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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A MIGHTIER RACE SHALL INHABIT THE WORLD

ON Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven
And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality.
A power released from circumscribing bounds,
Its height pushed up beyond death's hungry reach,
Life's tops shall flame with the Immortal's thoughts,
Light shall invade the darkness of its base.
Then in the process of evolving Time
All shall be drawn into a single plan,
A divine harmony shall be earth's law,
Beauty and Joy remould her way to live:
Even the body shall remember God,
Nature shall draw back from mortality
And Spirit's fires shall guide the earth's blind force;
Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought
A high proximity to Truth and God.
The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.
A greater truth than earth's shall roof-in earth
And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind;
A power infallible shall lead the thought,
A seeing Puissance govern life and act,
In earthly hearts kindle the Immortal's fire.
A soul shall wake in the Inconscient's house;
The mind shall be God-vision's tabernacle,
The body intuition's instrument,
And life a channel for God's visible power.
All earth shall be the Spirit's manifest home,
Hidden no more by the body and the life,
Hidden no more by the mind's ignorance;
An unerring Hand shall shape event and act.
The Spirit's eyes shall look through Nature's eyes,
The Spirit's force shall occupy Nature's force.
This world shall be God's visible garden-house,
The earth shall be a field and camp of God,
Man shall forget consent to mortality

And his embodied frail impermanence.
 This universe shall unseal its occult sense,
 Creation's process change its antique front,
 An ignorant evolution's hierarchy
 Release the Wisdom chained below its base.
 The Spirit shall be the master of his world
 Lurking no more in form's obscurity
 And Nature shall reverse her action's rule,
 The outward world disclose the Truth it veils;
 All things shall manifest the covert God,
 All shall reveal the Spirit's light and might
 And move to its destiny of felicity.
 Even should a hostile force cling to its reign
 And claim its right's perpetual sovereignty
 And man refuse his high spiritual fate,
 Yet shall the secret Truth in things prevail.
 For in the march of all-fulfilling Time
 The hour must come of the Transcendent's will:
 All turns and winds towards his predestined ends
 In Nature's fixed inevitable course
 Decreed since the beginning of the worlds
 In the deep essence of created things:
 Even there shall come as a high crown of all
 The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.
 But first high Truth must set her feet on earth
 And man aspire to the Eternal's light
 And all his members feel the Spirit's touch
 And all his life obey an inner Force.
 This too shall be; for a new life shall come,
 A body of the Superconscient's truth,
 A native field of Supernature's might:
 It shall make earth's nescient ground Truth's colony,
 Make even the Ignorance a transparent robe
 Through which shall shine the brilliant limbs of Truth
 And Truth shall be a sun on Nature's head
 And Truth shall be the guide of Nature's steps
 And Truth shall gaze out of her nether deeps.

SRI AUROBINDO

THE SEVEN SUNS

(1)

The Sun of Creative Origination (from the eternal vastnesses).

The double Sun of Light and Power (concentrating the movements emanated from the infinite Wisdom-Will.)

The Sun of the Word (organising the creation).

The Sun of Love, Bliss and Beauty (dynamising the descending harmonies)

The Sun of Soul-Power (aspiring, receiving, grasping, assimilating the creation; divided here into the mind and psyche, there unified in Soul-Mind, Brahman.)

The Sun of Life (dynamically externalising the creation).

The Sun of Everlasting Form (stabilising and containing the creation).

—

These are the seven powers of the Truth-Mind above the body.

—

(2)

The Sun of Truth, originating the supramental creation

The double Sun of Supramental Light and Will, transmitting the Knowledge-Power that creates, finds and organises the supramental creation.

The Sun of the Word, expressing and arranging the supramental creation

The Sun of Love, Bliss and Beauty, vivifying and harmonising the supramental creation.

The Sun of supramental Force (Source of Life) dynamising the supramental creation.

The Sun of supramental Life-Radiances, (Power-Rays) canalising the dynamis and pouring it into forms.

The Sun of Supramental Form-Energy holding and embodying the supramental life and stabilising the creation.

(3)

The Seven Suns of the Supermind

1. The Sun of Supramental Truth,—Knowledge-Power originating the supramental creation.

Descent into the Sahasradala.

2. The Sun of Supramental Light and Will-Power, transmitting the Knowledge Power as dynamic vision and command to create, found and organise the supramental creation.

Descent into the Ajna-chakra, the centre between the eyes.

3. The Sun of the Supramental Word, embodying the Knowledge-Power, empowered to

express and arrange the supramental creation
Descent into the Throat-Centre.

4. The Sun of supramental Love, Beauty and Bliss, releasing the Soul of the Knowledge-Power to vivify and harmonise the supramental creation.
Descent into the Heart-Lotus

5. The Sun of Supramental Force dynamised as a power and source of life to support the supramental creation
Descent into the navel centre

6. The Sun of Life-Radiances (Power-Rays) distributing the dynamis and pouring it into concrete formations.
Descent into the penultimate centre

7. The Sun of supramental Substance-Energy and Form-Energy empowered to embody the supramental life and stabilise the creation.
Descent into the Muladhara.

(4)

The Seven Centres of the Life

1. The thousand-petalled Lotus—above the head with its base on the brain. Basis or support in Life-Mind for the Supramental; initiative centre of the illumined Mind.

2. The centre between the brows in the middle of the forehead. Will, vision, inner mental formation, active and dynamic Mind.

3. The centre in the throat. Speech, external mind, all external expression and formation.

4. The heart-lotus. Externally, the emotional mind, the vital mental: in the inner heart the psychic centre

5. The navel centre. The larger vital proper; life-force centre.

6. The centre intermediate between the navel and the Muladhara. The lower vital; it connects all the above centres with the physical

7. The last centre or Muladhara. Material support of the vital initiation of the physical.

All below is the subconscious physical.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Record of Yoga II*, CWSA, Vol. 11, pp. 1341-43)

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

7

Today a cartman did what I asked him not to do and said something that made me want to beat him. For fifteen minutes I thought of beating him to my heart's content. Then I quieted down and knew that equanimity was not yet established.

These are recurrences—the equanimity must be established in every part in such a way that if anything comes it will find no foothold.

Then at 4.30 some gesture of a girl-worker put me in sex-disturbance. I tried to remain aloof but it was pulling me. Why does the sex-pull return again and again?

It is the same thing. Some part is still open to attacks and touches—you have established sufficient power of rejection for it to pass away after a little time—but the power should be so increased, become so automatic that the moment it touches, it falls away.

What most should I aspire for?

The union with the Divine Consciousness.

1 April 1933

Is the part of my being that is “still open to attacks and touches” the same part that wanders about looking out for beautiful faces or takes interest in things which are vulgar? It recurs often and obstructs.

It always does—it can only be worn out by persistence of refusal.

Does surrender alone also bring about aspiration and rejection? Is total surrender sufficient for Yoga?

Total surrender to the Divine—but that means rejection of all else.

After work at 6.00 in the evening, I feel very weak physically. Why does it happen?

These things establish a sort of rhythm of time—and the evening is a favourable time of theirs—perhaps because it is the time of a certain vibration of energy. One has to break this adverse time-rhythm.

2 April 1933

The night before there was no sex-dream, it was like a fight, but a night movement happened. Each time it happens it takes away some of my faith in the Divine's capacity when there is no particular lapse during the day which may have contributed to it. Is there any physiological necessity which can explain it?

You must remember that these “dreams” or fights or other experiences are based on some impression in the subconscious which rises up in sleep and is seized by the sex-forces. If you have *no* sex-thoughts or feelings in the waking state, that is only a first step, but not all. (Any sex-movement in the waking state leaves an impression in the subconscious which can rise up afterwards as material for a dream-form or night-impulse—not necessarily in the same night but long after.) For there is still the subconscious to be cleared and that is a long and difficult work. For this reason you ought not to be disturbed by these night movements, even though you must react against their coming—they come because the waking will is not there and the subconscious can therefore play in a way not possible in the waking state. As for physiological cause there is one, but it is not of great importance if it can be isolated from the psychological factors.

Last night in a dream I saw my eyes with ulcers and my face made ugly with eruptions, patches and ulcers.

These are the violent formations of the hostiles intended to be suggestive and to be accepted by some part of the consciousness—they have not to be thought of even as a possibility, but destroyed immediately by a movement of total rejection.

I cannot tolerate well this satisfaction many sadhaks feel when they have “worked” the whole day; they think the sadhana finishes there and no further inner effort needs to be made. They say that all thought of philosophy, self or Divine is selfishness and egoism. If one is a patriot, one feels distressed when one sees people in inertia doing nothing for the country. In the same way, I feel badly when I see others being side-tracked.

You forget that men differ in nature and therefore each will approach the sadhana in his own way—one through work, one through bhakti, one through meditation and knowledge—and those who are capable of it through all together. You are perfectly justified in following your own way, whatever may be the theories of others—but let them follow theirs. In the end all can converge together towards the same goal.

3 April 1933

Today I felt like hurting and killing R. I frankly say I have disliked R very much because of his posing as a moralist and his following K in every aspect.

It is this feeling of dislike that must have been the ground for the attack to come in. All feelings of dislike for other sadhaks should be absolutely rejected. Each has his own nature, his own difficulties and has to struggle out of them with the Divine Help. Defects and limitations in them should not be made a ground for dislike.

I wanted to hide this dislike of R in yesterday's letter, so today it got more strength thereby and wanted to do physical violence.

You must have relaxed in vigilance somewhere—especially there should be no hiding. A constant quiet vigilance has to be maintained and the least symptoms of return of the old movements has to be immediately dealt with—but there should be no impatience or upsetting because of attacks.

Do all these difficulties come because my aspiration is merely ambition? Is all that I am doing quite on the wrong side?

Your aspiration is not ambition, nor is what you have been doing on the wrong side.

Why is there so much abnormality in me, so many bad symptoms in the whole nature? It seems it is unfitness for Yoga.

It is not unfitness for Yoga—but sometimes a strong attack is made by the hostile forces to recover their hold. At these times remain firm, exercise a steady will, detach yourself entirely and call down the Force to repel the attack.

Yesterday I took a little more liberty and talked with a young girl without feeling anything at the time—but in a dream at night the same thing was repeated in a nearly sexual way.

It is an instance of what I said—the impression in the subconscious being used and given a sex-shape in dream—which it had not in waking.

Is there any truth in the idea that as one goes more inwards to the Divine, the conditions are stiffened and the zone of protection is shortened? For example I had put one condition for myself—that I must do what is useful for the Divine purpose. Now, if I do not do it, does the protection fall off? Do I go out of the circle?

There is some truth in that—though it is not quite so strict. But it is true the more one comes near to the Divine, the more is demanded,—a completer sincerity etc. Of course a strong faith will fill up the gaps.

Today again I resumed the method of keeping my sadhana-diary with me, so that I

can threaten any adverse movement by noting it down and sending it to you. This seems to keep adverse things away—only it appears a little too artificial.

How is it artificial? It is a means like any other—and a good means.

I saw R's work notebook and found that there were big signatures of Mother. I thought: in what way is my work inferior that Mother signs my book as if not appreciating my work?

A small signature does not mean lack of interest—usually it means more concentration than a large one.

I have felt often that Mother has never liked my work. There is a little feeling of hurt when my work is depreciated. Of course, all this may be a mental construction.

It was a construction, for on the contrary yours is one of the books which Mother reads most attentively and with the greatest interest because everything is clear and exact—nothing straggling and confused as with some others.

4 April 1933

Some rare attempts at attack by hostile forces appeared at a distance, but no opening was given to them.

It means they have receded into the environmental consciousness which each man carries about with him and through which he is open to the universal forces. It is from there they try to come back—but they should not be allowed to enter.

How has the pure sense of beauty been so distorted by human beings that it has become an impure desire for touch or sex-sensation?

It is part of the general degradation which things divine have been subjected to in the evolution out of the material Inconscience under the pressure of the Powers of the Ignorance.

Are there people (not necessarily those doing Yoga) who are not invaded by this vital impurity in their aesthetic sense and so enjoy beauty altogether in a subtle aesthetic way?

Yes, certainly. Artists who have trained their mind to a purely aesthetic look at beauty and beautiful things—for one instance. There are many others also who have sufficiently developed refinement of the aesthetic sense not to associate it with the crude vital wish for possession, enjoyment or sensual contact.

Is it possible to get rid of this vital impurity without giving up touching or seeing? Put in a wider way, is it possible to get rid of it without giving up vital enjoyment?

How can that be done? The enjoyment you speak of is vital physical, while beauty has to be enjoyed with the aesthetic sense—either human or divinised.

Are there any hostiles who are formed only of the mental plane stuff? If they are as subtle as mental stuff, how can they be destroyed?

Why not? You can dissolve a thought formation which is made of subtle mental stuff—why not then the mental Asura? There are Asuras who are *predominantly* mental—who live in the false Idea and can even be vitally aesthetic and appear to men as great Tapaswis. All the same there is a stern and violent vital as the effective instrument of their nature.

Sometimes when I am high up on a ladder, there is a suggestion of falling down; at such times I remember that there are “imps” and “brownies” used by the hostiles. Nowadays I often get slight foot injuries while walking; before I practically never got them. Are there some subtle physical beings who lead the body-consciousness slightly the wrong way or are these mere accidents?

There is no such thing as a mere accident. There is some—perhaps a very slight—unconsciousness in the physical and it is taken advantage of by these small beings of the vital physical plane—who are more mischievous than consciously hostile.

5 April 1933

(*To be continued*)

SRI AUROBINDO

... I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Fifteenth of August 1947: *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram*)

THEY

As they wander by the edges of the world
 In the uncharted place
By shimmering lagoons and shores impearled
With light from all the moons that ever curled
 Thin horns round Space,

They whisper to each other words of boding
 From no human lips
Like windle-straws that feel the night wind's goading,
Like the whine when rockets reel and zoom, exploding,
 And the star-shower dips.

They weave no shadow pattern with the moon-rays,
 They cast no shade
As they stalk across the land of that lagoon-maze:
Though their feet have crossed the sand on certain noondays,
 No dints were made.

November 18, 1934

ARJAVA

Arjava: To what extent does the more elaborate stanza-form help to build up an 'atmosphere'? The substance and mode of expression might seem rather thin and hackneyed if these were not this "backbone" of stanza-pattern to entertain the reader?

Sri Aurobindo: The stanza helps very much—it does create much of the atmosphere, but there is something in the diction also which helps carrying as it does a suggestion that is more than the surface sense of the words.

THE SUPRAMENTAL BOAT

Mother reads her comments on an experience she had on 3 February 1958:

BETWEEN the beings of the supramental world and men, almost the same separation exists as between men and animals. Some time ago I had the experience of identification with animal life, and it is a fact that animals do not understand us; their consciousness is so constructed that we elude them almost entirely. And yet I have known pet animals—cats and dogs, but especially cats—that used to make an almost yogic effort of consciousness to reach us. But usually, when they see us as we live and act, they do not understand, they do not *see* us as we are and they suffer because of us. We are a constant enigma to them. Only a very tiny part of their consciousness has a link with us. And it is the same thing for us when we try to look at the supramental world. Only when the link of consciousness is established shall we see it—and even then only the part of our being which has undergone transformation in this way will be able to see it as it is—otherwise the two worlds would remain apart like the animal and human worlds.

The experience I had on the third of February is a proof of this. Before that I had had an individual subjective contact with the supramental world, whereas on the third of February I moved in it concretely, as concretely as I once used to walk in Paris, in a world *that exists in itself*, outside all subjectivity.

It is like a bridge being thrown between the two worlds. Here is the experience as I dictated it immediately afterwards:

(Silence)

The supramental world exists permanently and I am there permanently in a supramental body. I had the proof of this even today when my earth-consciousness went there and remained there consciously between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. Now, I know that what is lacking for the two worlds to unite in a constant and conscious relation, is an intermediate zone between the physical world as it is and the supramental world as it is. This zone remains to be built, both in the individual consciousness and the objective world, and it is being built. When I used to speak of the new world which is being created, it was of this intermediary zone that I was speaking. And similarly, when I am on this side, that is, in the field of the physical consciousness, and I see the supramental power, the supramental light and substance constantly penetrating matter, it is the construction of this zone which I see and in which I participate.

I was on a huge boat which was a symbolic representation of the place where this work is going on. This boat, as large as a city, is fully organised, and it had certainly already been functioning for some time, for its organisation was complete. It is the place where people who are destined for the supramental life are trained. These people—or at least a part of their being—had already undergone a supramental transformation, for the

boat itself and everything on board was neither material nor subtle-physical nor vital nor mental—it was a supramental substance. This substance was of the most material supramental, the supramental substance which is closest to the physical world, the first to manifest. The light was a mixture of gold and red, forming a uniform substance of a luminous orange. Everything was like that—the light was like that, the people were like that—everything had that colour, although with various shades which made it possible to distinguish things from each other. The general impression was of a world without shadows; there were shades but no shadows. The atmosphere was full of joy, calm, order; everything went on regularly and in silence. And at the same time one could see all the details of an education, a training in all fields, by which the people on board were being prepared.

This immense ship had just reached the shore of the supramental world and a first group of people who were destined to become the future inhabitants of this supramental world were to disembark. Everything had been arranged for this first landing. At the wharf several very tall beings were posted. They were not human beings, they had never been men before. Nor were they the permanent inhabitants of the supramental world. They had been delegated from above and posted there to control and supervise the landing. I was in charge of the whole thing from the beginning and all the time. I had prepared all the groups myself. I stood on the boat at the head of the gangway, calling the groups one by one and sending them down to the shore. The tall beings who were posted there were inspecting, so to say, those who were landing, authorising those who were ready and sending back those who were not and who had to continue their training on board the ship. While I was there looking at everybody, the part of my consciousness which came from here became extremely interested; it wanted to see and recognise all the people, see how they had changed and check which ones were taken immediately and which ones had to remain to continue their training. After a while, as I stood there observing, I began to feel that I was being pulled back so that my body might wake up—a consciousness or a person here—and in my consciousness I protested, “No, no, not yet, not yet! I want to see the people!” I was seeing and noting everything with intense interest.... Things continued in this way until suddenly the clock here began to strike three, and this brought me back violently. There was a sensation of suddenly falling into my body. I came back with a shock because I had been called back very suddenly, but with all my memory. I remained quiet, without moving, until I could recollect the whole experience and keep it.

On the boat the nature of objects was not the one we know on earth; for instance, clothes were not made of cloth and what looked like cloth was not manufactured: it formed a part of the body, it was made of the same substance which took different forms. It had a kind of plasticity. When a change had to be made, it took place, not by any artificial and external means but by an inner operation, an operation of consciousness which gave form or appearance to the substance. Life created its own forms. There was *one single* substance in everything; it changed the quality of its vibration according to need and use.

Those who were sent back for fresh training were not of a uniform colour, it was as

if their body had greyish, opaque patches of a substance resembling earthly substance; they were dull, as if they had not been entirely permeated with light, not transformed. They were not like that everywhere, only in places.

The tall beings on the shore were not of the same colour, at least they did not have that orange tint; they were paler, more transparent. Except for one part of their body, one could only see the outline of their form. They were very tall, they seemed not to have any bones and could take any form according to their need. Only from the waist down had they a permanent density, which was not perceptible in the rest of their body. Their colour was much lighter, with very little red, it was more golden or even white. The parts of whitish light were translucent; they were not positively transparent but less dense, more subtle than the orange substance.

When I was called back and while I was saying “Not yet”, each time I had a brief glimpse of myself, that is, of my form in the supramental world. I was a mixture of the tall beings and the beings aboard the ship. My upper part, particularly the head, was only a silhouette whose contents were white with an orange fringe. Going down towards the feet, the colour became more like that of the people on the boat, that is, orange; going upwards, it was more translucent and white and the red grew less. The head was only a silhouette with a sun shining within it; rays of light came from it which were the action of the will.

As for the people I saw on board the ship, I recognised them all. Some were from here, from the Ashram, some came from elsewhere, but I know them too. I saw everybody but as I knew that I would not remember them all when I returned, I decided not to give any names. Besides, it is not necessary. Three or four faces were very clearly visible, and when I saw them, I understood the feeling I had here on earth when looking into their eyes: there was such an extraordinary joy.... People were mostly young, there were very few children and they were about fourteen or fifteen, certainly not below ten or twelve—I did not remain long enough to see all the details. There weren't any very old people, apart from a few exceptions. Most of the people who went ashore were middle-aged, except a few. Already, before this experience, some individual cases had been examined several times at a place where people capable of being supramentalised were examined; I had a few surprises and noted them; I even told some people about it. But the ones whom I put ashore today, I saw very distinctly; they were middle-aged, neither young children nor old people, apart from a few rare exceptions, and that corresponded fairly well with what I expected. I decided not to say anything, not to give any names. As I did not remain until the end, it was not possible for me to get an exact picture; the picture was not absolutely clear or complete. I do not want to say things to some and not to others.

What I can say is that the point of view, the judgment, was based *exclusively* on the substance of which the people were made, that is, whether they belonged completely to the supramental world, whether they were made of that very special substance. The standpoint taken is neither moral nor psychological. It is probable that the substance their bodies were made of was the result of an inner law or inner movement which at that time

was not in question. At least it is quite clear that the values are different.

When I came back, simultaneously with the recollection of the experience I knew that the supramental world is permanent, that my presence there is permanent, and that only a missing link was necessary for the connection to be made in the consciousness and the substance, and it is this link which is now being forged. I had the impression—an impression which remained for quite a long time, almost a whole day—of an extreme relativity—no, not exactly that: the impression that the relation between this world and the other completely changed the standpoint from which things should be evaluated or appraised. This standpoint had nothing mental about it and it gave a strange inner feeling that lots of things we consider good or bad are not really so. It was very clear that everything depended on the capacity of things, on their aptitude in expressing the supramental world or being in relation with it. It was so completely different, sometimes even altogether contrary to our ordinary appraisal. I recollect one little thing which we usually consider to be bad; how strange it was to see that in truth it was something excellent! And other things we consider to be important have in fact absolutely no importance at all: whether a thing is like this or like that is not at all important. What is very obvious is that our appraisal of what is divine or undivine is not right. I even laughed to see certain things.... Our usual feeling of what is anti-divine seems artificial, seems based on something that's not true, not living—besides, what we call life here did not seem living to me compared with that world—anyway, this feeling should be founded on our relation between the two worlds and on how things make the relation between them easier or more difficult. This would make a great difference in our appraisal of what brings us nearer to the Divine or what separates us from Him. In people too I saw that what helps them to become supramental or hinders them from it, is very different from what our usual moral notions imagine. I felt how... ridiculous we are.

19 February 1958

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1957-58*, CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 271-76)

N.B. Reference may also be made to *The Mother's Vision*, compiled by Georges van Vrekhem, pp. 589-94, and published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003, —Ed.

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(3)

Mother Divine,

I have been undergoing homoeopathic treatment for the last few years for my eczema with no appreciable result. New symptoms are developing. At present my eye-lids and the portion below it around the nose are affected apart from some fingers and a portion of the neck. I get but little sleep at night. The pain from itching is perhaps the worst form of pain. It forces the consciousness to remain on the surface. I could draw within during high fevers and burning pains all over my body. But this nasty itching does not allow me to go within. How I wish to have a high fever which burns like a terrible fire all poison within the body! Will You ask Kali to burn me with a fire of fever? I shall welcome it instead of this nasty disease. Mother, forgive me if I am a bit talkative. I have become rather desperate. I feel that something must be done.

Shall I stop all medicine for the present? Or shall I take some simple ayurvedic medicines for general health and purification of blood?

With pranams,

6-5-65

Your child
ABANI SINHA

*Before getting so desperate
try ayurvedic treatment
and take it with a
concentration on Kali's Force
blessings*

Before getting so desperate try ayurvedic treatment and take it with a concentration on
Kali's Force
blessings

INTERVIEW OF 8 SEPTEMBER 1979

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

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

P: Where was the furniture department?

A: There was no department as such, there was a go-down. There was no organisation, nothing at all.

P: The go-down was in the Ashram compound itself?

A: Some place a little further away. There was a place there and Kodandaraman was staying in the same place and he used to complain to Mother that the place was not properly organised, everything was dumped there and so on. Then I went on for about a year and half doing that and I used to take a strange perverse delight in distributing furniture, which I had never thought myself capable of. Then, one day, I think Mother saw me in the rain, going barefoot, taking the furniture up and down like that and she spoke to Amrita: "Poor fellow, can't he do with some help?", or something like that. And then there were complaints, also. Nolini, I think, complained—Nolini would want me to set up a room... Now I had discovered that I would furnish a room, then at the last minute a telegram would come that the fellow was not coming. So all my labour was wasted and I would take the furniture back. That meant double expense.

P: You would furnish a room for a visitor who was coming?

A: Yes, yes. A visitor who was coming, so I made it a policy to furnish the room only on the day before the date of the arrival. So now and again Nolini used to enquire, "Have you furnished the room?" and I would say, "No." And then most probably he might talk to the Mother, "I have told him a week ago and nothing is done." But I was trying to save the Ashram money, actually, and my own trouble, too, to take the furniture in and out like that. So there was some dissatisfaction about my work in some way. Then when I had my fall, which Lalita spoke to you about, and my knee became that big, Amrita came to me one day trying to break the news to me, that now the furniture work would be done by somebody else. He was very hesitant, you know, thinking that I would take it so badly and I knew that he was trying to tell me that and I said, "Amrita, come out with it." Then he said, "You know now it will be hard for you, I don't know how you will do it, I mean, somebody else will take up your work." I said, "Certainly, why not, I'll be very happy." And he looked surprised, and he went and reported to the Mother that "Amal took it like a yogi!" There was no disappointment, on the contrary there was exultation. So the furniture job was gone for me. And then after that the only surprise I have had was when the Mother, on one of my visits here, in the forties, the late forties, stopped me at pranam and said, "Both Sri Aurobindo and I think that you should be the next Indian Consul here." And I said, "My God, to be a Consul, what a horror!" You see, that was even worse than being in charge of the furniture department. But I made it a policy never to say No to the Mother, so I said, "All right, Mother, I will do something—I will go to

Bombay and talk to Navajata about it.” Navajata was very glad. While in the Ashram, I spoke to Udar about it and he said, “Don’t mind about that. So many of my friends are Consuls and they are all dunces.” He went on to tell me all about it and said all their staff did everything. But nothing came of it. Because it seems that you cannot be a Consul unless you are already in the Diplomatic Service. And when Sanat Banerji came, he was an ideal Consul. And I could never have done that work so well. Now, go on, your turn.

P: About your work? You told me about the manicuring and the other jobs that the Mother gave you. You have written about it also in the...

L: Yes, I have written about it all.

P: More than just the duties themselves, how did it bring you into contact with the Mother and how was it a part of the yoga, and how did you feel what was going on in your head and your heart at that time?

L: That is to say I asked the Mother for some work and then she gave me this sewing work.

A: She used to work almost the whole day.

L: The whole day I was working, but I...

A: Very, very strenuous work.

L: But I was doing embroidery with Vasudha, Minakshi, Tripura, then Padmasini. We were all doing it together in the house—now Huta House—where I was staying. But we were doing it on the ground floor where Minakshi was staying. But I was a very impatient person from the beginning, I think, and I am still that, so I couldn’t do my sarees very well and it used to take so long even to do a little bit of embroidery. And then I used to ask Vasudha, “Vasudha, how do you manage to do a whole saree for one year and keep your patience?” Then she said...

P: Were these sarees always for the Mother?

L: For the Mother, yes, always. Vasudha used to do the Darshan sarees. And she said, “I only think of today’s work, an inch or more, that’s all, I don’t think of the rest of the saree at all. And I do that as perfectly as I can and forget the rest.” That was a good lesson to me. The only saree which I did along with these people was a white saree of the Mother with two swans at the back and the rest was covered with silver clouds.

P: And you covered a saree with embroidery in that pattern?

L: Yes, in that pattern.

A: Once you were in charge of cooking, you remember?

L: Yes, I remember.

A: The kitchen was in the middle of the Ashram.

L: Where the Samadhi now stands.

P: A kitchen was there. But the eating room was...

A: But so many houses were there, you must remember. There were walls. And there were tunnels by which you passed from one house to another.

P: How many houses?

A: At least four houses at that time.

P: Well, there are four houses now, I mean there’s...

A: Yes, but you see now the middle space is all clear. At that time they were all divided and there were small little tunnels through which you passed from house to house,—these passages had walls and a roof, and we had to pass through that to go to the next house.

P: I see.

A: So there was a kitchen there, where the samadhi is because that was the wall of one house.

P: The wall of the house containing Sri Aurobindo's room?

A: No, no; that was a different house altogether.

L: Altogether different. This was...

A: You see, at that time the house where Sri Aurobindo was staying was not connected really with the house where Pavitra was staying. There was a long passage—an open terrace—across which the Mother used to go to Pavitra's room.

P: That house wasn't built then?

A: There was no house there at all, there was only that.

P: Oh, you mean along the back where Nirod's room is and all that?

A: Yes, yes. From the Mother's bathroom, you might say, or a little further, there was no house there at all. There was no passage, the passage which now leads to Pavitra's room upstairs, it was an open corridor.

L: Like a terrace, no?

A: Yes, like a terrace. She used to pass like that, right through—walk across. And then that part also from which she used to go for her drives. In the evening she would come down and go out and we used to wait there outside Dyuman's room—there was no Dyuman's room at that time. Dyuman was staying somewhere else—there was some working room there, I believe. We waited in the evening and the Mother used to come down and go out for a drive. We would see her off.

P: By the current garage door?

A: Not the current garage door. In those days, where you have Nirod's room and the other corner room—Debu's room—there was a door to go out.

P: But those rooms weren't there at all?

A: No, no rooms at all, absolutely nothing and there was a garage there, I believe, yes, that the car was kept in, but she used to go out of this door. And then when she would come back we would wait again to see her. In the evening after her drive. And Pavitra used to drive always.

(To be continued)

ON SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

(3)

SAVITRI has entered into the deathless luminous world where there is only faultless beauty, stainless delight and an unmeasured self-gathered strength. Savitri heard the melodious voice of the Divine:

You have now left earth's miseries and its impossible conditions, you have reached the domain of unalloyed felicity and you need not go back to the old turbulent life: dwell here both of you and enjoy eternal bliss.

But Savitri answered firm and moveless:

I climb not to thy everlasting Day,
Even as I have shunned thy eternal Night....
Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield...
Thy servitudes on earth are greater, King,
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.

Once more Savitri, even like Ashwapati, has to make a choice between two destinies, two soul-movements— although the choice is already made even before it is offered to her. Ashwapati had to abandon, we know, the silent immutable transcendent status of pure light in order to bathe in this lower earthly light. Savitri too as the prototype of human consciousness chose and turned to this light of the earth.

The Rishi of the Upanishad declared: they who worship only Ignorance enter into darkness, but they who worship knowledge alone enter into a still darker darkness. This world of absolute light which Savitri names 'everlasting day' is what the Upanishadic Rishi sees and describes as the golden lid upon the face of the Sun. The Sun is the complete integral light of the Truth in its fullness. The golden covering has to be removed if one is to see the Sun itself—to live the integral life, one has to possess the integral truth.

So it is that Savitri comes down upon earth and standing upon its welcoming soil speaks to Satyavan as though consoling him for having abandoned their own abode in heaven to dwell among mortal men:

Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth...
Still am I she who came to thee mid the murmur
Of sunlit leaves upon this forest verge...
All that I was before, I am to thee still...

Voicing Satyavan's thought and feeling, all humanity, the whole world in joy and gratefulness, utters this mantra of thanksgiving:

If this is she of whom the world has heard,
Wonder no more at any happy change.

(4)

In her *Prayers and Meditations* the Mother says:

Comme l'homme n'a pas voulu du repas que j'avais préparé avec tant d'amour et de soin, alors j'ai invité le Dieu à le prendre.

*Et mon Dieu, Tu as accepté mon invitation et Tu es venu T'asseoir à ma table; et en échange de ma pauvre et humble offrande Tu m'as octroyé la finale libération!**

What is this banquet that she prepared for man and which man refused? It is nothing else than the Life Divine here below—the life of the Gods enjoying immortality, full of the supreme light and power, love and delight. Man refused because for him it is something too high, too great. Being a creature earth-bound and of small dimensions he can seize and appreciate only small things, little specks of a material world. He refused, first of all, because of his ignorance; he does not know, nor is he capable of conceiving that there are such things as immortal life, divinity, unobscured light, griefless love, or a radiant, tranquil, invisible energy. He does not know and yet he is arrogant, arrogant in his little knowledge, his petty power, in his blind self-sufficiency. Furthermore, besides ignorance and arrogance there is an element of revolt in him, for in his half-wakefulness with his rudimentary consciousness, if ever he came in contact with something that is above and beyond him, if a shadow of another world happens to cross his threshold, he is not at peace, does not want to recognise but denies and even curses it.

The Divine Mother brings solace and salvation. For the Grace it is such a small and easy thing, it is a wonder how even such a simple, natural, inconspicuous thing could be refused by anybody.

If man finds no use for the gift she has brought down for him, naturally she will take it back and return it to Him to whom it belongs, for all things belong to the Supreme Lord, even She belongs to Him, as She is one with Him. The Gita says: there is nothing else than the Brahman in the creation—the doer, the doing and the deed, all are essentially He. In the sacrifice that is this moving, acting universe, the offerer, the offering and the offered, each and every element is the Brahman—*brahmārpanam brahma haviḥ*.

This gesture of the Divine Mother teaches us also what should be the approach and attitude of human beings in all their activities. In all our movements we should always

* "Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoked the God to take it.

My God, Thou hast accepted my invitation, Thou hast come to sit at my table, and in exchange for my poor and humble offering Thou hast granted to me the last liberation."

remember Him, refer to Him, consider that in the last analysis each and every movement comes from Him and we must always offer them to Him, return them to the parent-source from where they come, therein lies freedom, the divine detachment which the individual must possess always in order to be one with Him, feel one's identity with Him.

(5)

Man's refusal of the Divine Grace has been depicted very beautifully and graphically in a perfect dramatic form by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. The refusal comes one after another from the three constituent parts of the human being. First of all man is a material being, a bodily creature, as such he is a being of ignorance and misery, of brutish blindness. He does not know that there is something other than his present state of misfortune and dark fate. He is not even aware that there may be anything higher or nobler than the ugliness he is steeped in. He lives on earth-life with an earth-consciousness, moves mechanically and helplessly through vicissitudes over which he has no control. Even so the material life is not a mere despicable thing; behind its darkness, behind its sadness, behind all its infirmities, the Divine Mother is there upholding it and infusing into it her grace and beauty. Indeed, she is one with this world of sorrows, she has in effect become it in her infinite pity and love so that this material body of hers may become conscious of its divine substance and manifest her true form. But the human being individualised and separated in egoistic consciousness has lost the sense of its inner reality and is vocal only in regard to its outward formulation. It is natural for physical man therefore to reject and deny the physical Godhead in him, he even curses it and wants to continue as he is. He yells therefore in ignorance and anguish:

I am the Man of Sorrows, I am he
 Who is nailed on the wide cross of the Universe...
 I toil like the animal, like the animal die.
 I am man the rebel, man the helpless serf...
 I know my fate will ever be the same,
 It is my Nature's work that cannot change...
 I was made for evil, evil is my lot;
 Evil I must be and by evil live;
 Nought other can I do but be myself;
 What Nature made me, that I must remain.

The Divine glory manifests itself for a moment to the earthly consciousness but man refuses to be pulled out of its pigsty. The Grace withdraws but in its Supreme Consciousness of unity and love consoles the fallen creature and gives it the assurance:

One day I will return, a bringer of strength...
 Misery shall pass abolished from the earth;
 The world shall be freed from the anger of the Beast...

The basic status or foundation of Man, in fact of creation, is earth, the material organisation. After the body, next comes the life and Life-power. Here man attains a larger dynamic being of energy and creative activity. Here too, on this level, what man is or what he achieves is only a reflection, a shadow, but mostly a misshapen resemblance, an aberration of the divine reality that hides behind, and yet half-reveals itself. That Godhead is the Mother's form of Might, we name it variously, Kali and Durga and Lakshmi, for it is Her Grace that is ultimately expressed and fulfilled in this world of vital power. It is because of this realising power of the Mother that

Slowly the Light grows greater in the East,
 Slowly the world progresses on God's road.
 His seal is on my task, it cannot fail;
 I shall hear the silver swing of heaven's gates
 When God comes out to meet the soul of the world.

But man in the strength of his ignorance and arrogance does not recognise this Goddess. Human power, we have said, is a reflection, a shadow of the Divine Power but most often it is a deformed, a perverted Divine Power. Man is full of his egoistic vital self-confidence: he believes it is his own will that is realising all, all which is achieved here; whatever he has created, it is through the might of his own merit and whatever new creations will be done in the future will be through the Grace of his own genius. A mighty vital selfhood obscures his consciousness and he sees nothing else, understands nothing else beyond the reach of that limited vision. This is the Rakshasa, this is the Asura in man. Here is his philosophy of life:

I climb, a claimant to the throne of heaven.
 The last-born of the earth I stand the first...
 I am God still unevolved in human form;
 Even if he is not, he becomes in me....
 No magic can surpass my magic's skill.
 There is no miracle I shall not achieve.

So this vital being in man in his Rakshasic hunger and Asuric self-conceit rejects the Divine Power that is in fact behind him too, supporting him. The Goddess, in the wake of her predecessor, goes back from where she came, leaving however a consoling word, assuring that one day she will return; she will bide her time. For one day,

The cry of the ego shall be hushed within,
 Its lion-roar that claims the world as food,
 All shall be might and bliss and happy force.

In his body man is the beast, in the vital he is the Rakshasa and the Asura, he rises

now into the mind. And in the mind he is the human being proper, he has attained his own humanity. Here he has received the light of knowledge, a wider and deeper consciousness, he has unveiled the secret mysteries of Nature, brought to play hidden forces that were unknown and untapped. All these achievements have been possible for man because it is the Mother of Light that is behind and has come forward to shed something of her luminous presence around. But man has no inkling of the presence of this luminous Deity, his own light has been a screen in front of the inner divine light. It is not possible for the human mind to seize the higher light: his consciousness, his knowledge is too narrow, too superficial, too dull to comprehend what is beyond. This Divine Light is also a thing of delight, the consciousness it possesses is also the very essence of Joy and Felicity. But all that is occult to the human knowledge. Man considers Truth is his property, whatever truth is there his understanding can grasp it and bring it to play: Truth and Reality are commensurate with his own consciousness, his mental comprehension. What others speak of as realities of the spirit, truths transcendental, are an illusion and delusion. This is what is usually known as the scientific mind, the rational consciousness. An orthodox scientific mentality is in the first instance a thing of overweening self-confidence, of arrogant self-assertion. It declares in its formidable pride:

I have seized the cosmic energies for my use.
 I have pored on her infinitesimal elements
 And her invisible atoms have unmasked...
 If God is at work, his secrets I have found.

This imperiousness in man seems however to be a sheer imperviousness: it is a mask, a hollow appearance; for with all his knowledge, at the end he has attained no certainty, no absoluteness. There is something behind, all the outer bravado he flourishes has a sense of helplessness, at times almost as pitiable as that of a child; for he finds at last

All is a speculation or a dream.
 In the end the world itself becomes a doubt.

It is true his survey of the universe, his knowledge of boundless Nature and the inexhaustible multiplicities of creation have given him a sense of the endless and the infinite but he has not the necessary light or capacity to follow those lines of infinity, on the contrary, there is a shrinking in him at the touch of such vastnesses; his small humanity makes him desperately earth-bound, his aspiration follows the lines of least resistance:

Our smallness saves us from the Infinite.
 In a frozen grandeur lone and desolate
 Call me not to die the great eternal Death...

Human I am, human let me remain
Till in the Inconscient I fall dumb and sleep.

Thus, this Goddess too is rejected like her previous comrades—the Mother of Light, the Deity who is properly the guide and ruler of man's own destiny. Even she is refused but hers is not to complain, in tranquil quietness she brings comfort and hope to the troubled human mind and says she goes to come back in the fullness of her incarnation. She utters divinely:

One day I shall return, His hands in mine,
And thou shalt see the face of the Absolute.
Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
Then shall the divine family be born.

(6)

To the inconscient and ignorant human nature, Savitri, the Divine's delegate presents the powers and personalities that are behind man's present infirmities—these broken images of true realities lying scattered about in the front of existence. Man will be made conscious, he is being made conscious step by step precisely by such relations from time to time. The Vedic image is that of the eternal succession of dawns whose beginning no one knows, nor the end, that creation proceeds from light to light, from consciousness to higher reaches of consciousness. From the material life through the vital and the mental life he first reaches the spiritual life and finally the Life Divine. From the animal he rises to manhood, and in the end to Godhood.

But there are intermediaries. The fullness of the realisation depends on the fullness of the incarnation. The Evil in the body, the Evil in the vital, the Evil in the mind are, whatever their virulence and intransigence, subsidiary agents, for they serve only a mightier Lord. The first original Sin is Death, the God of Denial, of non-existence. That is the very source—*fons et origo*—the fount and origin of all the misfortune, the fate that terrestrial life involves. This demon, this anti-Divine has to be tracked and destroyed or dissolved into its original origin. This is the Nihil that negates the Divine—*Asat* that seeks to nullify Sat and that has created this world of ignorance and misery, that is to say, in its outward pragmatic form. So Savitri sees the one source and knows the remedy. Therefore she pursues Death, pursues him to the end, that is, to the end of death. The luminous energy of the Supreme faces now its own shadow and blazes it up. The flaming Light corrodes into the substance of the darkness and makes of it her own transfigured substance. This then is the gift that Savitri brings to man, the Divine's own immortality, transfusing the mortality that reigns now upon earth.

In view of the necessity of the age, for the crucial, critical and, in a way, final consummation of Nature's evolutionary urge, the Divine Himself has to come down in the fullness of His divinity; for only then can the earth be radically changed and wholly

transformed. In the beginning the Divine once came down, but by sacrificing Himself, being pulverised, scattered and lost in the infinitesimals of a universal, material, unconsciousness. Once again He has to come down, but this time in the supreme glory of His victorious Luminosity.

This then is the occult, the symbolic sense of the Mother's gesture turning away from man with her gifts and returning to the Divine Himself, and inviting Him as the chief guest of honour upon this earth. Or, in the Vedic image, He is to come as the flaming front and leader of the journeying sacrifice that is this universal existence.

(Concluded)

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Collected Works, 1973, Vol. 4, pp. 237-53)

A VERMILLION DOT

IN the serene vastness
 A silence leaps down
 Even as blows the breath of the morn
 Through the happy soft clouds.
 A single dot of vermillion peeps out,
 As through the shroud a smile.
 A recognizable touch is felt;
 A sudden glow, a swift knowing
 And a strange new sight opens.
 Something is caught in that rush
 And at once the dot disappears.
 But again it is there
 In the beauty of truth and light,—
 O the vermillion dot
 In the midst of things of the day!

SHAKUNTALA MANAY

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

Savitri and the Record of Yoga

10

AFTER “The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind”, the next step in Aswapati’s climbing of the world-stair brings him to “The Heavens of the Ideal” described in Book Two, Canto Twelve of *Savitri*. If the “Greater Mind” of Canto Eleven is what Sri Aurobindo usually termed “Higher Mind”, to what plane or planes do these heavens belong?

On the first page of the canto they are called the “heavens of the ideal Mind”.¹ “Ideal Mind” is also mentioned in a line in the previous canto, which speaks of the “splendours of ideal Mind”.² When he introduced “ideal Mind” into *Savitri* in the late 1930s in these two lines, Sri Aurobindo was reviving this expression from a terminology he had seldom used in his writings since 1914-20. In the *Record of Yoga* during that period, though “ideal mind” itself occurs only a few times, it is evidently equivalent to “ideality” which occurs several hundred times as an English substitute for the still more frequently occurring term “vijñana”.³ It is applied to a consciousness higher than the intellectual or even the intuitive mind, as in an entry on 12 June 1914:

The attempt to carry the ritam farther is for the present entirely baffled by the forces that seek to remain in the intuitive reason & develop it to the exclusion of the descending Ideal Mind.⁴

In works that appeared in the *Arya*, also, “ideal mind” occurs occasionally in a sense similar to its meaning in the *Record*, as in this passage in a chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga* published in February 1917 and slightly revised by Sri Aurobindo in his own copy of the *Arya*:

The link between the spiritual and the lower planes of the being is that which is called in the old Vedantic phraseology the *vijñāna* and which we may describe in our modern turn of language as the Truth-plane or the ideal mind or supermind. There the One and the Many meet and our being is freely open to the revealing light of the divine Truth and the inspiration of the divine Will and Knowledge.⁵

This statement, according to which “ideal mind” would seem to be the same as “supermind”, tells us about the essential nature of *vijñāna* and what all its planes have in common; it does not make the distinctions between various planes which became increasingly important for Sri Aurobindo as he advanced on the path and the aim of his

Yoga widened from self-perfection to earth-transformation. These distinctions between planes, unnecessary for achieving the inner liberation which was long considered the only true goal of spirituality, were gradually discovered by Sri Aurobindo to be indispensable for the purpose of a Yoga that contemplates a radical and integral change of our nature. The reason becomes apparent from his explanation, in one of his letters, of how the higher planes differ from the lower ones:

The Self governs the diversity of its creation by its unity on all the planes from the Higher Mind upwards on which the realisation of the One is the natural basis of consciousness. But as one goes upward, the view changes, the power of consciousness changes, the Light becomes ever more intense and potent. Although the static realisation of Infinity and Eternity and the Timeless One remains the same, the vision of the workings of the One becomes ever wider and is attended with a greater instrumentality of Force...⁶

Such a “greater instrumentality of Force” is necessary for the integral Yoga because of the resistance of the established nature of this world, rooted as it is in the primeval Inconscient. For even after the individual being in all its parts has undergone the beginnings of a psycho-spiritual conversion and transformation,

the original basis of Nescience proper to the Inconscient will still be there needing at every turn to be changed, enlightened, diminished in its extent and in its force of reaction.

In this passage in “The Ascent towards Supermind”—a chapter Sri Aurobindo added to *The Life Divine* when he revised it for publication in 1939-40—he went on to indicate the limitations of the Higher Mind from this point of view:

The power of the spiritual Higher Mind and its idea-force, modified and diminished as it must be by its entrance into our mentality, is not sufficient to sweep out all these obstacles and create the gnostic being, but it can make a first change, a modification that will capacitate a higher ascent and a more powerful descent and further prepare an integration of the being in a greater Force of consciousness and knowledge.⁷

In the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1919 of “a higher than the logistic ideality”, characterised by “a diviner splendour of light and blaze of fiery effulgence”.⁸ Initially he referred to it as the “hermetic ideality”, “hermetic gnosis” or “hermetic vijnana”, shortening these sometimes to “hermesis”.⁹ In 1920 he adopted the term “srauta vijnana” formed from the word for inspired knowledge, *śruti*.¹⁰ The differences between the “logistic” and “hermetic” planes of *vijñāna* as presented in the *Record of Yoga* resemble those between the Higher Mind and the Illumined Mind in the terminology Sri Aurobindo settled upon by the early 1930s and used consistently in his later prose writ-

ings, including his letters and the revised or added chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*.

The passage quoted above from *The Life Divine* goes on to identify the “greater Force of consciousness” for which the action of the Higher Mind can prepare us:

This greater Force is that of the Illumined Mind, a Mind no longer of higher Thought, but of spiritual light. Here the clarity of the spiritual intelligence, its tranquil daylight, gives place or subordinates itself to an intense lustre, a splendour and illumination of the Spirit: a play of lightnings of spiritual truth and power breaks from above into the consciousness and adds to the calm and wide enlightenment and the vast descent of peace which characterise or accompany the action of the larger conceptual-spiritual principle, a fiery ardour of realisation and a rapturous ecstasy of knowledge.¹¹

The depiction of the “heavens of the ideal Mind” in Book Two, Canto Twelve of *Savitri* suggests that Sri Aurobindo’s intention there was to portray this Illumined Mind, both on its own plane and in the effects of its descent into the human consciousness. Though, as we have seen, “ideal Mind” by itself according to his earlier use of that expression might mean any supra-intellectual plane, what he says about these “heavens” seems to agree specifically with his definition of the Illumined Mind.

The identity of the plane of consciousness represented in this canto is revealed most clearly by a line in its concluding paragraph:

All there was an intense but partial light.¹²

We have seen that “an intense lustre” distinguishes the Illumined Mind from the Higher Mind’s “clarity of the spiritual intelligence, its tranquil day-light”. But if its light is intense in comparison with what is below it, the word “partial” is justified when this light is compared with that of the planes above it. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter that the light of knowledge is

still rather diluted and diffused in the illumined mind; it becomes more and more intense, clearly defined and dynamic and effective on the higher planes so much so as to change always the character and power of the knowledge.¹³

Most of the canto entitled “The Heavens of the Ideal” is devoted to descriptions of two contrasting series of worlds: the “lovely kingdoms of the deathless Rose” and the “mighty kingdoms of the deathless Flame”.¹⁴ Here the Rose and Flame seem to symbolise, respectively, the “rapturous ecstasy of knowledge” and “fiery ardour of realisation” mentioned in *The Life Divine* as attributes of the Illumined Mind. This consciousness, when it descends into us, brings a “seeing and seizing power” which “can effect a more powerful and dynamic integration” of the mental, emotional, vital, sensational and physical nature than the Higher Mind:

it illumines the thought-mind with a direct inner vision and inspiration, brings a spiritual sight into the heart and a spiritual light and energy into its feeling and emotion, imparts to the life-force a spiritual urge, a truth inspiration that dynamises the action and exalts the life movements; it infuses into the sense a direct and total power of spiritual sensation so that our vital and physical being can contact and meet concretely, quite as intensely as the mind and emotion can conceive and perceive and feel, the Divine in all things; it throws on the physical mind a transforming light that breaks its limitations, its conservative inertia, replaces its narrow thought-power and its doubts by sight and pours luminosity and consciousness into the very cells of the body.¹⁵

Many of these effects of the working of the Illumined Mind can be detected in the description in *Savitri* of what happens when the “bud” of the deathless Rose “is born in human breasts”, translating into human experience something of the “rapt idealism of heavenly sense”¹⁶ native to those higher realms where the Rose of God blooms eternally:

Then by a touch, a presence or a voice
The world is turned into a temple ground
And all discloses the unknown Beloved.
In an outburst of heavenly joy and ease
Life yields to the divinity within
And gives the rapture-offering of its all,
And the soul opens to felicity.¹⁷

It is a predictable result of the action of such a faculty that “it illumines the thought-mind with a direct inner vision”. But Sri Aurobindo has added that it even “pours luminosity and consciousness into the very cells of the body”. This, too, is depicted in the same passage in *Savitri*:

A fiery stillness wakes the slumbering cells,
A passion of the flesh becoming spirit,
And marvellously is fulfilled at last
The miracle for which our life was made....
Mind pauses thrilled with the supernal Ray,
And even this transient body then can feel
Ideal love and flawless happiness
And laughter of the heart’s sweetness and delight
Freed from the rude and tragic hold of Time,
And beauty and the rhythmic feet of the hours.¹⁸

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. *Savitri* (1993), p. 277.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 260. The first section of Book Two, Canto Eleven, where this line is found, introduces not only that canto, but all the later cantos of Book Two. So the “splendours of ideal Mind” need not be restricted to the realms of the greater or higher mind which are the subject of most of the canto in which the phrase occurs.
3. Sri Aurobindo defined “vijñana”, the “supraintellectual faculty”, as “the plane of ideal consciousness” (*Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 14) or “the ideal faculty” (*ibid.*, p. 81) and used “ideal” as an adjective interchangeably with “vijñanamaya”, the adjective formed from “vijñana”.
4. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 489.
5. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 417. When the complete text of *The Synthesis of Yoga* was first published in the 1950s, Sri Aurobindo’s light revision of this and a few other chapters in a copy of the *Arya* which is still kept in his room had not yet been discovered, so these chapters were reproduced from the printed *Arya*. This revision seems to have been done within a few years of the original publication, before the extensive revision of Part One and some chapters of Part Two in the early 1930s. The unrevised version of this particular passage is found in SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 399.
6. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1154.
7. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 944.
8. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1136.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 1136, 1139, 1143, 1146, 1148, 1155, 1157, 1158, 1162, 1164, 1166, 1167, 1175, 1178, 1181, 1183.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 1235, 1237, 1241. Though the three faculties of *smṛti*, *śruti* and *dr̥ṣṭi* can all act in the logistic *vijñāna*, whose levels are defined by their various combinations, *smṛti* which “remembers at a second remove the knowledge secret in the being but lost by the mind in the oblivion of the ignorance” is said to be the essence of the logistis, while *śruti* which “divines at a first remove a greater power of that knowledge” is the essence of the hermesis (*ibid.*, p. 1136); *dr̥ṣṭi* or revelation is the essence of a third plane called the “seer ideality” or “seer gnosis”. The hermetic *vijñāna* has three levels, “logistis in the hermesis”, “middle hermesis” and “seer hermesis” (*ibid.*, p. 1183), formed like the levels of the logistic *vijñāna* by different combinations of the three main faculties of *vijñāna* modifying the predominant character of the plane.
11. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 944. Three levels of the Illumined Mind seem to be implied here, corresponding to the three levels of the hermetic *vijñāna* mentioned in the *Record of Yoga*. The spiritual intelligence subordinating itself to the intenser illumination would correspond to the “logistis in the hermesis”; giving place to it altogether, a level equivalent to the “middle hermesis” would be formed; while the lightnings of a higher revelation breaking in upon the illumined consciousness would constitute a third level, resembling the “seer hermesis” of the *Record of Yoga*.
12. *Savitri*, p. 281.
13. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1155.
14. *Savitri*, pp. 277, 279.
15. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 946.
16. *Savitri*, p. 279.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 278.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.

NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

Image

O RADIANT image of the vast Self:
In the path of the sun your girdle of blue hills
Beckons me. The moon with its pale smile
Sinks. She who sports in the waveless ocean
On a meditation seat smeared with Omkara-ash
Descends unhasting into the volcano's
Burning molten cave. In Himalaya's
Snow-crest's mantra-annointed moment
The flood of Mandakini's victory-march
Carries its heaven-piercing dream in all directions.
The fire of accumulated lightnings
On its trembling chariot of Destruction seated
Writes in burning letters the speech
Of a future Aditi:
In the prisoner's chains
Rings the Rudraveena of freedom's fire.

(To be continued)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

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."

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THE MOTHER'S MISSION AS DELEGATED TO HER BY SRI AUROBINDO

ABOUT Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal into the Subtle Physical in 1950 the Mother says the following:

Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary. When I asked him to resuscitate he clearly answered: "I have left this body purposely. I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way." As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised in me. The Supermind had descended long ago—very long ago—in the mind and even in the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly through these intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.¹

The baton passed to the Mother to carry on the two-pronged Integral Yoga mission: (1) Descent of the Supramental Consciousness, (2) Physical Transformation. Both the missions were unprecedented in the history of human civilisation. Each mission, if were left to the Nature, would require millions of years as the challenge of the missions was far greater in scope than to manifest mental consciousness and create a human race, which is supposed to have taken several million years. The combination of both the missions required the greater intensity and higher level of conscious-force superceding Nature's participation. The integrality of the dual mission to be attained required the sanction of the Supreme, as without His Will it would be unattainable. To shorten the time to a mere few hundred years to attain the integrality of the dual mission required nothing short of the direct and dynamic participation of the Divine as the dual Avatars in the form of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This was an unprecedented undertaking requiring unprecedented dual Avatar participation. Sri Aurobindo decided to operate from the Subtle Physical level to be ubiquitous and supra-potent to overcome effectively the negation of the "Four Matter Forces" as their sadhana increasingly became focused on the transformation of the physical body, physical material, constituent matter, subconscious, inconscient, and the superinconscient.

The Mother's mission as delegated to her by Sri Aurobindo was to continue the dual objectives of descent of the Supermind and the transformation of matter. Sri Aurobindo was to be the first in Supramentalised "human form" in his second coming and the Mother was to be the first human divinised to have the Supermind descended in the human body.

The Mother took the baton of the grand relay race of the transformation as according to Sri Aurobindo her body was most suitable to carry on the process of body transformation. Their mission has been to enable the human race to transit from the current creature-human-body to the vessel of the Supramental Light in the form of a new race of Overman and progressively pave the path for the ultimate transformation of human body-life-mind-consciousness from Overman into the Supramental Being created of the Supramental stuff and ready to lead to the next level of evolution based on the principle of Love-Truth and culminating into Sat-Chit-Ananda (Sachchidananda).

Then took place the most significant event: the Supramental Descent in 1956. The Mother narrates:

“This evening² the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that *‘the time has come’*, and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.”³

The Mother heard the message “the time has come” in English, as she herself said, probably suggesting that it was Sri Aurobindo who actually sanctioned the execution. In the year of his departure, Sri Aurobindo had told the Mother: “You have to fulfil our Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation.” The Mother fulfilled one part in 1956—Supramental Descent—and the task of Transformation continued.

The Supramental Descent in the subtle-physical was not announced for over a month. The Mother made the first announcement in her message of 29 March 1956:

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

The text of the proclamation is a validation of the Mother's prayer of 25 September 1914 about Divine's active collaboration:

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute:
A new Light shall break upon the earth.
A new world shall be born,
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.⁴

The second announcement of the Mother came on 24 April 1956:

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living

fact, a reality. It is at work here, and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognize it.

The Mother, according to Wilfried, provided the following explanation for the lack of observable changes after the Supramental descent: “The atmosphere of the earth is too contrary to the magnificence of the Supreme consciousness and veils it almost constantly. From time to time It can show and express Itself, but then again, this Inconscient atmosphere veils It. It was like that when in 1956 the Supramental Power came down upon earth. It was coming in torrents of Light, wonderful Light and Force and Power, and from the earth big waves of deep blue Inconscience came and swallowed It up. All the force that was coming down was swallowed up and it is again from inside the Inconscient that It has to work itself through. That is why things take so much time here.”⁵

It took more than 41 years for the Mother’s prayer of 1914 to become a reality in 1956 by the Supramental descent! Time and again, we will see that the time-table of the “things” (...India’s Freedom, India’s unification, Supramentalisation of man...) keep changing in view of the inertia, ignorance, and unwillingness of the world to change and to open to the Divine—a consequence of its free will! And yet the Will of the Supreme works in its own mysterious way. Sri Aurobindo had predicted such a pattern of delay: “It may well be that, once started, it [the supramental endeavour] may not advance rapidly even to its first decisive stage; it may be that it will take long centuries of effort to come into some kind of permanent birth. But that is not altogether inevitable, for the principle of such changes in Nature seems to be a long obscure preparation followed by a swift gathering up and precipitation of the elements into the new birth, a rapid conversion, a transformation that in its luminous moment figures like a miracle.”⁶

ARUN VAIDYA

References

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2. During the common meditation on Wednesday 29 February 1956.
3. *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 202
4. *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 249.
5. *The Mother: A Short Biography* (1986), p. 79.
6. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 267.

THE DEWDROP

In the bliss, they say, of the love that laves the skies and ocean and earth,
All things hasten to lose, they say, the grieving ripple of birth.
Why, then, ah! do I tremble and pale at the thought of thee, O Death,
And shivering, stand to take my plunge in that infinite sea of breath?
There are the lost joys of my life, far sunk beyond rave and fret;
There are the souls of dreams unflowered, and the roses of regret.
There is the sunken dreadful gold of the once that might have been,
Shipwrecked memory anchors there, and my dead leaves there are green.
Why in the merge of all with all by a plunge recoverable,
Desperate diver shudder I from all pearls in one shell;
For there more precious than all things lost is the one that I let fall,
One heart brimful of love for me, her love that encasketed all.
Dear, like a trembling drop of dew I held thee in my hand;
How of a sudden could I so spill as to lose it in infinite sand,
Fresh on the rose-petal of life, with its fragrance through and through
Drenching my heart? I held thee long, thou trembling drop of dew.
As I stood sadly secure of thee, as happy I looked my fill,
Thou from that rose petal didst glide and vanish in salt sea rill.
Now by the infinite shore I roam, the bliss that all things laves;
Down-bent, weeping, I seek for thee by a mournful music of waves,
Deaf to the grandeur and the roar that hath washed thee away from me;
In the streaming sands and my own salt tears I wildly look to thee.
Thou with the freshness and the foam art glorying borne away;
I mid wreck and driftwood grope and dally with all dismay.
“Come back, tremulous heart,” I sob, “heart’s bliss, come back,” I cry.
Only the solemn ecstasy of waters makes reply.

MANMOHAN GHOSE

(Songs of Love and Death, 1926)

REMEMBRANCE OF THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

I ARRIVED in Bombay on the night of the 13th August, 1964. My brother, niece and nephew as well as my uncle came to receive me at the pier. I went with my uncle, and asked my nephew to buy me a plane ticket for the 14th August to Madras, and to send a telegram to Pondicherry for a car to receive me at the Madras airport. For, I must reach the Ashram for the darshan of the 15th.

My brother came with all my jewelry and said: "Take care. This is your wealth, besides whatever you may have. You can keep it or offer it to the Mother as you like." I said: "For me, she is the Divine Mother. All wealth belongs to her. And to offer her all that I am and have is a unique opportunity." I told him that I would come back to see my sister-in-law, who had brought me up like her own daughter and never to worry about me.

I left them for Pandy and arrived at the Ashram in the evening around seven o'clock on the 14th with a garland of jasmine and some alphonso mangoes for the Mother. I was met by Mohan Mistry whom I did not know but who recognized me. I gave the flowers and the mangoes to Vasudhaben and did my pranams at the samadhi. Mohan took me to Dr. Sanyal's Nursing Home. This was to be my home for some time to come.

The Mother had sent a flower of the *Divine's Presence* for me. Usha was the only person I knew in the Ashram and she was there with her warm hospitality and introduced Richard to me. He gave me the flower.

I spent the next day at Usha's place where she introduced me to her friends. It was August 15th and my heart was concentrated on Sri Aurobindo. In the evening, the Mother came to the balcony to give her blessings to all assembled below. It was a summons to adore as she came slowly, looking at all of us with her smiling, compassionate and luminous eyes. Then, she looked up at the sky, as if invoking the Lord's blessings. Slowly she withdrew and the crowd began to disperse and I too left. It was only a five-minutes' experience but it quenched a thirst of ages!

Next day, I came to know Richard a little better. He was convalescing in the Nursing Home. He seemed to be a very handsome boy of very quiet disposition with bright intelligent eyes. Gradually, we became acquainted with each other to find that we were very different in our external personality with only one subject common to both of us: flowers and their significance. And of course, the Mother and the spiritual aspect of the Ashram was a link too.

As time passed by, I was also to learn that it was divinely planned that we be of friendly help to each other. And though his quiet, inexpressive personality was quite in contrast to my exuberant vibrant nature, he had deep spiritual resources. I did not want to have any social contacts in the Ashram. And he kept me free. I hardly saw or knew anybody excepting those I had to. He is truly a wonderful person to be with, always smiling and ready to help anybody, even a stranger, and loved by everyone from children

to elderly folk. He gives himself abundantly without care for himself or his needs. He never asks for anything at all, though I am to him like an elder sister—I must feel his needs and give him what he requires. I feel it is impossible to find such a person with so many good qualities,—a real yogi in his attitude and bearing, and a true friend. It is another concrete example of the Divine Grace in my life. I found a brother whom the Mother called her son. I am truly privileged.

Now, I had done by myself what I could in the Yoga of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but to partake in their work and to have the advantage of personal guidance from the Mother was now the thing most important to me. I had already established a personal relationship with the Mother when I was in New York, and had felt her to be so close to me that I did not feel the necessity of coming here for the Yoga. But now, having left America, I was like a newborn babe in the Ashram atmosphere, intensely keen to learn whatever the Mother had to teach me.

So, when she gave me the chance of an interview with her on the 17th morning, I was ready for the personal meeting. Dr. Sanyal had sent me a flower, the *Supramental Sun* from his garden. It was just what I needed and came to me unasked. I collected two flowers from my garden: surrender and friendship with the Divine. I went to see her at ten in the morning with all my jewelry and money from different countries and the flowers with an aspiration to make a clean sweep of all that I was and to offer all that I had.

As I entered her chamber, she said: “Welcome here! Welcome here! Welcome here! Welcome here!” I ran to her, feeling completely at home. Then, I offered her the flowers and she took them one by one carefully and put them aside. Then, I offered her the money and all my jewelry.

I put my hands into hers and said: “Mother, you did not want me to come?” She held my hands tightly and said: “You are welcome here. But there is a work waiting for you there.” I said: “But Mother, that must be your work and to do it perfectly, I must know myself, and prepare myself fully so that I can do it as your instrument. And so I have come to you to learn it from you. One day, I will go when I am ready for it and if you want me to.” She listened to me attentively, nodding her approval. She concentrated awhile and asked me: “Shall we now meditate?” I said quite enthusiastically: “Yes, Mother. Go through all the parts of my being and re-mould me in your consciousness.”

When I offered the flower of *Supramental Sun*, I had the spontaneous aspiration to be like the *Supramental Sun*, a golden flower of perfectly resplendent light whose white rays could radiate through every pore of my being. It seemed to me to be the perfect flower to express the one-pointed, intense aspiration with which I came to the Mother for her guidance and help. So, I was happy to have this meditation in which I could commune with her. It was the most wonderful meditation I had with the Mother. It was later published in *Mother India*.

She gifted me with the flowers *Supramental Sun*, *Friendship with the Divine* and a rose as her blessings and said: “Au revoir, ma petite!” It was a memorable day, the remembrance of which can never be erased.

Now, the question of my work came. Some people said that the Mother had put me

in the Nursing Home to do the work of Janina. I was surprised, because I did not believe that to be my work, but I kept quiet. For, two thoughts were in my mind: first, I had come to do the yoga of Sri Aurobindo in which surrender to the Mother was the first condition; secondly, I thought that the people in the Ashram would not tell me anything unless they knew that the Mother wanted me to do that work. So, I waited.

Then, came Navajata's offer to work with him for the Mother's project of Auroville. I said: "I would do it only if the Mother wants me to do it. I will ask her first." He said that he had already asked the Mother and she had told him: "It would be very good, if she is willing. She writes very well." I told the Mother that I would accept this work on condition that I was allowed to work directly with her. She agreed.

At the time I took up this work, it was just an idea and not a project. The work was very slow. In the meantime, Udar had asked the Mother if I could do the secretarial work for him. So, the Mother wrote to me: "It is a very useful work. Can you do it?" I thought it was about getting the films for Saturday evenings, and I said: "I will try." Well, I must have tried for a couple of days. It was not as creative, nor as interesting as I believed. For, I had to type letters dictated by Udar for the commercial enterprise of Harpagon and file them. I found it too mechanical for my frame of mind. I told this frankly to the Mother. The Mother said that it was quite all right if I left it. And so I did.

Now, about the Nursing Home work. I had two servants: an elderly man, pampered by Janina and another quite smart young boy, who evidently did not like his elder boss. They used to quarrel quite often. I wrote to the Mother that I would like to remove the elder one and have another. The Mother gave her okay to this. The younger one, Abdul, asked me if he could bring a young girl. I said: "I would have to see her." So, he brought her. She, Vedavalli, was a shy girl of fourteen with a pleasant disposition, but she did not know English, nor Hindi and I did not know Tamil. Abdul was my interpreter since he knew Hindi. She adapted perfectly to my American standards of cleanliness, regularity and efficiency. She was obedient and smiling and willing to do anything I asked her to do. Hence the house was well taken care of; for I must say she was the best servant one could find anywhere in the world. She too was a precious gift from the Mother.

Now, I had to go to Bombay to clear my luggage and see my family as promised. I wrote to the Mother and she asked me to see her. When I met her she said: "Do you have to go? Can we send your keys and ask our people in Bombay to release the luggage and have it sent here? I said: "Mother, since I am coming from America, there is the question of examining everything for duty. It would be more convenient if I go. Secondly, I have not seen my family in ten years and I promised them that I would come. They love me and would like to know why I have come here." She said with a smile: "You cannot explain it to anyone, my child. But you can go and try. Come back soon." I did my pranams, silenced my mind and left with her blessings.

Needless to say, my sister-in-law was very happy to see me and was so anxious to prepare for me whatever I liked. They wanted the people of my community to meet me. I told them that I had come only for three days to be with them, and I was not so anxious to meet other people. I saw my other brother and his family and the cousin who was

brought up with me as my own brother and his family. During the three days that I stayed with them, I explained to them that it was not a sannyas and they could come and visit me. It was with a heavy heart that they bade me farewell and wished me all that I wanted to achieve.

In Bombay, I got my luggage cleared with the help of our centre there and they arranged with the truck service to send it to Pondicherry. I had a luncheon meeting with Pandit Ravi Shankar who had become a good friend and wanted me to return to America, where he felt that I truly belonged. I told him that my decision to stay at Sri Aurobindo Ashram was truly final. He was disappointed but wished me well, though he neither understood nor approved. None of my family or friends could understand this decision. For all of them I was a very vibrant, intelligent, self-willed girl, full of life and interested in all the good things that life has to offer. How could I be a recluse in an Ashram? They all predicted that I would leave the Ashram in a short period of time and return to them or go back to America. On the other hand, they also knew that I was too self-willed to be swayed from my decision.

I returned to Pondicherry. Let me tell you that it was not at all easy for me. Everything in the Ashram and in Pondicherry was quite contrary to my way of life and my nature. The Ashram with all its facilities still seemed ascetic in its outward appearance. People were curious about me. They wanted to meet me. But I was not interested in anything or anybody except the Mother, my relation with her and the yoga. I wanted nothing but a communion with her.

I started sending a dishful of jasmines—*Purity* in spiritual parlance—and a country rose—*Surrender*—in its midst. Vasudha-ben kindly carried it to the Mother. The Mother was so gracious! She took all my flowers one by one and sent the flowers of the *Divine Grace*. I was thrilled with the experience. Day after day, for months this communion through flowers representing my aspiration for purity and surrender, and her force and blessings of the *Divine Grace* to achieve it went on. As long as the *Divine Grace* was there, I was sure to receive it. This established firmly my determination to stay here under the Mother's watchful eyes and loving care. The stamp of the *Divine Grace* was indelible and I was to realise its imprint in all circumstances without exception. I will give you an instance.

It was the 11th February 1965. I had sent the Mother only one flower of *Surrender* in a beautiful lotus shaped Japanese candle-holder. The Mother returned it with a single flower of the *Divine Grace*, which I kept in the kitchen. It was a Thursday, so we used to go to Usha's house in the evening to read *The Adventure of Consciousness* to a small group of friends. I read it till it was time for them to go to the Playground for meditation. I always meditated at home; but that day, somehow they asked me to go with them. So, Richard and I accepted to go.

After the meditation, we were asked to remain seated since there was some trouble in the town due to the language riot and we were safer in the Playground. Richard was then called for duty since the hooligans had ransacked the Nursing Home, which was located in a remote area. He was called to inspect the damage. He found that all of the

surgical equipment, all the mattresses, pillows, bedsheets and curtains had gone into the bonfire, which had been lit in the middle of the street. After that they took away all the crockery and everything in the kitchen except the electric stove and my vase containing the *Divine Grace* that the Mother had sent. Richard's room was emptied of all his clothes and other possessions. Then, they came to my side of the house. All the books were thrown into the fire from the room near the street but the flowers of *Sat-chit-ananda* and *Divine Grace* which were sent by the Mother and had been pressed in the books were scattered all over the room. In Richard's room too these pressed flowers were the only things that remained.

Then, they came to the middle room, where they found my precious three-in-one Grundig record-player-cum radio-cum cassette player. Grundig is the well-known German company that made the best equipment in the world. And since I wanted to offer the very best to the Mother, I had purchased it. Unfortunately, the record player, which could continuously play ten records one after the other, was slightly damaged due to the rough weather at sea during the voyage. I called the projector room people to see whether they could repair it. They said that they would require some part, which could be supplied only by the company. Now, I could not offer that damaged piece to the Mother. And the idea lingered in my head that in case I had to go back to America, I could sell this radiogram for at least Rs. 2,500 and buy a ticket to return to America. However, I was not comfortable with this idea, since it implied a reservation in my surrender to the Mother. But the contrast of my life here compared to in America, especially on the physical plane was very great. The only thing that kept me here was the Mother who kindled my psychic aspiration and made it so strong that I was reluctant to leave.

I usually went to the Ashram in the morning to leave my flowers for the Mother. Significantly, it was on that very morning that I stood before the photo of Sri Aurobindo in the middle of his symbol in the Meditation Hall. I looked into his penetrating eyes and a spontaneous prayer arose in my heart: "Lord, break the bonds I have not the strength to break and make me totally, absolutely Thine. Let my surrender be complete and integral."

Lo and behold! This radiogram, my only hope for going back to America was thrown into the fire. My attachment to America was burnt to ashes. Besides, my cupboard containing perfumes, bath-oils, body-lotions, shampoos and all such toilette items was emptied and everything was thrown out.

Then, they came to my cupboard of clothes. It was half emptied and they must have run out of the house as if burnt by the fire. For, they burnt the most precious thing the Mother had sent me while I was in America: her crown. All my silk clothes remained which I distributed among friends and relatives, for I did not want any attachment to stand between the Mother and myself. The room in which I meditated every day in the mornings and evenings remained intact and absolutely untouched, along with the books: *The Mother* and *Savitri*. They did not or rather could not even enter there.

Richard came back to the Playground with the flower of *Divine Grace*, which the Mother had sent me in the morning. It was two o'clock in the early hours of the morning when someone came looking for me: "Where is Kailas?" When he saw me, he said:

“The Mother is anxious about you. She is asking how you are.” I smiled and, pointing to the flower in my hand, I said: “Please tell the Mother that the Divine Grace is with me and so there is nothing to worry about at all. I am fine.” Tears of joy surged up as I realized how the Mother cared for her child! What a living Grace!

We all spent the night in the Playground, and could go to our respective homes only in the morning. When I came back to the Nursing Home with Richard and saw the house, I was unmoved and calm. I was happy to see my meditation room untouched. Later when we were going to the Ashram, we met two Ashram ladies who, lamenting our loss, said: “We feel sorry for you. How are you?” I said: “Very fine. But why do you feel sorry when I don’t feel sorry at all?” One of them exclaimed: “But you lost everything you held precious!” I answered: “No, you are mistaken. What I hold most precious is still with me, intact.” They asked: “Oh! What is that?” I said: “The Divine Grace.” Perhaps, they did not understand nor did I explain and they quietly went away.

The Mother sent mattresses and other things needed for Richard and me. She asked Bula-da to send me a fan. She even sent me her lipstick, cream, manicure set and perfume. Then, I asked to see her. When I went to her, she asked: “Are you sorry?” I replied: “No, Mother. But I regret only one thing. I lost the crown you sent me.” She said: “Ah! But you have got all that I intended you to have.” I said: “I am extremely blessed, but...” She interrupted me: “You were very much attached to it even when it had served its purpose. So, it had to be taken away. It was an action of Kali. Do you like Kali?” I said: “Of course! She speeds up progress.” She explained: “Yes, you have got all that I intended you to have with it. The experiences that you had are wonderful. But it is your attachment that is taken away. Nobody can take away from you what the Divine gives. You must now go on with my blessings. You will realize what you are meant to.” I still asked hesitatingly: “Mother, is it a promise? In this life?” She answered: “Yes, it is a promise. You will go very far, beyond your imagination, beyond your asking, very far, my child.” I do not know how far I have gone, but I am certainly a different person from what I was. And yet, I know I have very far to go. The Mother, as usual, asked: “Shall we meditate?” I replied: “Yes, Mother.”

She took away all my anxiety about the crown. I felt as if my head was held between two puissant hands and I was sailing smoothly on a sea of golden light. I woke up as if from a trance. She held my hands and said: “Remember, I am always with you. Au revoir, ma petite.” “Au revoir, Douce Mère!” I returned as light as a feather.

In a few days, the Nursing Home was repaired and I went back to stay there. Richard was asked to continue to stay there too so that I would not be alone in that house. I continued to send her flowers and she continued to return the dish, filling it with other flowers like *Supramentalised Psychological Perfection*, or *Perfect Radiating Purity*, as long as they were in season. Her comment on *Supramentalised Psychological Perfection* is: “A psychological perfection aspiring to be divinised.” She would put a different central flower such as *Supramental Consciousness*, *Supramental Sun*, *Supramental Sat-chit-ananda*, etc. The flowers I sent were invariably: jasmine or *Purity*, roses, *Radha’s Consciousness*, *Constant Remembrance of the Divine*, *Sincerity*, *Energy turned towards*

the Divine, Power of the Truth in the Subconscious, Trust in the Divine. This continued every day for four years.

For me this meant a constant communion between me and the Mother, training me to give everything of myself, 'drop by drop' and to receive her incessant flow of Grace, Light, Power and Help.

Then, one day, Vasudha-ben told me: "Kailas, do you know that the Mother herself takes your flowers one by one and arranges the flowers she gives to you?" I said: "I am so grateful that you told me this. Maybe, I could send her flowers but she need not."

Vasudha-ben said: "Oh! No! She cannot just take your flowers without responding." So, I said: "Alright then, I won't send flowers. I will send her flowers painted on cards, which she can use." Vasudha-ben said: "Oh, that would be good!"

(To be continued)

KAILAS JHAVERI

MEDITATION

THE bow bent
String drawn
Arrow gleaming,
Just for release
The archer's strain
Eager for target.

The eagle motionless
About to swoop.
The oblivious rodent
Just within grasp!
The hound's leap
Shall catch up the hare
A moment along for the kill!
All obstacles
Disappear in a flash,
The impossible occurs now!

K. N. VIJU

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

Prayer, Pain and Love: Two Planes of Lyricism

TRANSLATION is not just a fraud. It may be absurd at times. The rhythm and vibrations are part and parcel of mantric poetry or the poetry of incantation. How could one translate Tagore's *aaji joto tara tobo akashe*? I was wondering about that, as I walked through the long procession of the singing crowd the night before the *Pous Mela*, that cold night of 22nd December, which brings in the song freshly every year. It reminds us of the forgotten stars and the mighty face hidden behind them. We walk in the cool night through the tall dark trees and feel an ecstasy rising with the song, spreading everywhere its intense fragrance. The song seizes the Divine and pulls him down to the singing procession! Or He is trapped by Tagore's words. Nobody could translate the song. If it was mantric poetry, it was born for a particular language. Yet, there are lyrics by Tagore,—the poetry of prayer, love and pain—which may be perceived even in the translations. They may be studied with reference to certain poems by Sri Aurobindo.

Throughout his life, Tagore seems to have kept an eye on the Divine. It seems to have been a constant memory. And it seems to have kept him conscious all the time about the temple within, which is to be cleaned repeatedly for the smooth installation of the Presence there. His poetry speaks of this long rapport with a Presence playing hide and seek with him throughout his life.

The painful theme of Sri Aurobindo's *The Dream Boat* is a recurring idea in Tagore's poetry. It is expressed in different ways and with different metaphors, not just in *Gitanjali*, but also in lyrics written after 1913. The failure of timing is an eternal spiritual crisis for the pilgrim soul.

He came and sat by my side but I woke not. What a cursed sleep it was, O miserable me! He came when the night was still, he had his harp in his hands, and my dreams became resonant with its melodies. Alas, why are my nights all thus lost? Ah, why do I ever miss his sight whose breath touches my sleep? (*Gitanjali*: 26)

The same pain is expressed in a different way in *Crossing* (16):

You came to my door in the dawn and sang; it angered me to be awakened from sleep, and you went away unheeded.

You came in the noon and asked for water; it vexed me in my work, and you were sent away with reproaches.

You came in the evening with your flaming torches,

You seemed to me like a terror and I shut my door.

Now in the midnight I sit alone in my lampless room and call you back whom I turned away in insult.

Sri Aurobindo's *The Dream Boat* is a more realistic presentation of this spiritual tragedy caused by the failure of response. It lacks the colourful imagery of Tagore, but it is more painful than Tagore's mystic lyrics on response failure. In the first stanza, the soul listens to the query of the 'gold god':

Do you come now? is the heart's fire ready?

Stanza two speaks of the response failure in a way which is perfectly real to the spiritual pilgrim. The specific problem is contained in the two lines—

It recalled all that the life's joy cherished,
Imaged the felicity it must leave lost for ever...

This is specifically the reason why man refused to say 'yes' to the infinite adventure. The last stanza is exactly expressive of the tragic situation in the life of an individual. Sri Aurobindo chooses two simple words—'hollowness' and 'void'—to indicate the result of a wrong choice.

In Tagore, the prayer for purification is quite genuine. This poetry puts on a new colour in the English translation:

Do not turn away thy face from my
heart's dark secrets, but burn them
till they are alight with thy fire. (*Crossing*: 4)

Touch me with thy fire,
Burn and purify my life,
Lift my body
And make it thy temple lamp.
Let my songs be the oil
That feeds the flame.
In the core of Darkness
Stars blossom forth at thy touch,
And my agony aflame
Rises to heaven. (Translated by Arindam Bose)

Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore knows well that 'pain is the hammer' of God and that God is an oppressor because He loves:

Thou hast done well, my lover, thou hast done well to send me thy fire of pain.
For my incense never yields its perfume till it burns and my lamp is blind
till it is lighted.

When my mind is numb its torpor must be stricken by thy love's lightning; and the
very darkness that blots my world burns like a torch when set afire
by thy thunder. (*Crossing*: 6)

Have you come to me as my sorrow? All the more I must cling to you. Your face is veiled in the dark, all the more I must see you.
 At the blow of death from your hand let my life leap up in a flame. Tears flow from my eyes—let them flow round your feet in worship.
 And let the pain in my breast speak to me that you are still mine. (*Crossing*: 24)

For Sri Aurobindo, pain means this and also something different. He is a deputy of the aspiring world and his is a god's labour, which is to lift man to God and also to bring God down to man:

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
 To bring the fire to man;
 But the hate of hell and human spite
 Are my meed since the world began. (*A God's Labour*)

In Tagore's poetry the psychic comes out frequently in various forms, but most interestingly in the love lyrics:

You will lead me from star to star to waken me in new mornings of love. It is your love that draws out the flow of my being through the maze of channels of new life over your endless worlds.
 You will startle me with new visions of fulfilment at every bend of the road and fashion my moments with immortal forms of joy. (*Poems*: 28)

Early in his life, Sri Aurobindo has expressed his love for the Divine in this simple way in his sonnet entitled *I have a hundred lives* (SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 125). In Sri Aurobindo's lyrics, we rarely see the gesture of prayer. He speaks of his experiences of love and pain and those feelings are too far from us. That is precisely the reason why Sri Aurobindo has failed to achieve the status of a popular lyric poet. This surely is not to degrade the status of Tagore, the lyricist, who is the first among the modern Bengali poets to use the lyric as a means of ascension of consciousness.

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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FLOWER OF ALL ETERNITY

THERE is no rapture earth can give
Surpassing memory of Thee,
To kneel before Thee one could live
In oceans of infinity.

There is no light that does not pale
Before Thy timeless golden form
No sea on which we could not sail
Secure in tidal wave or storm.

The helmsman He who steers our course,
The star who ever guides us, Thee,
The rain of Grace that on us pours
Thy splendour and Thy majesty.

The beacon of our godward climb
The answer to our soul's desire
O Mother-Force beyond all time
Lift us higher, ever higher

Until we reach Thy lotus feet
And in the roses of Thy hands
Invincible and heaven-sweet
An offering without demands

Our lives in Thy omniscient care
Surrender to live alone in Thee,
Transcendent goddess bright and fair,
Flower of all eternity.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

THE INSPIRATION OF BANKIMCHANDRA'S ANANDA MATH

HISTORIANS like Jadunath Sarkar, R.C. Majumdar and literary critics have generally held that *Ananda Math* was a product of Bankimchandra's imagination. The painstaking research of Kishanchand Bhakat, assistant teacher of mathematics in the M.N. Academy High School, Lalgola, in the district of Murshidabad, spanning over two decades seems to have proved otherwise. Having been District Magistrate of Murshidabad at one time and now the Divisional Commissioner, I was impelled to verify the claims. To do so I visited the ruins of the Lalgola Raj Palace, now West Bengal's sole open-air jail, and this is what I found.

1.1. The seeds of Bankimchandra's anti-British sentiments were sown in Berhampore, the district headquarters of Murshidabad district where he was posted as a Deputy Magistrate [he was the first Bengali to be offered a job in the civil service after he graduated with grace marks in Bengali, his examiner having been none other than Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who did not give him pass marks!]. It was the 15th of December 1873 when Bankimchandra was, as usual, crossing the Barrack Square field opposite the Collectorate in his palanquin while some Englishmen were playing cricket. Suddenly one Lt. Colonel Duffin stopped the palanquin with some abusive remarks and insisted that it should be taken out of the field. When Bankim refused to abandon his customary route, Duffin apparently forced him to alight from the palanquin and pushed him violently (as reported in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 8.1.1974). Witnesses to the incident included the Raja of Lalgola Jogindranarain Roy, Durgashankar Bhattacharji of Berhampur, Judge Bacebridge, Reverend Barlow, Principal Robert Hand and some others. Furious at the insult, Bankimchandra filed a criminal case against the Colonel, with the Lalgola Raja, Durgashankar Bhattacharji and Hand cited as witnesses. Duffin had to get a lawyer from Krishnagar in Nadia district, as no one in Berhampore was willing to appear for him, while all the local lawyers had signed vakalatnamas for Bankimchandra.

1.2. On 12th January 1874 the Magistrate, Mr. Winter, summoned Duffin and had just begun to question him when Judge Bacebridge entered and requested a few words in his chamber. After a little while they called in Bankimchandra and Duffin. Apparently they told Bankimchandra that Duffin had not recognized that Bankim was a Deputy Magistrate and regretted the incident. They requested Bankimchandra to withdraw the case. This he was not prepared to do but after much persuasion agreed provided Duffin offered a formal apology in open court. Reluctantly, Duffin agreed. Winter took his chair in the court thereafter and in his presence, before a packed court, Lt. Col. Duffin offered an unconditional apology to Bankimchandra. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15.1.1874 reports: "It appears that the colonel and the Babu were perfect strangers to each other and he did not know who he was when he affronted him. On being informed afterwards of the position of the Babu, Col. Duffin expressed deep contrition and a desire to apologise. The apology was made in due form in open court where about a thousand spectators, native and Europeans, were assembled."

2. Almost immediately thereafter we find Bankimchandra taking three months leave. After this incident there must have been considerable resentment in the Berhampore Cantonment among the British militia and, apprehending bodily harm, Rao Jogindranarain Roy took Bankimchandra away to stay with him in Lalgola.

3. In Lalgola the Guru of the raja's family was Pandit Kali Brahma Bhattacharya who practised tantrik sadhana. Kishanchand Bhakat has obtained an excerpt of seven slokas from a book in the family of Kali Brahma Bhattacharya whose rhythm, sense and even some words bear an uncanny resemblance to Bankim's song. It is most probable that Bankimchandra took the first few lines of his immortal "Bande Mataram" (up to *ripudalabarining*) from here because in the first edition of the novel in *Banga Darshan* (Chaitra 1287, pp. 555-556), these lines are given within quotation marks and the spelling is most ungrammatically retained as "matarang". Bankim faced considerable criticism on this account from Haraprasad Shastri, Rajkrishna Muhopadhyay, and others. In the later editions he removed the quotation marks and changed the spelling to the proper Sanskrit "mataram", wiping out all trace of the borrowing.

4.1. There is an image of Kali in the Lalgola palace temple that is unique. Its four hands are bereft of any weapon. The two lower hands are folded in front (*karabadhha*), the palm of one covered by that of the other, just as a prisoner's hands are shackled. From behind, the image is shackled to the wall with numerous iron chains. Kali is black, with terrifying mien, naked, a serpent between her feet, and Shiva a supine corpse before her. This represented to Bankim what India, the Mother, had become:

"The Brahmacharin said, 'Look on the Mother as she now is.'

Mohendra said in fear, 'It is Kali.'

'Yes, Kali enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom. She is stripped of all, therefore naked. Today the whole country is a burial ground, therefore is the Mother garlanded with skulls. Her own God she tramples under her feet. Alas, my Mother!'" (Sri Aurobindo's translation, 1909)

4.2. It is extremely significant that on either side of this unusual Kali we find Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kartik and Ganesh, who are never represented with this goddess. It is in this Kali that Bankim envisioned Mother as she will be and that is why he wrote, "*tvam hi durga dashapraharana dharini*", Thou, indeed, art Durga, ten-armed, weapon-wielding. It is this temple that is the source of Bankimchandra's 'Monastery of Bliss'.

4.3. To reach this temple a tunnel existed, whose vestiges are still visible, from another temple that is now in ruins and covered up with jungle. This ruined edifice was the Jagaddhatri temple that Bankim would have seen and described in his novel thus:

"Jagaddhatri, Protrectress of the world, wonderful, perfect, rich with every ornament ...the Mother as she was. ...She trampled under foot the elephants of the forest and all wild beasts, and in the haunt of the wild beasts she erected her lotus throne. She was covered with every ornament, full of laughter and beauty. She was in hue like the young sun, splendid with all opulence and empire. ...The Brahmacharin then showed him a dark underground passage... In a dark room in the bowels of the earth an insufficient light

entered from some unperceived outlet. By that faint light he saw an image of Kali.” (*ibid.*)

4.4. A little to the east is another temple in which the image of goddess Durga was worshipped by Kali Brahma Bhattacharya—“Mother as she will be”:

“The ascetic...began to ascend another underground passage. ...In a wide temple built in stone of marble they saw a beautifully fashioned image of the ten-armed Goddess made in gold, laughing and radiant in the light of the early sun. ...Her ten arms are extended towards the ten regions and they bear many a force imaged in her manifold weapons; her enemies are trampled under her feet and the lion on which her foot rests is busy destroying the foe. ...on her right Lakshmi as Prosperity, on her left Speech, giver of learning and science, Kartikeya with her as strength, Ganesh as Success.”

5. In the tenth chapter of *Ananda Math* there is an elaborate description of an extremely opulent building housing a dazzling image of four-armed Vishnu with two huge demons, beheaded, lying in front, Lakshmi garlanded with lotuses on the left with flowing hair, as though terrified, and on the right Sarasvati with book and musical instrument, surrounded with incarnate raga-raginis and on his lap one lovelier than either goddess, more opulent and more majestic—the Mother. The dynastic deity of the Lalgola Raja family was Vishnu and the image was worshipped inside the huge palace. Underground chambers can still be seen here and it is possible that the Kali icon was originally housed in one of these, reached through the tunnels.

6. A little further on is the ruin of an ancient Buddhist Vihara where the Buddhist goddess Kalkali was worshipped. The stream that flows by is named after her, and is mentioned in the novel. In chapter 5 of the novel he describes this “great monastery engirt with ruined masses of stone. Archaeologists would tell us that this was formerly a monastic retreat of the Buddhists and afterwards became a Hindu monastery.” This is where Kalyani first sees the noble, white-bodied, white-haired, white-bearded, white-robed ascetic. Is Kali Brahma Bhattacharya the inspiration for this figure?

7. To the north of the palace, through what was then a dense forest, one reaches the confluence of Kalkali, Padma and Bhairav rivers known as “Sati-maar than”. Here, under a massive banyan tree, groups of Bir and Shri sects of violent Tantriks used to meet. Kali Brahma used to tutor them in opposing British rule to free the shackled Mother. One tunnel from the Kali temple goes straight to the Kalkali river, whose banks were dotted with a number of small temples in which these tantriks used to take shelter. It is said that in this Kali temple Bankim witnessed a very old tantrik offering a red hibiscus to the goddess, shouting “*Jaya ma danujdalani, bande bandini matarang*”. Is it mere coincidence that if “bandini” is dropped from this tantrik’s exclamation we get exactly Bankim’s “*bande matarang*”?

8. Bhakat hazards a guess that this may have occurred on the full moon night of Maagh, 1280 B.S. (Jan-Feb 1874) when the death anniversary of Rao Ramshankar Roy used to be observed in the Lalgola family. This occasion occurred very soon after the court case in Berhampur and Bankimchandra’s taking leave. On this anniversary, sadhus from Benares used to arrive at this Kali temple. Repeatedly Bankim refers to “Maghi Purnima” in the novel.

9. The inspiration Bankim received from all this is reflected first in his essay "Aamaar Durgotsab" (1874).

10. In the same area we find the Raghunath temple with icons of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Radha and Krishna, with 51 Shiva lingas and 34 Saalgraams. It is said that these were kept here from the time of the Sanyasi Revolt of 1772-73. Bhakat points out that near the Lalgola zamindari was the estate of Rani Bhawani of Natore who used to distribute food freely to the ascetics and was therefore renowned as goddess Annapurna herself. Her patronage extended right up to Benares. In 1772-3 Warren Hastings, the Governor General, forfeited a large portion of the Rani's estate. This led to stoppage of the supplies to the Sanyasis. The famine that followed in Bengal fanned the flames and the Sanyasis attacked the British. Led by the tantrik Mahant Ramdas of Dinajpur's Kanchan Mashida monastery, they deposited the icons of their deities with Rao Atmaram Roy, the Lalgola zamindar, and left on their mission.

11. Bhakat has identified Bankimchandra's "Padachinnha" village with Dewan Sarai village which tallies with all the data in the novel: north to south beside Padachinnha the earthen embankment built by the Nawab runs through "to Murshidabad, Cossimbazar or Calcutta" where Kalyani urges Mohendra to go and also mentions "town" which could be a reference to "nagar/Rajnagar" in Birbhum which can also be reached by this embankment. (Chapter 1 of *Ananda Math*.) On either side of the embankment there used to be dense forest, and at the confluence, at Basumati (located in Nashipur, now washed into the river) was a burning ghat frequented by Bhojpuri Tantriks. All the temples mentioned in the novel are also here, as also the tunnels, the Vishnu temple, Kalkali river. Bhojpuri speaking looters and sepoys feature in the novel who tally with the fact of such people having been brought into Lalgola by the zamindar to act as sepoys and servants. Bhakat himself is a scion of such a family of staff-wielding guards and servants. They used to live in the "Deshwali" area in the jungle adjacent the palace on the banks of the Kalkali and Padma with surnames like Mishra, Pande, Rai and used to receive initiation in tantric worship from Kali Brahma. The guru was addressed as "maharaj".

12. Bhakat proposes that Satyananda of the novel is none other than Kali Brahma Bhattacharya; that Dhirananda is based on the court-poet and priest of Lalgola, Trailokyanath Smritibhushan; that Bhabananda is based on the character of Raja Jogindranarain Roy (himself a tantric sadhak), who stood by Bankim and helped him get away from the wrath of the British militia; that Jibananda reflects much of Bankim himself. Bankim would have lived in the first floor room that still exists in the Kali temple courtyard. In the ground floor room lived Dr. Parry who had spent nearly Rs.10,000 in 1873 to make a medical library for the Lalgola palace. He is said to have worshipped Kali and could be the original for the physician in the novel who is loyal to the British.

On the basis of these findings, it can now be asserted that *Ananda Math* was not just a figment of the novelist's imagination, but was rooted in a personal insult suffered by Bankimchandra and in the experiences he had in Lalgola as a guest of Rao Jogindranarain Roy.

WHISPER

LISTEN to the whisper that lives in the breeze,
Hear the wind sigh in the ancient trees,
Feel the gentle teardrops that fall on the dew,
Tears that are being wept for you.
In the ocean of dreamlight, the timeless womb,
Where the moon bewitches the sea,
From a sky of love that is far above,
The whispering comes to me.
In the deepest night, when the stars are bright,
When the heart is at rest in the soul,
From the mystery of eternity
Comes a call to a distant goal.
Silver is the moonlight, and deep her spell,
Lost is the world in its sleep;
Fated is the tide where the dreamers dwell,
Precious are the tears that weep.
I have no understanding, my eyes are blind,
I am held by the moon as a thrall,
But I long to fly in my heart's own sky,
To follow a whispered call.
Listen to the whisper that lives in the breeze,
Hear the wind sigh in the ancient trees,
Feel the gentle teardrops that fall on the dew,
Tears that are being wept for you.

ROGER CALVERLEY

“ME”, “MINE” AND “OTHERS”

It is natural human behaviour to think first of oneself, then of those dear and near, and only then of others.

Sage Vasishtha, in his spiritual instructions to young Prince Rama says:

अयं बन्धुरयं नेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्।
उदारचरितानां वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्॥

It is only the narrow-minded who consider that this one is a friend and that other is not; for the large-hearted, the entire world is a single family.

Thus the ideal condition would be to seek the abolition of the ego, with its attachments, preferences, likes and dislikes, so that considerations of “me”, “mine” and “others” do not colour one’s judgment and behaviour.

But transcending all sense of possessiveness is indeed extremely difficult, if not totally impossible. So, what should one do if one is quite unable to give up all sense of “mine”, entirely excluding the feeling of separateness from the “others”? An apparently simple solution to this problem has been suggested by a poet in the following shloka:

त्यक्तव्यो ममकारस्त्यक्तुं यदि शक्यते नासौ।
कर्तव्यो ममकारः किन्तु सर्वत्र कर्तव्यः॥

It would be best if one can totally abandon the feeling of “mine”. But if not able to do it, then one should try to include everybody within this feeling of “mine”.

This solution to the problem, though it sounds simple is asking for nothing less than the abolition of the ego, because it is only in the condition of no “ego” that universal love can emerge and influence one’s relationship with others.

B. G. PATTEGAR

CHILD EDUCATION

In the olden days it was believed that a child was nothing but an adult in a miniature form.

But with the advent of different branches of science it was proved that like his body a child develops in stages to his full manhood in all aspects. As Jean Epstein says, "...regarding the development of a child it would be easier to speak of development without giving specific quality, for it is admitted that a child as a whole undergoes a slow maturity. Therefore it is not proper to treat a child the same way as an adult."

The scientific findings naturally forced the educationists to think about child-education on different lines. This is the reason why for the last fifty years different individuals in different countries have made a concentrated effort to develop fruitful systems of education for the very young so that the child may grow as he should: in stages towards his adulthood. Of all the systems that have been tried out in the last century, quite a few have come down to our time. Still in practice are those that were developed by Montessori, Celestin Freinet, Rudolf Steiner, Decroly to mention only a few. Though each one of them satisfies a certain number of requirements in educating a child, yet one feels that something more is needed in order to make them an integral system of education for the very young. The very first steps in the world of education either makes or breaks an individual's academic carrier.

Some thirty or forty years ago, at least in India, a child's very first contact with anything regarding education began at home with the family members. The parents and grandparents took the responsibility to introduce a child to his alphabets and numbers. (R. K. Narayan in one of his novels spoke of a boy who had his initial lessons with his grandmother.) Learning then was not something regimental, rigid or a disciplinary obligation for a child. He recited his alphabets and numbers while playing or even while eating. It was a part of his daily life that was free of all rules and discipline. And by the time he knew his letters, he also knew a few simple rhymes, sentences and even simple texts. Along with the numbers he came in contact with some general knowledge too, like four stands for the four Vedas, six for seasons, seven for oceans etc. Thus in a very non-academic way a child learnt quite a few things and by the time he entered school he was equipped with the rudiments of a language and numbers. Thus there was created in him a curiosity to find out what this place was where he was sent to learn something more.

But due to different reasons this type of education discontinued and we have handed over the child's education from the very first step to an institution which means an individual's academic life begins at the age of two and a half or three in a disciplined manner.

This exposure of a very young child to the outside world has mixed reactions. Let us consider the most important aspect first. At the very tender age of two and a half or three a child feels most secure at home among the family members. We do not have to go far to find out the truth. We see constantly children hugging the knee of the father or the mother while talking to strangers or answering to their questions. His world is his parents, not so much the father as the mother.

But when he goes to school, in the beginning he feels very insecure. He is lost in the midst of unknown faces. Faces may belong to those who are of his age yet they are not his people and this sense of insecurity makes the child nervous, fretful and even sometimes vicious. The atmosphere is not friendly. He does not have the arms to run into when he is hurt. The outcome is: he does not like to take part in all that happens in the classroom. Now and then he may feel a little curious, but the moment he remembers the absence of his parents he withdraws into himself. It may not be that he is unwilling to play or make some figures with some wooden blocks or whatever the class is engaged in, but what he wants to do must be done in his own corner, at home, having the presence of the known persons. So naturally he wants to get back home: to his own world.

This return to the family fold predominates his subconscious wants. Moreover, if a child is timid and shy he may shun the nearness of other children as his defence against all assaults, be they physical or mental. Yet in the midst of other children he can't spend his hours as on a solitary island, thus he has to face different situations. And if by any chance due to certain happenings a fear psychosis has developed then the child may refuse to go to school. And in this way the first seed of dislike for school is sown. Nobody can be blamed for it but the fact is that it is happening with very many tiny tots. When there is dislike for a place, there creeps in unwillingness to work which is very natural.

Another point that needs to be taken into account is the teacher-student relationship on this level. We have already mentioned that the mother's nearness is of utmost necessity at this tender age. Because of this need the teachers at Nursery level and at Kindergarten have often to play the part of a surrogate mother to most of their students. And here comes the difficulty. As it is natural that there is a good number of students in each class and all of them are of the same age therefore their need is also more or less identical. So even if a teacher is willing to do her best with her children, it is next to impossible due to the sheer number. Just to keep them under control sometimes becomes quite a job. Thus a certain amount of discipline and disciplinary action become unavoidable. Sometimes a teacher has to even be harsh and strict so that she may be able to teach something. Discipline is a necessity no doubt and even harsh treatment if it becomes unavoidable but then what do we see as the consequence?

Children being of different temperament react to these disciplines in different manners. Some who are bold may not react the same way as the timid ones. So some may remain quite free and bold, others may shy away for a certain amount of time and again others may withdraw completely into themselves. Because of these diverse reactions among the children, they ultimately divide up into very distinctive groups. As Dominique Mezan in her work with Kindergarten children found out "...among the very young, children divide primarily into three main groups: that is, the bold ones, timid ones and the indifferent ones." And then she says, "...in a large group when the loquacious ones are not allowed to speak, they are bored; when the timid ones are left to themselves, they become indifferent and those who refuse to communicate with the others are left to themselves, just go to sleep." She concludes saying that it is essential to subdivide a class into small groups as many times as possible during the day so that every child gets

personal attention from the teacher or teachers and feels wanted and loved; thus a curiosity and willingness to learn shows up more often.

The question is, what do we want to teach at this level? Is our education to be information oriented or interest and knowledge oriented? If there is interest then knowledge can be acquired even singlehandedly. It is said that the great reformist of Bengal, Kesav Chandra Sen discontinued his university studies as he was much more interested in having knowledge than information. It is said that he studied all by himself and contemplated for hours on end and we can't question the depth of his knowledge. But in general, education for us means to learn (this word "learn" has a very vague meaning for most of us) and pass and ultimately go through school and college with good marks so that a good job can be in our hand. Thus study for us means to learn to read, to write to do sums etc, etc.

Everything is planned and a child is to follow meekly all that is put in front of him. But to begin at the beginning we need a vehicle of expression. That naturally is language.

So we begin with a language and language being the most important of our disciplines, gets the utmost attention and yet it is found that a large number of students remain weak to very weak in this subject. The reason can be diverse: it may be timidity, unwillingness to learn or even a lesser degree of intelligence. As we have already mentioned that the young tend to divide themselves into subgroups, the natural outcome is that in a big class a few learn, a few understand somewhat and quite a few don't learn anything. But if they are separated and given personal attention then something surely can be taught. Otherwise those who begin as weak students at the level of Kindergarten find the going quite difficult and as time passes, gradually lessons become quite incomprehensible and in Yvette Jenger's words, "failures follow failures." It is but a natural outcome, for if I don't have a proper and solid base of the medium through which I am to learn the other disciplines then how can I understand anything?

We come across identical problems regarding the numbers. Somehow mathematics is a discipline which has remained the biggest obstacle in many a student's academic life. But then are we to understand that the very subject is difficult for the ordinary intelligence?

The Japanese educationist Toru Kuman thinks not. His involvement with education is rather unique. He found that one of his sons was poor in maths and was getting very low grades. So in order to help his son he began to prepare some worksheets. Later those worksheets developed into a cohesive programme which is followed by millions not only in Japan but also in the United States and some Western countries and are getting exceptional results.

Just for the sake of curiosity let us see what his method is.

"We offer a set of carefully sequenced or graduated worksheets containing math problems. The student must attain a required level of competence in completing each of them within a prescribed time span, or within what we call standard completion time. This is a must in our method. Not the matter of whether the students score 100%. Only when the students have attained that crucial proficiency are they given the go ahead to move on to the next, slightly more difficult worksheet."

How do they complete their work?

“The student first learns to add one and always one to two long rows of figures. The next step is to add two and always two to another two rows of figures. And so it goes. Only when the student has amply mastered the assignment of the first worksheet can he graduate from that stage and advance to the next.”

Educationists all around the world feel that education at the very beginning must be very solid and yet it should be imparted in varied ways and means. Children should get involved frequently in the subject that they are learning through demonstration and participation.

Let us see what kind of work is expected from a teacher. In France Luce Berenger wanted to teach her students of Kindergarten the concept of volume. For young children the notion of volume is full, not full and empty. In order to teach different measures in volume the teacher brought in the class a number of glasses of different capacities and filled them up with a drink. She asked her students to take one glass each and drink a specific number of mouthfuls. Having done as was asked the children found that some glasses were empty, some half filled and others even more filled. Thus they came to see that the volume differs with the size. Similarly another teacher wanted to teach the notion of vapour. So she boiled some coloured water and after a while the children saw that the original mark was much above the existing level of water. The water had gone to the atmosphere in the form vapour to change later into dew, frost, cloud etc.

Exposure to advertisement in journals and on TV is a powerful means to teach the young ones. Listening to the teacher and at the same time having visual contacts make a deep impression. In the west they have access to cameras, cassette players and even computers. These certainly are beyond our means. But surely we can make a concentrated effort to have small groups as classes for Nursery, Kindergarten and elementary sections so that some personal attention can be given to the need of each child. And this should not be difficult as there are educated young people in our country by the million. But the important factor is that the policy makers in the education field of the country should feel the need for such orientation. We are crying hoarse saying that the standard of education is deteriorating year by year. But then with a weak foundation a strong edifice can't be built.

Let us begin at the very beginning and this will certainly make a great difference for the future in the field of education. If we presume that “the child is a jewel needing the greatest care” as says J. A. Comenius, then we have to take some concrete steps to give that care and the sooner the better.

JHARNA GHOSE

(Courtesy: www.searchforlight.org)

ISLAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

The House of Wisdom

DURING the two hundred years of the early Abbasids the Muslim civilization was at the best moment of its glory. Of this age the Arab chronicles say that the world was young when ruled those Caliphs with the fabulous Baghdad as crown-city of the world. The House of Wisdom founded by al-Mamun in 830 at a cost of two hundred thousand dinars was a leading institution of excellence where men of culture arrived from distant lands and lived in the richness of their learning. If the quality of a people is to be judged by the kind of academies they promote, then here we have one such remarkable example. Al-Mamun looked for knowledge where it was evident and made it a point to bring it to his capital. His liberal ideas coupled with intelligence proved rewarding in the long-term gains for the world. The "rediscovery of Greece", as Will Durant puts it, resulted in the flowering of science, literature and art comparable to what was witnessed in later centuries in the Italian Renaissance. Al-Mamun was in contact with the Byzantine emperors and with lavish gifts brought from them books of science and philosophy. The works of Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Ptolemy and others in their possession reached Baghdad and threw open the possibility of newer dimensions entering into our understanding. The unreserved State patronage attracted scholars of great erudition which gave rise to an excellent team of translators. Libraries were set up and the Caliph urged his subjects to read these translations and profit from the ancient wisdom. He also made sure that for scientific work quality instruments were available. This not only gives us an idea about the literary milieu of the time but also speaks of the precious fact that, having come in contact with the secrets of Hellenism, the House of Wisdom acquired, preserved and passed on those secrets to future generations. Greek knowledge and insight would in the coming centuries reach Europe via the Arabic route and change its character in an altogether different way. In that sense it is perhaps justifiably claimed that the renaissance awakening took place in the flourishing of the Islamic pursuits for knowledge.

The roots of this knowledge could be discovered in what the Prophet had enjoined on the Muslims. They were told that they should "seek learning as far as China"—and indeed they did it. More important possibly was the Force released in the creative urge of the civilization. It found instruments and it achieved results in what we may call the secular way. In the social backdrop of the time when not much was present, interaction with other cultures played a significant part. Surely there were religious and political factors, but a certain rational and objective opening did occur which allowed a rush of happy ennobling things of art and of learning to flood and fill life. In this respect we may well appreciate how the inundation took place, how the influences that came from several directions enriched the modes of living. Take the Greek inspiration. The libraries in Constantinople were treasuries of the Athenian wisdom and we might as well say that the

foundations of the rich Muslim culture derived much from its resources. In the process it is very likely that the ancient classics underwent modifications or shifts of emphases because of factors pertaining to another religious or cultural outlook. However, it cannot be denied that al-Mamun's celebrated House of Wisdom or Bayt al-Hikmah had an enduring impact in the conduct of history. It preserved the philosophical and scientific tradition of the ancient world, joining not only the continents but also the epochs of time and of thought.

Tracing connections with the Grecian knowledge, we have the following observation: "As the early scholars in the Islamic world agreed with Aristotle that mathematics was the basis of all science, the scholars of the House of Wisdom first focused on mathematics. Ishaq ibn Hunayn and Thabit ibn Qurrah, for example, prepared a critical edition of Euclid's Elements, while other scholars translated a commentary on Euclid originally written by a mathematician and inventor from Egypt, and still others translated at least eleven major works by Archimedes, including a treatise on the construction of a water clock. Other translations included a book on mathematical theory by Nichomachus of Gerasa, and works by mathematicians like Theodosius of Tripoli, Apollonius Pergacus, Theon, and Menelaus, all basic to the great age of Islamic mathematical speculation that followed." The recognition of scholarship wherever it was, and promoting it, is what contributed to the blossoming of learning in the Islamic system of forward-looking thought. "During a trip to Byzantium in search of manuscripts, Muhammad ibn Musa happened to meet Thabit ibn Qurrah, then a money changer but also a scholar in Syriac, Greek, and Arabic. Impressed by Thabit's learning, Muhammad personally presented him to the Caliph, who was in turn so impressed that he appointed Thabit court astrologer. As Thabit's knowledge of Greek and Syriac was unrivalled, he contributed enormously to the translation of Greek scientific writing and also produced some seventy original works—in mathematics, astronomy, astrology, ethics, mechanics, music, medicine, physics, philosophy, and the construction of scientific instruments."

In the historical sequel the translated texts also included, in varying degrees, Indian, Chinese and Persian works. This had an important bearing upon the growth of sciences in the Islamic world. In mathematics the introduction of Indian numerals including the concept of zero, for instance, revolutionized the entire field. The simplification that came in calculations with them later on led to the development of algebra. "In zoology, anthropology, and certain aspects of alchemy, as well as, of course, in mathematics and astronomy, the tradition of Indian and Persian sciences was dominant, as can be seen in the Epistles (Rasail) of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa') and the translations of ibn Muqaffa'. It must be remembered that the words 'magic' and Magi are related, and that, according to the legend, the Jews learned alchemy and the science of numbers from the Magi, while in captivity in Babylon." The elements of Chinese alchemy can be traced in the word al-klmiya, which is an Arabization of the classical Chinese word Chin-l, or, in some dialects, "*Kim-Ia*, meaning the gold-making juice." We might perhaps trace these Chinese roots of alchemy to the tradition of the Tibetan Buddhism. However, at a later date, through Mongol invasion, Chinese arts and technologies entered

in a major way the Muslim world. Paper manufacturing is one such great event. In fact it is that which made the large-scale translation activity in the House of Wisdom possible.

Apropos of the easy availability of paper we have an interesting account in the following: "The prosperous period," says a study, "for the publishing and selling of books was essential for cultural development. Paper was, therefore, of prime importance in the ninth century. From then on the book business was established in the Orient. However, we do not know whether the publishing was done by the author, a specialized merchant, or both at the same time. Well-stocked bookshops were often set up around the main mosque. Scholars and writers met in them, and copyists were hired there. In addition to the public libraries open to everyone there were reading rooms where anyone, after paying a fee, could consult the work of his choice. Readers squabbled over works copied by well-known calligraphers whose names were scrupulously recorded in the chronicles. The main libraries had their official copyists and their appointed binders. Wealthy writers had teams of such people." In contrast to that what do we see today? A perceptive analysis feels sorry for the prevailing bleak condition: "The entire Arab world translates about 330 books annually, one-fifth the number that Greece translates, says a survey. It adds that in the thousand years since the reign of the Caliph al-Mamun the Arabs have translated as many books as Spain translates in just one year. Even a cursory glance at other Muslim countries, including Pakistan, reveals that the Arab situation is typical. Of the 48 countries with a full or near Muslim majority, none has yet evolved a stable democratic political system. In fact, all Muslim countries are dominated by self-serving corrupt elites who cynically advance their personal interests and steal resources from their people. None of these countries has a university of international stature." Can the times of yore, of the House of Wisdom be revived today? Or is it that a society passes through cycles of evolution and one simply accepts whatever comes in the stride of things? But that would mean passive compliance. There are unparalleled riches of nature in the possession of this world but it lives on borrowed technology and labour. Indeed, riches by themselves can never be sufficient to build up a progressive and prosperous nation or a community. However, there are also genuine concerns about these matters in the minds of serious thinkers, but they seem to be rather helpless. Perhaps the creative vitality that depends upon something else, some mysterious fiat of the spirit, is missing and one is just unable to get it back. The Abassids had it in happy abundance, that "something" which fashions times,—and fortunate were they that they had lent themselves to it successfully.

During the Abbasid supremacy advances in learning became possible to a great extent because of the economic progress. "A vast trading network was created which helped to spread religion, culture, and technology. New business practices such as partnerships, the use of credit, and banks to exchange currency, were developed to handle the increase in trade. The establishment of such a network made the Islamic Empire very wealthy, and helped to stimulate many of their cultural and intellectual achievements."

By way of illustration we may mention here just a few contributions made by the Islamic scholars. The first book on algebra written by Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarazmi is a classic example. This was a pioneering work and was later passed on to the European

universities as a standard reference. The name of the book *Kitab al-Jabr wa-l-Muqabalah* was derived from the second word in the author's title. "One of the basic meanings of *jabr* in Arabic is 'bone-setting' and al-Khwarazmi used it as a graphic description of one of the two operations he uses for the solution of quadratic equations." Geometry was another key subject studied at Bayt al-Hikmah. This was encouraged as "it enlightens the intelligence of the man who cultivates it and gives him the habit of thinking exactly." A critical edition of Euclid's *Elements* was prepared and a number of other mathematical books translated; Archimedes's eleven major works, including a treatise on the construction of a water clock, were among some of these.

In this brief context we may also mention the three sons of Musa ibn Shakir, the Banu Musa. Musa ibn Shakir himself was an astronomer in the court of al-Mamun and his sons devoted their lives and fortunes to the quest for knowledge. They not only sponsored translations of Greek works, but also wrote a series of important original studies of their own. The titles of these studies are: *The Measurement of the Sphere*, *Trisection of the Angle*, and *Determination of two Mean Proportionals to form a single division between two given Quantities*. In addition to these, the Banu Musa also contributed works on celestial mechanics and the atom. But in the down to earth assignments they helped with such practical projects as canal construction.

In the field of technology we have ibn al-Haytham who authored *The Book of Optics*. While describing the anatomy of the eye he enunciates an important aspect of seeing. The scientific understanding is that it is the eye which receives the light thrown by an object, and not the other way round as was thought by the mystics and Aristotelian philosophers. Al-Haytham, born in Iraq in 965, maintained that science should be based on experiment but must have connections with arguments that seek truth. Lindberg puts him in the rank of mathematical giants such as Archimedes, Kepler and Newton. His engineering abilities can very well be judged by the fact that he constructed a dam on the Nile which survives even today. This must be considered as a technological achievement of the tenth century.

Not just mathematics but other subjects also drew the attention of scholars in the House of Wisdom. Thus Hunayn ibn Ishaq translated the entire canon of Greek medical works into Arabic, including the Hippocratic oath. Afterward he became the director of the House and wrote some twenty-nine treatises on medical topics. The book on anatomical details of the eye and its treatments was later translated into Latin and "for centuries was an authoritative text that was studied in both Western and Eastern universities." In this connection we may also speak of al-Razi "who, according to one contemporary account, was a fine teacher and a compassionate physician, who brought rations to the poor and provided nursing for them. He was also a man devoted to common sense, as the titles of two of his works suggest: *The Reason why some Persons and the Common People Leave a Physician even if he is Clever*, and *A Clever Physician does not have the Power to Heal All Diseases, for That is not within the Realm of Possibility*." Al-Razi, unlike scholars of modern times specializing in specific branches of learning, was at once a philosopher, a mathematician and a physician. Another interesting example is that of al-

Kindi, “the first Muslim philosopher to use Aristotelian logic to support Islamic dogma; he also wrote on logic, philosophy, geometry, calculation, arithmetic, music, and astronomy. Among his works were such titles as *An Introduction to the Art of Music*, *The Reason why Rain rarely falls in certain Places*, *The Cause of Vertigo*, and *Crossbreeding the Dove*.” About the importance of al-Kindi’s contributions to the Muslim world of knowledge it is said that with him “the Arab intelligence rose to the level of philosophy.”

But perhaps ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna (980-1037), was the most famous Islamic physician, philosopher, encyclopaedist, mathematician and astronomer of his time. He wrote his celebrated book *al-Qanun* or *Canon on Medicine*, which was an encyclopedia of Greek, Arabic, and his own knowledge of medicine. The work extends over a million words, surveying the entire medical knowledge available from the ancient and Muslim sources. Its systematic approach made it a standard medical text in Europe for over five hundred years. “The book is rich with the author’s original contribution. It includes such advances as recognition of the contagious nature of phthisis and tuberculosis, distribution of diseases by water and soil, and interaction between psychology and health. In addition to describing pharmacological methods, the book described 760 drugs and became the most authentic materia medica of the era. He was also the first to describe meningitis and made rich contributions to anatomy, gynaecology and child health.”

Ibn Sina also contributed to mathematics, physics, music and other fields. He explained the “casting out of nines” and its application to the verification of squares and cubes. He made several astronomical observations and, to increase the precision of instrumental readings, devised a kind of Vernier scale. In physics, his contribution comprised the study of different forms of energy, heat, light and mechanical, and such concepts as force, vacuum and infinity. He made the important observation that if the perception of light is due to the emission of some sort of particles by the luminous source, the speed of light must be finite. He propounded an interconnection between time and motion, and also made investigations on specific gravity and used an air thermometer. While the finiteness of the speed of light was then just a philosophical concept, it proved true when the European physicists measured it in later days. Ibn Sina observed that in the series of consonances represented by $(n + 1)/n$, the ear is unable to distinguish them when $n = 45$.

The following is said about ibn Sina: “At the age of 17, he was fortunate in curing Nooh ibn Mansur, the King of Bukhara, of an illness in which all the well-known physicians had given up hope. On his recovery, the King wished to reward him, but the young physician only desired permission to use his uniquely stocked library.” This itself is a splendid attestation for the collection of books at the Baghdad academy.

“In the school of medicine at the University of Paris hang two portraits of Muslim physicians—Rhazes and Avicenna,” writes Will Durant. “Avicenna studied medicine without a teacher, and while still young began to give gratis treatment... When Mahmud of Ghazni sent for Avicenna, al-Biruni, and other intellectual lights of al-Mamun’s court, Avicenna refused to go... After many hardships he took service at the court of Qabus. Mahmud circulated throughout Persia a picture of Avicenna, and offered a reward for his capture, but Qabus protected him. When Qabus was murdered, Avicenna was called to

treat the emir of Hamadan; he succeeded so well that he was made vizier. But the army did not like his rule; it seized him, pillaged his home, and proposed his death. He escaped, hid himself in the rooms of a druggist, and began in his confinement to write the books that were to make his fame. As he was planning a secret departure from Hamadan he was seized by the emir's son, and spent several months in jail, where he continued his writing. He again escaped, disguised himself a Sufi mystic and was at Isfahan. A circle of scientists and philosophers gathered around him, and held learned conferences over which the emir liked to preside... Worn out too soon he died at the age of 57." Ibn Sina or Avicenna wrote a hundred books covering every field of science and philosophy.

In this hurried cataloguing of names of the Muslim Men of Knowledge we may briefly speak of two other polymaths: Omar Khayyam and al-Biruni.

Ghiyath al-Din Abul Fateh Omar ibn Ibrahim al-Khayyam (1044-1123) of the *Rubaiyat*-fame was born at Nishapur, in Persia. Commonly known as Omar Khayyam, he was at once a mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, physician and poet. He was al-Tusi's contemporary and led a calm life devoted to the search for knowledge.

Algebra ranked first among the fields of Khayyam's interest and he worked extensively on algebraic equations. To the third degree equations he offered solutions that included geometric solutions; there were also partial geometric solutions for most other equations. "His book *Maqalat fi al-Jabr wa al-Muqabila* is a masterpiece on algebra and has great importance in the development of the subject. His remarkable classification of equations is based on the complexity of the equations, as the higher the degree of an equation, the more terms, or combinations of terms it will contain. Khayyam recognized 13 different forms of the cubic equation. He also developed the binomial expansion when the exponent is a positive integer. In fact, he has been considered to be the first to find the binomial theorem and determine the coefficients. In geometry he studied generalities of Euclid and contributed to the theory of parallel lines." Another important contribution of Khayyam was to introduce the solar calendar that was remarkably accurate with an error of just one day in 3770 years. This may be compared with the Georgian calendar having an error of 1 day in 3330 years. The calendar was named as *Al-Tarikh-al-Jalali*. Out of the ten books and thirty monographs he wrote four concerning mathematics, three physics, one algebra, one geometry and three metaphysics.

Much can be said about al-Biruni who travelled extensively in the tenth-century India and recorded his observations in the book entitled *Tarikh-al-Hind*. This versatile and mature mathematician, astronomer and geographer was born in the year 973 in what is now a part of Uzbekistan. Al-Biruni wrote some 146 works totaling 13,000 pages which only go to show the extent of his learning. In him we have the Muslim scholar at his best, says Will Durant. While we shall take up his works in more detail later, we may just talk about a few things here. "Philosopher, historian, traveller, geographer, linguist, mathematician, astronomer, poet and physicist—and doing major original work in all fields—he was at least the Leibniz, almost the Leonardo, of Islam." Contrast his travels in India with the "incalculable despot" Mahmud of Ghazni's plundering the country,—and we begin to wonder at the strangeness of times bringing such diametrically opposed

personalities together! In al-Biruni's monumental records we have just a few chapters dealing with the sociological and geographical context of the country which, from a historical point of view, are certainly of particular interest to us. But his study assumes another dimension of a vaster scale when it comes to scientific, religious and philosophical aspects. "He translated several Sanskrit works of science into Arabic, and, as if to pay a debt, rendered into Sanskrit Euclid's *Elements* and Ptolemy's *Almagest*." (*The Age of Faith*)

Coming back to the House of Wisdom, we may say that its success came from the cosmopolitan outlook it nourished and maintained. Learning was more important than any other consideration. Jews, Christians and Muslims all participated in the flowering of science, art, medicine and philosophy in the great spirit of enlightened research and creative activity. This spirit was at its height in the tenth and eleventh centuries when giants like Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham, Abu Rayham Muhammad al-Biruni and Abu Ali al-Hussein ibn Sina strode the East. While the House remained dynamically effective for at least 500 years and extended its influence from Spain to Persia, there persisted but a thick mediaeval greyness over the Indian world of learning and knowledge. This was not only regrettable, but also in the historical context disastrous. In spite of a few achievements here and there, men of India withdrew into a shell and lost contact with the firm yet adventuring spirit of the fourfold conduct of life.

But let us look at the House of Wisdom more as a comprehensive metaphor transcending the dimensions of space and time than just an institution of learning. Its success lay in it. Yet it must also be recognized that, while in the pursuit of natural sciences there were open-minded discussions where inquiry had another temper, there was also sought the context of the Islamic Holy Book. For instance, the thirteenth century anatomist and philosopher ibn Rushd declared that anyone "who studies anatomy will increase his faith in the omnipotence and oneness of God the Almighty." It is maintained that "the primordial character of its revelation, and its confidence that it was expressing the Truth at the heart of all revelations," was the historically motivating force to seek unity of the Creation. "The new corpus of sciences grew over the centuries and became part of the Islamic civilization, integrating it into the basic structure derived from the Revelation itself." It is said that the scholars found such favour in medieval Islam that sciences became its natural part. Its mystical aspect meant that it was another way to experience the unity of creation, unity that was the central message of Islam. Thus the study of anatomy was justified by maintaining that it will increase one's faith in the omnipotence and oneness of God the Almighty.

Similarly, Greek learning which opened out new horizons for the Arab mind itself gave rise to two greatly conflicting schools of thought, the Pythagorean with the occult-mystical elements in it and the Aristotelian with reason coming into play to understand nature. The first favoured the symbolic-metaphysical interpretation of phenomena and the other syllogistic-rationalistic point of view with sciences falling in a rational system. A distinction thus came to be drawn between the divine and the human knowledge. The divergence became yet acute with theology and Sufism attempting to integrate natural

sciences into the system but, unfortunately, in later days it caused weakening of the intellectual aspect of life. In this respect al-Ghazzali went to the extreme of “destroying philosophy for the sake of religion.” For him the Sufi with an access to the hidden core of reality came closer to truth than the philosopher. (*The Age of Faith*)

The question that essentially gets posed is about the relationship between the individual and the universal. Does an object stand by itself or should it be seen in the cosmological setting? Is the universe the unity and the individual event or object a sign bearing some other significance? Plato asked these questions. The Muslim thinkers also pondered over them. But Islam brings a stronger unitary point of view “with a passionate dedication to the Divine Will” in every aspect of its functioning. The Islamic Gnostic or Arif recognizes pure knowledge as the highest and most comprehensive. In it the individual has no separate existence of his own. “He is like the birds and the flowers in his yielding to the Creator; like them, like all the other elements of the cosmos, he reflects the Divine Intellect to his own degree.” Science has to flow from this basic truth of existence.

In fact in Baghdad there developed “the famous quarrel between the partisans of culture stemming from the text of the Quran and the pre-Islam poets and their adversaries, the writers of Persian origin who controlled the administration of the Caliphate. The writers’ leader, Sahl ibn Harun, was director of the Academy of Wisdom, which played a considerable role in literature. The discussions, which were very violent at times, were favorable to the development of Arab literature. The ‘Arab’ party, if it can be called that, defended itself stubbornly and glorified as well as it could its religious position which made of the Quran a revelation in the Arabic language.”

Of the presence of religion in art we might take an example of decorative handwriting, called calligraphy. As the Islamic painters were forbidden to use human figures in religious depiction they found expression for their creative urge in geometric shapes. Written in a stylized form these patterns contain verses from the Quran. But non-religious artists were allowed to use human figures. Such presentations most often appear in scholarly works of lavishly illustrated science or literature. A fascinating study of the calligraphic art relates it to the esoteric facets of Islam. Here mention may be made of Dr. Martin Lings’s most celebrated book *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* that “has become a point of bibliographical reference for anyone researching on the Prophet’s life.” He calls Sufism as “nothing other than Islamic mysticism, which means that it is the... most powerful current of that tidal wave which constitutes the Revelation of Islam...” Dr. Lings was the former Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books at the British Museum. Recently he paid a brief visit to Pakistan to deliver a lecture on *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*. “When his authoritative voice began the commentary on the significance of the ornamentation of the Holy Quran, it overshadowed the physical frailty of the 94-year-old Sufi scholar, bringing to life the grandeur of the Holy Quran in script, illumination and style.” In the course of the lecture he said: “It was not a paradox that the civilization of ‘the unlettered Prophet’ should have been destined to excel in the art of lettering.” The first calligraphic perfection of Islam was to be found in the monumental script, which was believed to have reached its fullness

in 815. Describing Islamic art of calligraphy and illumination as one of the most beautiful forms of abstract art, Dr. Lings showed a handwritten manuscript of the Quran by Hazrat Ali, preserved to date in Nurosmaniye Mosque Library, in Istanbul. He said: "...one of the great purposes of Quran's calligraphy was to provide a visual sacrament because gazing transfixedly at the Quran was a widespread practice in Islam." According to him the Quranic calligraphy started on a sacred note and the practice of illumination revolved around purity. Purity of writing meant purity of soul, which was why 80 per cent of the calligraphers at that time were Sufis. The fear of intruding the sanctity of the Quranic text prevented a liberal attitude towards illumination. Dr. Lings called it reverential awe (*haybah*), which was responsible for the wonderfully natural flow of illumination in the coming years. (This has been reported by the Karachi daily *Dawn*, dated 2 March 2003)

Can there be such a formalisation of the scientific pursuit in the framework of religion? While in the arts such as music, painting, sculpture, architecture, dancing or in literature and poetry we may see a distinct possibility of such an expression, the House of Wisdom in Baghdad seems to convey to us another message. Later we shall discuss this aspect in more detail by including several other religious traditions.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

COMELY COMPROMISE

BEYOND demand and despair,
 Penury and prayer
 Your silence
 Pinches me, Mother,
 As pounces upon me
 Your pervading grace
 Like a lioness
 Upon its desired prey.

 No outlet henceforth
 No escape either;
 But only
 A comely compromise
 Between hurt sentiment
 And warm heart;
 Resistance and response
 I leave at Time's disposal.

ASHALATA DASH

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAYAVADA

(Continued from the issue of May 2003)

An Examination of Mayavada:

WHAT then is the exact meaning of the statement that the world is unreal (*mithyā*)? Eminent authorities on the Shankara Vedanta are agreed that the world is unreal in the sense that it is logically indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*), so that the categories of being and non-being are simply inapplicable in the determination of its ontological status. The world cannot be said to be non-existent, because it functions as the positive content and objective terminus of our perceptual experience. The world cannot also be said to be existent, because it is flatly contradicted (*bādhita*) on our realization of the supreme Truth, Brahman. Nor is it open to us to hold that the world is at once existent and non-existent, because that would be a flagrant violation of the fundamental law of contradiction.¹ While from the standpoint of Avidya or Maya the world is real and endowed with pragmatic validity, it is assuredly unreal from the standpoint of ultimate reality. It is *sadasadvilakṣaṇa*.

Now, it will be evident from the Mayavadin's elaboration of his concept of unreality (*mithyāva*) that he finally takes his stand upon a fundamental duality of standpoints, the empirical and the ultimate or transcendent. And yet he leaves that duality unresolved and unreconciled. What is the logical transition from the higher standpoint to the lower? In other words, how are we to understand the logical derivation of the empirical standpoint from the ultimate or transcendental standpoint? A failure to answer this question is extremely unsatisfactory in a monistic system of thought. The Mayavadin's usual reply in this connection is: "Oh, that is a question which ought not to be asked at all, because it proceeds from abysmal Ignorance!" Now, to explain everything in terms of Ignorance and yet make no attempt to derive Ignorance from Knowledge is as irrational as it is inimical to the monistic outlook. The Mayavadin will perhaps retort by saying that the demand for an explanation of Ignorance in terms of Knowledge is prompted by a total failure to understand the very meaning of Ignorance. For, is not Ignorance a final irrationality, about which no further question should be asked? That is indeed a very curious position. In order to avoid Dualism, the Mayavadin says that Maya is an eternally cancelled falsehood (*sanātānīmithyā*); in order to account for the world of our experience, he declares that Maya is beginningless and positive (*anādi* and *bhāvarūpā*); and in order to avoid the necessity for a rational explanation of the principle of Maya, he describes it as a final irrationality, a logically indefinable mystery (*mahādbhutā anirvacanīya-rūpā*). And it passes one's comprehension how an eternally cancelled falsehood and irrationality can function as a beginningless positive entity productive of a highly significant world of experience.

It has been observed that according to Mayavada while the world is real from the standpoint of Avidya, it is unreal from the standpoint of Brahman. There seems to be

1. See Sankara's *Vivekacudamani*, st. 109: *sannyāpyasannyāpyubhayāmikā na*.

some difference of opinion on this point among the interpreters of Mayavada. According to some, the world is unreal in the sense that it is not as real as Brahman, from which it follows that the world possesses a subordinate and inferior type of reality intermediate between Brahman and non-being. Whereas Brahman is permanent and non-temporal, the world is impermanent, evanescent or ephemeral; whereas Brahman is the embodiment of the highest values of life, the world is void of any enduring worth or value. Now, the world so understood is either related or not related to Brahman. If the world be in any way related to Brahman, then the necessity is imposed upon the Mayavadin for precisely determining the nature of that relationship consistently with the undifferentiated unity of Brahman. If the world, supposed to enjoy a peculiar subordinate type of reality, be not in any way related to Brahman, then we are landed in a position of unmitigated dualism.

According to a second school of interpretation, the world is unreal in the sense of being absolutely non-existent (*asat* or *tuccha*) from the standpoint of ultimate reality. On such an interpretation, no satisfactory explanation of the world of our experience can evidently be sought in the nature of Brahman. Brahman, which is void of any power of self-determination (*nirguna*), can have nothing to do with the world of determinations, which is a mere nothing to it. The Mayavadin will no doubt reply by saying that the world being essentially unreal, the question of its explanation does not arise at all. But it must be noted that even though the world be unreal or illusory, the fact of its being so remains and demands explanation. The appearance of an unreal world as a real world is no less in need of explanation than the creation of a real world by a real power. The Mayavadin will perhaps say that the appearance of the world is itself false or illusory because the world being illusory there can be only an illusory and no true perception of it. How can there be a true perception of a false world? But this will appear on examination to be an evasion of the real difficulty. Taking for granted that we have only a false perception of a false world, there is no getting away from the fact that there is the *appearance* of a true perception of a real world. Taking for granted that the world and our perception of it are equally false, the fact of a false world falsely appearing to false perception must itself be admitted to be an eternal truth. It is an eternal fact, or an eternally true proposition which has got to be explained. If this eternal fact also be declared to be false, then the Mayavadin would be confuted out of his own mouth. If this eternal fact be accepted as true, then the Mayavadin must provide some explanation of this eternal truth in terms of its ultimate principle—Brahman. But can the Mayavadin's Brahman be treated as a source of explanation of this eternal truth? If so, then Maya conceived as a power of presenting a false appearance to some false percipient must be accepted as a power inherent in Brahman, in which case Brahman would cease to be absolutely *nirguna*. If, on the contrary, no explanation of this eternal truth is to be found in the nature of Nirguna Brahman, then the latter ceases to be the sole ultimate reality, and must be accepted as only a particular poise of being of the supreme Reality, as Sri Aurobindo maintains.

Again, the question may be raised: Does the world have even a false appearance from the standpoint of Brahman? According to some, the world appears as unreal only to the *jīvanmukta* and to *īśvara*, but not to Brahman, from whose standpoint the world as a

pure non-entity is less than a false appearance. On the realization of Brahman, the world entirely vanishes into nothingness, just as the false snake completely disappears on the true perception of the rope. So, viewed from the standpoint of Brahman, not only is the world unreal, there is not even any appearance of an unreal world. On such an interpretation, Brahman must suffer from some limitation of knowledge in so far it is unaware of the eternal fact of a false world falsely appearing to the false perception of false individuals. According to others, Brahman, who is the ultimate ground-consciousness, must indeed be aware of the world, but then Brahman is aware of the world as a false appearance just as the scientifically enlightened human mind is aware of the sun's movement in the sky as a false appearance. In that case, what is it that is responsible for the presentation of a false appearance to Brahman? It cannot be a power of Ignorance inherent in Brahman, because Brahman is *nirguṇa*. It cannot be a power of Ignorance inherent in *īśvara*, because from the standpoint of Brahman *īśvara* does not exist as a separate reality. It cannot also be regarded as a self-existent power, because that would militate against the undivided unity and sovereign reality of Brahman.

Finally, there is another question that may be put to the Mayavadin. Is *īśvara* in any way affected or deluded by Maya? *īśvara* is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the world. But does *īśvara* labour under any false impression that the world is ultimately real, or that the qualities of being creator, sustainer, and destroyer are His limiting determinations? If so, then *īśvara* is not the Lord of Maya in the strict sense of the term, but is as much a victim of Maya as the *jīva* is. If, on the contrary, *īśvara* is free from any such self-delusion, then why regard Ishvarahood as a mere illusory superimposition (*adhyāsa*) on the basis of Brahman? Why consider *mokṣa* or absorption in Brahman as a higher ideal than *līlā-sāhacarya*, i.e., blissful communion and conscious co-operation with the dynamic Divine for the fulfilment of His purpose in the world? If *īśvara* is the Lord of Maya in the full sense of the term, then He can by no means be regarded as a mere phenomenal manifestation. So Sri Aurobindo rightly contends that Brahman and *īśvara*, supra-cosmic Silence and cosmic Creativity, are equally real and eternal terms of existence. It follows from this that dynamic co-operation with the Divine Will for the fulfilment of the Divine purpose immanent in the world is a far greater ideal of life than that of static absorption in Nirguṇa Brahman. That is why Sri Krishna emphatically declares in the Gita that a yogi, or a man dynamically united with the Divine, is by far preferable in his eyes to all other categories of spiritual aspirants.²

Prof. Nikam's observation examined:

Prof. N. A. Nikam has brought out with admirable clarity and precision the full significance of Sri Aurobindo's view that the world is a genuine manifestation of Brahman, and not an unreal superimposition on its basis. As Sri Aurobindo views it, the variegated world of our experience is indeed an expression of some imperative truths in the nature of ultimate reality. Prof. Nikam is also perfectly right when he observes at the conclusion of his

2. *tapasvibhyo'dhiko yogījñānibhyo'pi mato'dhikah, karmibhyaścā'dhikoyogī tasmādyogī bhavāṛjuna* (vi, 46).

article that Sri Aurobindo's two profoundly important volumes of *The Life Divine*, more than any other treatise, have endeavoured to present to us the true philosophy of the Upanishads and convey to us the all-pervasive and dynamic presence of the Divine in all things. But the comments which he makes on Sri Aurobindo's philosophical position seem quite incompatible with the aforesaid appreciation. Dr. Indra Sen has said that while Sankara "constantly dichotomises", Sri Aurobindo "always reconciles". Prof. N. A. Nikam points out by way of criticism that in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy also there is a dichotomy,—the dichotomy between the logic of the finite and the logic of the Infinite, the dichotomy between thought and existence. But had Prof. Nikam looked a bit closer into Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, he would have certainly noticed that whatever dichotomy or antinomy one comes across in that philosophy is not left unresolved, but is reconciled in the harmony of an inclusive unity. True, there is according to Sri Aurobindo an essential difference between the logic of the Infinite which constitutes the deeper rationality of Reality itself and the logic of the finite which is characteristic of our rational thinking. But there is, in his view, no yawning chasm or unbridgeable gulf between the two. He shows how the supra-mental self-knowledge of the Infinite expresses itself at a lower level in the form of the rational intellect as its own subordinate instrumentation or inferior mode of operation, and how again the rational mind, by casting off its vanity and rigidity and through adequate self-opening and self-surrender, can pass over into the infinite consciousness of the Supermind. There is not only a continuous passage between the logic of the Infinite and the logic of the finite, between supra-rational Being and rational thinking, between the Supermind and the Mind, but the latter can even be more and more expanded and heightened and finally transformed into a flawless medium of self-utterance of the former.

Then again, Prof. Nikam says that between the Mayavada of Shankara and the Lilavada of Sri Aurobindo there is a common premise, namely, "The world is a dream". Prof. Nikam supposes that Sri Aurobindo considers the world to be real, because although the world is a dream, dreams are in his view real. Now, such a presentation of Sri Aurobindo's view about the world appears to our mind to rest upon a misunderstanding. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the world is real, not because dreams are real, but because it is a genuine self-manifestation of the supra-cosmic Spirit. It is all an expression of some imperative truths embedded in the nature of the Infinite. It is an outcome of the fullness of joy that is in the heart of God, a manifestation of His delight of becoming (*āmandād hy eva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante*). The question of dream crops up in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in connection with his critical evaluation of Mayavada. Mayavada considers the world to be as unreal as a dream. Just as dreams disappear into nothingness on the attainment of wakeful experience, so also the world is supposed to be revealed as an unreality on the realization of the self-shining Truth. But Sri Aurobindo points out that dreams, rightly understood, provide no real support to the contention of Mayavada. Dreams are not unreal simply because they are excluded from waking experience. Waking experience is as much excluded from dream experience as dream experience is excluded from waking experience. The truth about the matter is that waking and dreaming represent

two different orders of one and the same Reality; they constitute different grades of our self-experience and world-experience.³

Modern Psychology in course of its exploration of the unconscious regions of the mind has come to discover that dreams have a profound truth and connected significance of their own. In modern European philosophy, such extremes of thought as Neo-Realism and the Absolute Idealism of Bradley and Bosanquet, agree in holding that dreams can hardly be dismissed as unreal and arbitrary constructions of fancy. Sri Aurobindo maintains that besides the bulk of our ordinary dreams which are significant creations of the subconscious, there are “subliminal dreams”, some of which occur to us in the shape of warnings, premonitions, prophetic utterances, glimpses into the future and the like, and some of which again are records of happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes of our own being or of universal being into which we may enter on the automatic stilling of the surface mentality during sleep.

The point to be particularly noted here is that the dream analogy is not, according to Sri Aurobindo, available as an illustration of the lack of significance and reality of the external world. Both the dream world and the waking world (*svapna* and *jāgrat*) are in truth different forms of manifestation of the same ultimate Reality. What is unreal is not the world as such but the world ignorantly supposed to be self-existent and real apart from Brahman. The world as it wrongly appears to the eye of Ignorance is a distorted perspective of the world which is revealed to the eye of Knowledge as a genuine self-manifestation of the supreme Reality. In Sri Aurobindo’s view, the world is not only real, but is deeply significant as the field of progressive self-revelation of the Divine in such apparent contraries of His nature as discord and division, darkness and distress, death and disability. But be it observed that the reality of the world does not in any way detract from the full freedom, eternal self-sufficiency, and infinite opulence of the supreme Spirit. Just as on the one hand Sri Aurobindo does not accept the position of Shankara that the world is unreal from the standpoint of ultimate reality, so also on the other hand he would not agree with Bradley that the Absolute Spirit “has no assets beyond the appearances” such as constitute the very stuff of its existence, or with Hegel that the Absolute depends on the world for its own perfection and self-fulfilment. Although in respect of His delight of becoming Brahman descends into the world of manifestation as infinite Creativity, in respect of His delight of immutable being, He is eternally self-sufficient as supracosmic Silence. Although by virtue of His superconscious creative Energy, the *śakti*, He is the Creator and Lord of the universe, yet He is absolutely free either to allow or not to allow His *śakti*, the Divine Mother, to embark upon her creative adventures. To be at once freedom and creativity, transcendence and universality, silence and activity,—that is indeed the profoundest mystery of existence, the standing miracle in the nature of the Spirit.*

(*To be continued*)

HARIDAS CHAUDHURI

3. *The Life Divine*, Vol. II (1), p. 202.

* This concludes Haridas Chaudhuri’s paper.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

The Birth of Savitr: A Poetic Composition based on Sri Aurobindo's Savitri by R. Y. Deshpande. Published by East-West Cultural Center, Los Angeles, USA. Price: Rs. 100.00 (India); US\$ 7.00 (Overseas). Published on 21 February 2003.

ONE of the main concerns of R. Y. Deshpande, among his many and varied activities, consists in spreading the presence and influence of Sri Aurobindo's incomparable masterpiece, *Savitri*. He is one of a small group of *Savitri* explorers and lovers who feel impelled to communicate the delight of their discoveries to others in order that the living poem may be present among us, and thus support us in our effort to contribute to the realization of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Work. His *Ancient Tale of Savitri*, *Vyasa's Savitri* and *Satyavan Must Die* are well known, and his two volumes of *Perspectives of Savitri* are an indispensable source of information to all who approach the epic in whatever way.

His new publication, *The Birth of Savitr*, comprises two main parts: forty-eight poems of twelve lines, each brief poem meant to be a summary or rather a sort of condensation of a canto of Sri Aurobindo's epic, preceded by a foreword and an introduction; and, secondly, a resume in prose of each of the cantos, followed by a presentation of "The Legend", "The Tale", and an interesting discussion of "The Symbol". The second part needs little comment. R. Y. Deshpande has intended these texts as a reference for those who are familiar with *Savitri*, and as guidance for those who are about to take up the adventure of its endless exploration. Such are the dimensions of *Savitri* that some signposts are welcome to those who want to find their bearings while exploring it—although losing oneself into its many layers, worlds and occult realities is a necessary condition to partake of its spiritual riches.

The main part of *The Birth of Savitr* is the first one: the poetical summarization of each canto into twelve lines. I can imagine that many a *Savitri* lover will have a quasi-instinctive reaction of misgiving as to the feasibility of such an enterprise. Some of the reflections, or objections, are obvious. How could it be possible to encapsulate Sri Aurobindo's inspiration and vision within such small confines? The uniqueness of *Savitri* lies in the uniqueness of its creator, a poet whose spiritual realisations, as the Avatar, went beyond any borderlands reached before. Is it, therefore, not pretentious and even reckless to assume that one can encompass the realms of Sri Aurobindo's revelations and, more, that one is able to compress those countless riches into a few gems?

Moreover, the poetic meaning and force of the lines in *Savitri* often depend on their position in the whole, their effect depends on the length and their placement in the canto. "And Savitri too awoke among these tribes", and "This was the day that Satyavan must die" come to mind at once. But there are many, many more, for instance the very first line of canto five, "This knowledge first he had of time-born men"—a statement I have but seldom seen commented upon—and sometimes a whole bloc of text like the supernal passage starting with "The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone" in the canto "The Secret Knowledge". And if Sri Aurobindo needed that many lines, almost 24,000, to give shape

to his creation, why try and reduce it to what one surmises is its core?

The first to be aware of such reflections is R. Y. Deshpande himself. He is after all the associate editor of *Mother India*, the author of six volumes of poetry, and a critic who has given evidence of his sharp discernment and erudition in a considerable number of essays. He has prevented many critical barbs in an extensive "Apologia" that serves as an introduction to the short poems constituting his actual *Birth of Savitri*. In this apologia he states frankly: "To think of putting such a work [like *Savitri*] in scarcely six hundred lines is a perilous task, fully loaded with the question if this should be done at all." Being as a matter of course aware that *Savitri* "was planned and executed with great artistic care, with the essential 'power of architectural construction'," he considers if "to compress it by a factor of forty" is not "to tell stories, if not desecrate the magnificence of the structural design."

Deshpande stresses the individual aspect of his poetical venture. "This also means that there are as many ways of living in her [i.e. *Savitri*'s] glad presence as there are individuals who approach her with an urge to find the true spirit of divinity in every thing, material as well as heavenly. One could do meditative paintings, or compose new musical opuses, or present her in operatic magnificence, or sculpt her moods of love and laughter, or speak of her in participative discourses, or write hymns and poems in praise of her, or in deep choreographic gestures bring her movements to the world of men and matter"—as has been done a few years ago in a spirit of sincerity and aspiration by a dance company of Bombay. "And if it is a creative effort, then each composition will carry in it the soul of the particular artist himself. Each one will then have his own *Savitri*, each sculptor a bust of his own goddess, each doer of yogic tapasya a characteristic aura of hers."

"Therefore", writes R. Y. Deshpande, "what we are having here is just one piece of art in a poetic form, suggesting that there will follow many more in the course of spiritually vibrant times. We may call these cantos brief meditations on *Savitri*. Therefore they are entirely subjective in character ... The idea is only to indicate, in a suggestive and compressed phrase, the thematic nature of the text which has the canvas of the whole blue firmament to paint the glories of the Sublime." Deshpande's thematic poems are, he says, "an attempt to provide in a poetic form a compacted argument of each canto of the epic." And in a memorable simile he compares the Great Ashwattha Tree of Sri Aurobindo's epic to the Japanese bonsai of his summarization, written from the "inner mental, though perhaps at times touched by the overhead."

The introductory apologia is worth reading in its own right. And so is the "Foreword" in which Debashish Banerji comments upon it. "The legacy of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is a rich body of pointers," he writes, "opening the way to the cultural standards of the future, not rigid commandments but recognizable in consciousness; and it remains for us to embody the states in our lives and work which would make these standards living and manifest." Debashish Banerji is one of the Aurobindonians *extra muros*, running the East-West Cultural Centre near Los Angeles in the U.S.A. He is also, in collaboration with the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Los Angeles, the publisher of *The*

Birth of Savitri. It is people like him, a representative of all the best the culture of Bengal has to offer, who carry the spirit of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into the world.

The poet R. Y. Deshpande has used the multimundial playground of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* as a direct inspiration for a series of poetical impressions, trying to order them in such a way that they sketch an outline of Sri Aurobindo's great epic. In this he has done what every *Savitri* reader does more or less unconsciously: gather or formulate his experiences during or after reading. An ordinary reader will not try to verbalize the impressions his reading has caused in his soul, mind and feelings. Deshpande, the poet, has tried to articulate his impressions, to give them shape, to put them into words. And to this end he has chosen the discipline of restricting his recreations within twelve lines, just as others write a cycle of sonnets or poems in another form.

An element which played a role in the writing of *The Birth of Savitri* is the urge, common to all persons trying to understand themselves and the world they live in, to grasp their experience, to arrange it, to make it fathomable by the mind. The origin of the mind is, after all, the Supermind, which is the Unity-Consciousness. This is the reason, according to Sri Aurobindo, why the mind will always try to bring all its objects within a single comprehensive hold, although its efforts must remain in vain. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo has (to some extent) described his and the Mother's yoga, their spiritual experiences and realizations; never is there a limit that does not hide another horizon behind it, never a height that does not point to another height. It is difficult for man, the mental being, to enter such a Consciousness. Poetry, like all Art, creates patterns, forms, shapes which, in their apparent limitations, reveal widenesses beyond. What R. Y. Deshpande has done in his *Birth of Savitri* may set an example and act as an incentive to others, *Savitri* readers and all experiencers of inner, deeper and higher regions: to formulate what otherwise remains vague or fleeting.

As the proof of the poetry is in the reading, I quote the first poem of *The Birth of Savitri*, based on the first and generally well-remembered canto of *Savitri*:

At the river's bend hope took a northward turn—
 As if stumbling on a strange post of the night
 Stars found a sudden way through emptiness;
 Something glimmered to awaken a newer urge,
 The spirit of things timeless and alone.
 Gods were yet to be and the enormous hush
 Held in its still incumbent mood of trance
 Another surprise getting shaped by death.
 Colours of wonder flew on rhythmic wings,—
 And also came repeated pain in the heart.
 But in rich green silence of the wood at noon
 Stood Savitri to meet the blemished might.

GEORGES VAN VREKHEM