Vichitravirya by unthinkingly foisting two wives on a sickly adolescent. He failed to protect his nephews, the Pandavas, from the beginning. He made no attempts to expand the boundaries of Hastinapura or to continue the bloodline of



Shantanu. In a way, Bheeshma achieved a pyrrhic victory through his vow: he saw, in his lifetime, that his step-brothers failed to enjoy his father's throne which he was allowed by Shantanu to renounce without the slightest hesitation. With a frightening indifference Bheeshma watches his stepmother's grandchildren (for they are Vyasa's children) make a mess of their lives. He says nothing when Pandu, having won many kingdoms, inexplicably exiles himself to the forests. During this exile, never once does he enquire about the welfare of Pandu and his wives even after what ought to have been cause for festivities: the birth of five sons. He says nothing when Gandhari decides to keep her eyes permanently bandaged, thereby depriving Hastinapura's blind king of sorely needed help. But, then, Dhritarashtra himself appears to like her self-imposed blindness, for he never protests. And what of the utter callousness with which Bheeshma countenances the attempts of the adolescent Kauravas to kill their cousins, and the war itself, not to speak of the division of the kingdom and the dice-game and the 13-year exile? Bheeshma is, indeed, a tragic failure. Even in the sense of the scriptures, Bheeshma remains a failure. He never graduates beyond the first stage: *brahmacharya*. Where Satyawati takes to the forest—*vānaprastha*—after the coming of the Pandavas, Bheeshma, who is around the same age, never retires gracefully. He is fascinated with the throne of Hastinapura which seems to have immobilised him with a basilisk's glare, so that, right or wrong, he sticks to that throne. It is a very narrow interpretation of dharma for the sake of which he turns into the inveterate compromiser, a prey to loneliness, unable to take hard decisions to avert catastrophes, and perhaps one in whom the libido could neither be sublimated fully nor allowed to run its natural course.

Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's unique quality lies in her ability to plumb these secret chinks in this 'superman's' armour. Her Bheeshma tells Arjuna of the mistake Shantanu made in swearing an oath to Ganga, not realizing that the hunger for sons is greater than that for a woman. 'One learns of it after the vow is taken,' says Bheeshma. And that applies equally to himself. In this quest for the true meaning of dharma, it is Yudhishtira who is made the key by the author, and it is his role in the death of Drona which leads to the realization that 'the world was full of decisions which old dharma could not lead you to.' He tells Arjuna, who is prostrated by the death of Drona, that the man he is bewailing is the slayer of Abhimanyu; is the man who watched Draupadi being disrobed; is the general who promised Duryodhana to capture Yudhishtira for yet another dice-game and who swore that he would stop Arjuna from slaying Jayadratha. She has Yudhishtira tell Arjuna, 'If I have forgone heaven for this lie, so be it. I do not feel the stain of sin. If Dronacharya is your Guru, mine is Krishna.' She has voiced these ringing words which have been lying unspoken within the body of the epic for millennia.

The novel raises a profound query: is surrender the best dharma? She asks, through Arjuna, whether surrender would have averted the war, as it saved the Pandava armies from the all-annihilating Narayana missile launched by Ashwatthama on hearing of Drona's death. Krishna replies in the negative and explains, 'Surrender to a dying dharma (like Bheeshma's surrender) only feeds a dying dharma. It is not surrender to the Absolute. Discrimination... that is the most important thing.' And it is precisely this faculty which



Arjuna lacks, and which is the root of his paralysing confusion. In a brilliant image she has Arjuna say, 'Discrimination is an *astra* that sunders doubt: it is the arrow's head that sunders darkness.' And then she has Krishna lash him into keen consciousness, saying 'To be without memory as well is worse... I know what we are here for. You forget. Forgetting is the suffering. Ignorance is pain.' It is in this marvellous chapter, the fourteenth, that Maggi Lidchi-Grassi pierces to the core of the dilemma which has plagued the era following the great war. That was a Yuga which forgot and its people knew that they were forgetting. The succeeding generations, however, 'will not know they have forgotten. They will not believe... we have lost the age of sharing with the being in all things. The Kshatriyas have destroyed it with their sole belief in power.'

What of the enigma that is Krishna? Maggi Lidchi-Grassi gives us answers through Ashwatthama, through Arjuna, but, perhaps, most of all through Vyasa. Arjuna poses his dilemma to Vyasa, who replies, 'Krishna is free of Dharma as humans understand it. It will not work to act as if we are free if we are not.... If you annihilate the self that thinks it is doing, then you act within this freedom. If you be the arrow that Krishna lets fly, then that is freedom. Without that, each one of us must walk within his human Dharma.'

Through Arjuna's eyes we find a unique summing-up of the epic: 'I looked towards the river. Between the longed-for seas of Dwaraka and the mountains of the north where Shiva as a hunter came to me, there stretched a plain that was the warp and woof of life. Here were the poisonings, the Palace of Delight, the dice-game and the insults, the exile and the embassies, the *akshauhinis* and the field of battle. What happened there when I had loosed my arrows here to kill? Our arrows aim at unknown targets. Our lives themselves are arrows shot from the unseen into itself.'

These insights come to Arjuna in Vyasa's Ashram, after the war. And here the author offers us yet another gem of insight: why did the seer arrange the vast whole of the Veda into four parts? For he foresaw the shrinkage of the mind which would only comprehend through division, through analysis, not through an integral apprehension of the *gestalt*. She has Vyasa say, 'I sort out the Vedas so they can sort out men. They will guard the knowledge until a Wisdom such as we have never dreamt sets them to rest forever. Until then they will be the raft that will carry us across the darkness of a Yuga.' It is with the death of Bheeshma that the weight of the ancient Dharma slips from the earth and it renews itself. In a remarkable scene where, after the war, Arjuna and Krishna mingle with the commoners, Maggi Lidchi-Grassi provides the worm's eye-view of Bheeshma's static role: 'They say he saw it coming. But he was not the father. He had to sit there like a eunuch on account of having given up his throne... The only people who had any sense had given up their power or were Sutas like Sanjaya and Vidura.' The author has Bheeshma himself admit his error on his deathbed, that despite being the guardian of the monarchy and the true heir he failed to rule and allowed Kurukshetra to take place: 'If you refuse to rule because of false compassion and remorse,' he tells the eldest Pandava, 'there will be other Kurukshetras.' The only Dharma of a king, he declares, is to rule: 'He cannot sacrifice it to please his father or his Guru or his son, or anything or anyone.' It is precisely this Dharma, the supreme calling, which Devavrata Bheeshma

abjured in favour of a personal oath and in that decision lies his grand tragedy, his *hubris* and his *hamartia*.

Vignettes of unexpected beauty surprise us with joy: Arjuna telling the sorrowing Uttara stories of her brother and Brihannala routing the Kuru invaders of the Virata kingdom (a clear prefiguring of the great war to follow, with Arjuna-Krishna forcing the fleeing Uttara-Arjuna to face the foes); Arjuna and Krishna mixing, incognito, with the commoners after the war; Krishna reviving the still-born Parikshit; Yudhishtira, in a unique moment, revealing his love for Arjuna; Krishna explaining Kunti's silence about Karna. The exploration, albeit cryptic, of the psychology of Pritha, given away by her father and bereft of her very name to be known only as Kunti, placed at the service of Durvasa in her adolescence, is one of the many scintillating gems of insight that sparkle and entrance the reader throughout the corpus of the novel.

However, whatever else the novel might be, it is above all the story of Arjuna, his autobiography. And it is in Arjuna that we see the author at her very best. She gives the hero a new name: the Wanderer, who needs must savour the sense of being alive as if living on the razor's edge. It is in his post-war wanderings to Indraprastha and the conquered lands for the Ashwamedha that the apotheosis of the book is reached. For, these journeys become a survey of his whole life as he re-visits all the kingdoms he had been to before the war and sees the sea change wrought in the years gone by. But even more than this it is a record of the inner journey of which the Ashwamedha is turned into a symbol. It is Arjuna's exploration of the depths of his own self till he is able to meet, fight and conquer his own ego that breaks the 'inner Gandiva' of his own conceit. Appropriately, the author has placed this at the very end of the book, immediately after Arjuna, in the full flight of his soaring pride, has been knocked down into unconsciousness by his son Babhruvahana.

Babhruvahana, yes: but it is the sacrificial horse, named Kalidasa by the author, that takes Arjuna through this journey culminating in his own sacrifice as the Aryan striver offering himself in the flame of aspiration in response to the horse's question, 'You have conquered the nations but what of yourself?'

What delights one is Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's vision merging the Vedic epiphany into this re-creation of the epic. For, indeed, the *Mahabharata* is said to be the fifth Veda. The five brothers' reconciliation to their fate, following the aftermath of their deeds of destruction, is echoed and re-echoed in a superb recreation of Vedic chants following Vyasa. And it reappears in the elaborate description of Yudhishtira's consecration in the unique Ashwamedha the author conjures up. For no armies follow the steed. Arjuna alone accompanies Kalidasa.

The novel is so full of memorable passages. The Pandavas walking towards Bheeshma are thus described: 'We walked towards our childhood.' Again, for Duryodhana, 'peace was a knife searching his entrails.' Vidura is 'the lamp that cut through every wind.' Knowledge of the mystic nature of the Sacrifice is 'like the fabric that Duhshasana tried to pull from Draupadi... It kept unwinding with new colours long after you thought it must come to an end.'

*The Legs of the Tortoise* is a major work. It is a book to come back to, time and again, to drink at the reviving fountain of new insights into our half-forgotten mythic heritage. It was Joseph Campbell who, in the last series of TV talks he gave before his death, pointed out that with the hiatus created by science between mythological symbols and modern society, “there is everywhere in the civilized world a rapidly rising incidence of vice and crime... violence, murder and despair.... It is the myths that offer the most solid supports of the moral order, of the cohesiveness and creativity of civilisation. And it is in the phenomenon of the spate of creative literature concentrating on our epics that I see the hope for our society in the twenty-first century.”

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA