

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LVII

No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## THE DIVINE HEARING

[Sri Aurobindo's *Last Poems*, p. 1; first published in August 1952]

### The Divine Hearing

(1)

All sounds, all voices have become Thy voice:  
Music and thunder, and the cry of birds,  
Life's bubble of her corners and her joys,  
Cachet of human speed and murmured words,

The laughter of the sea's enormous mirth  
The winged plane hurrying through the conquered air,  
The auto's trumpet-song of speed to earth,  
The machine's reluctant drone, the sun's glow

Blowing upon the wing of Space:  
A call of distance and of mystery,  
Memories of seen bright lands and ocean ways, —  
All aware under-tones and throes of thee.

A secret harmony steals through the blind heart  
And all your beautiful being then art-

Oct 24. 1937

(Transcription overleaf)

**THE DIVINE HEARING**

All sounds, all voices have become Thy voice:  
 Music and thunder and the cry of birds,  
 Life's babble<sup>1</sup> of her sorrows and her joys,  
 Cadence of human speech and murmured words,

The laughter of the sea's enormous mirth,  
 The winged plane purring through the conquered<sup>2</sup> air,  
 The auto's trumpet-song of speed to earth,  
 The machine's reluctant drone, the siren's blare

Blowing upon the windy horn of Space  
 A call of distance and of mystery,  
 Memories of sun-bright<sup>3</sup> lands and ocean-ways,—  
 All now are wonder-tones and themes of Thee.

A secret harmony steals<sup>4</sup> through the blind heart  
 And all grows beautiful because Thou art.

Oct. 24, 1937

1. babbling
2. silent
3. sun-lit
4. smites

## THIS WRITTEN MEDITATION

November 2, 1912

ALTHOUGH my whole being is in theory consecrated to Thee, O Sublime Master, who art the life, the light and the love in all things, I still find it hard to carry out this consecration in detail. It has taken me several weeks to learn that the reason for this written meditation, its justification, lies in the very fact of addressing it daily to Thee. In this way I shall put into material shape each day a little of the conversation I have so often with Thee; I shall make my confession to Thee as well as it may be; not because I think I can tell Thee anything—for Thou art Thyself everything, but our artificial and exterior way of seeing and understanding is, if it may be so said, foreign to Thee, opposed to Thy nature. Still by turning towards Thee, by immersing myself in Thy light at the moment when I consider these things, little by little I shall see them more like what they really are,—until the day when, having made myself one in identity with Thee, I shall no more have anything to say to Thee, for then I shall be Thou. This is the goal that I would reach; towards this victory all my efforts will tend more and more. I aspire for the day when I can no longer say “I”, for I shall be Thou.

How many times a day, still, I act without my action being consecrated to Thee; I at once become aware of it by an indefinable uneasiness which is translated in the sensibility of my body by a pang in my heart. I then make my action objective to myself and it seems to me ridiculous, childish or blameworthy; I deplore it, for a moment I am sad, until I dive into Thee and, there losing myself with a child’s confidence, await from Thee the inspiration and strength needed to set right the error in me and around me,—two things that are one; for I have now a constant and precise perception of the universal unity determining an absolute interdependence of all actions.

THE MOTHER

(*The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 405-06)

## ON IDEALS

IDEALS are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatist intellect which takes its stand upon the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentialities of future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished. But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe, to the consciousness which is not imprisoned in its own workings or carried along in their flood but is able to envelop, hold and comprehend them, to the soul that is not merely the subject and instrument of the world-force but can reflect something of that Master-Consciousness which controls and uses it, the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the Idea which has created it.

Certainly, ideals are not the ultimate Reality, for that is too high and vast for any ideal to envisage; they are aspects of it thrown out in the world-consciousness as a basis for the workings of the world-power. But they are primary, the actual workings secondary. They are nearer to the Reality and therefore always more real, forcible and complete than the facts which are their partial reflection. Reflections themselves of the Real, they again are reflected in the more concrete workings of our existence. The human intellect, in proportion as it limits itself by the phenomena of self-realising Force, fails to catch the creative Idea until after we have seen the external fact it has created; but this order of our sense-enslaved consciousness is not the real order of the universe. God pre-exists before the world can come into being, but to our experience in which the senses act first and only then the finer workings of consciousness, the world seems to come first and God to emerge out of it, so much so that it costs us an effort to rise out of the mechanical, pluralistic and pantheistic conceptions of Him to a truer and higher idea of the Divine Reality. That which to us is the ultimate is in truth the primary reality. So, too, the Idea which seems to us to rise out of the fact, really precedes it and out of it the fact has arisen. Our vulgar contrast of the ideal and the real is therefore a sensuous error, for that which we call real is only a phenomenon of force working out something that stands behind the phenomenon and that is pre-existent and greater than it. The Real, the Idea, the phenomenon, this is the true order of the creative Divinity.

The pragmatic intellect is only sure of a thing when it finds it realised in Power; therefore it has a certain contempt for the ideal, for the vision, because it drives always at execution and material realisation. But Power is not the only term of the Godhead; Knowledge is the elder sister of Power: Force and Consciousness are twin aspects of being, both in the eternal foundation of things and in their evolutionary realisation. The idea is the realisation of a truth in Consciousness as the fact is its realisation in Power, both indispensable, both justified in themselves and in each other, neither warranted in ignoring or despising its complement. For the idealist and visionary to despise the

pragmatist or for the pragmatist to depreciate the idealist and visionary is a deplorable result of our intellectual limitations and the mutual misunderstandings by which the arrogance of our imperfect temperament and mentality shuts itself out from perfection. It is as if we were to think that God the Seer and Knower must despise God the Master of works and energies or the Lord of action and sacrifice ignore the divine Witness and Originator. But these two are one and the division in us a limitation that mankind has yet to conquer.

The human being advances in proportion as he becomes more and more capable of knowing before he realises in action. This is indeed the order of evolution. It begins with a material working in which the Prakriti, the executive Power, is veiled by its works, by the facts it produces, and itself veils the consciousness which originates and supports all its workings. In Life the force emerges and becomes vibrant in the very surface of its works, last, in Mind the underlying consciousness reveals itself. So, too, man is at first subject in his mentality to the facts which his senses envisage, cannot go behind and beyond them, knows only the impressions they make on his receptive mind. The animal is executive, not creative; a passive tool of Matter and Life he does not seek in his thought and will to react upon and use them: the human being too in his less developed state is executive rather than creative; he limits his view to the present and to his environment, works so as to live from day to day, accepts what he is without reaching forward in thought to what he may be, has no ideals. In proportion as he goes beyond the fact and seeks to anticipate Nature, to catch the ideas and principles behind her workings and finally to seize the idea that is not yet realised in fact and himself preside over its execution, he becomes originative and creative and no longer merely executive. He begins thus his passage from subjection to mastery.

In thus progressing humanity falls apart after its fashion into classes; it divides itself between the practical man and the idealist and makes numerous compromises between the two extremes. In reality the division is artificial; for every man who does anything in the world, works by virtue of an idea and in the force given to him by ideals, either his own or others' ideals, which he may or may not recognise but in whose absence nevertheless he would be impotent to move a single step. The smaller the ideals, the fewer they are and the less recognised and insisted on, the less also is the work done and the progress realised; on the other hand, when ideals enlarge themselves, when they become forceful, widely recognised, when different ideals enter into the field, clash and communicate their thought and force to each other, then the race rises to its great periods of activity and creation. And it is when the ideal arisen, vehement, energetic, refuses to be debarred from possession and throws itself with all the gigantic force of the higher planes of existence on this reluctant and rebellious stuff of life and matter to conquer it that we have the great eras which change the world by carrying out the potentialities of several centuries in the action of a few decades.

Therefore wherever and whenever the mere practical man abounds and excludes or discourages by his domination the idealist, there is the least work and the least valuable work done in that age or country for humanity; at most some preliminary spadework,

some labour of conservation and hardly perceptible motion, some repression of creative energies preparing for a great future outburst. On the other hand, when the idealist is liberated, when the visionary abounds, the executive worker also is uplifted, finds at once an orientation and tenfold energy and accomplishes things which he would have otherwise rejected as a dream and chimera, which to his ordinary capacity would be impossible and which often leave the world wondering how work so great could have been done by men who were in themselves so little. The union of the great idealist with the great executive personality who receives and obeys the idea is always the sign of a coming realisation which will be more or less deep and extensive in proportion as they are united or as the executive man seizes more or less profoundly and completely the idea he serves and is able to make permanent in force what the other has impressed upon the consciousness of his age.

Often enough, even when these two different types of men work in the same cause and one more or less fulfils the other, they are widely separated in their accessory ideas, distrust, dislike and repudiate each other. For ordinarily the idealist is full of anticipations which reach beyond the actual possibilities or exceed the work that is destined to be immediately fulfilled; the executive man, on the other hand, is unable to grasp either all the meaning of the work he does or all its diviner possibilities which to him are illusion and vanity, while to the other they are all that is supremely valuable in his great endeavour. To the practical worker limiting himself by patent forces and actual possibilities the idealist who made his work possible seems an idle dreamer or a troublesome fanatic; to the idealist the practical man who realises the first steps towards his idea seems a coarse spoiler of the divine work and almost its enemy: for by attaching too much importance to what is immediately possible he removes the greater possibilities which he does not see, seems to prevent and often does prevent a larger and nobler realisation. It is the gulf between a Cavour and a Mazzini, between the prophet of an ideal and the statesman of a realisable idea. The latter seems always to be justified by the event, but the former has a deeper justification in the shortcomings of the event. The successes of the executive man hiding away the ideal under the accomplished fact are often the tragedies of the human spirit and are responsible for the great reactions and disappointments it undergoes when it finds how poor and soulless is the accomplished fact compared with the glory of the vision and the ardour of the effort.

It cannot be doubted which of these two opposites and complementaries is the most essential to success. Not only is the upheaval and fertilising of the general consciousness by the thinker and the idealist essential to the practical realisation of great changes, but in the realisation itself the idealist who will not compromise is an indispensable element. Show me a movement without a force of uncompromising idealism working somewhere in its sum of energies and you have shown me a movement which is doomed to failure and abortion or to petty and inconsiderable results. The age or the country which is entirely composed of reasonable, statesmanlike workers ever ready for concession and compromise is a country which will never be great until it has added to itself what is lacking to it and bathed itself in pure and divine fountains and an age which will accomplish



nothing of supreme importance for the progress of humanity. There is a difference however between the fanatic of an idea and the true idealist: the former is simply the materialistic, executive man possessed by the idea of another, not himself the possessor of it; he is haunted in his will and driven by the force of the idea, not really illumined by its light. He does harm as well as good and his chief use is to prevent the man of compromise from pausing at a paltry or abortive result; but his excesses also bring about great reactions. Incapable of taking his stand on the ideal itself, he puts all his emphasis on particular means and forms and overstrains the springs of action till they become dulled and incapable of responding to further excitation. But the true idealist is not the servant of the letter or the form; it is the idea which he loves and the spirit behind the idea which he serves.

Man approaches nearer his perfection when he combines in himself the idealist and the pragmatist, the originative soul and the executive power. Great executive personalities have usually been men of a considerable idealism. Some indeed have served a purpose rather than an ideal; even in the idea that guided or moved them they have leaned to its executive rather than its inspiring and originative aspect; they have sought their driving force in the interest, passion and emotion attached to it rather than in the idea itself. Others have served consciously a great single thought or moral aim which they have laboured to execute in their lives. But the greatest men of action who were endowed by Nature with the most extraordinary force of accomplishment, have owed it to the combination in them of active power with an immense drift of originative thought devoted to practical realisation. They have been great executive thinkers, great practical dreamers. Such were Napoleon and Alexander. Napoleon with his violent prejudice against ideologists and dreamers was himself a colossal dreamer, an incurable if unconscious ideologist; his teeming brain was the cause of his gigantic force and accomplishment. The immense if shapeless ideas of Alexander threw themselves into the form of conquests, cities, cultures; they broke down the barriers of Greek and Asiatic prejudice and narrow self-imprisonment and created an age of civilisation and soul-interchange.

But these great personalities do not contain in themselves the combination which humanity most needs; not the man of action driven by ideas, the pragmatist stirred by a half-conscious exaltation from the idealistic, almost the mystic side of his nature, but the seer who is able to execute his vision is the higher term of human power and knowledge. The one takes his stand in the Prakriti, the executive Force, and is therefore rather driven than leads himself even when he most successfully leads others; the other takes his stand in the Purusha, the knower who controls executive force, and he possesses the power that he uses. He draws nearer to the type of the divine Seer-Will that has created and governs the universe. But such a combination is rare and difficult; for in order to grasp the ideal the human soul has to draw back so far from the limitations, pettinesses, denials of the world of phenomenal fact that the temperament and mentality become inapt for executive action upon the concrete phenomena of life and matter. The mastery of the fact is usually possible to the idealist mind only when its idealism is of no great depth or power and can therefore accommodate itself more easily to the actual life-environment.

Until this difficulty is overcome and the Seer-Will becomes more common in man

and more the master of life, the ideal works at a disadvantage, by a silent pressure upon the reluctant world, by occasional attacks and sudden upheavals; a little is accomplished in a long time or by a great and sudden effort, a little that is poor enough, coarse enough, material enough compared with the thing seen and attempted, but which still makes a farther advance possible though often after a period of quiescence and reaction. And times there are, ages of stupendous effort and initiative when the gods seem no longer satisfied with this tardy and fragmentary working, when the ideal breaks constantly through the dull walls of the material practical life, incalculable forces clash in its field, innumerable ideas meet and wrestle in the arena of the world and through the constant storm and flash, agitation of force and agitation of light the possibility of the victoriously fulfilled ideal, the hope of the Messiah, the expectation of the Avatar takes possession of the hearts and thoughts of men. Such an age seems now to be coming upon the world. But whether that hope and expectation and possibility are to come to anything depends upon whether men prepare their souls for the advent and rise in the effort of their faith, life and thought to the height and purity of a clearly-grasped ideal. The Messiah or Avatar is nothing but this, the divine Seer-Will descending upon the human consciousness to reveal to it the divine meaning behind our half-blind action and to give along with the vision the exalted will that is faithful and performs and the ideal force that executes according to the vision.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 301-07)*

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## SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the Issue of December 2003)

*A strong doubt has come whether there are any hostiles at all. There may be such beings, but what have they got to do with me? It is only my own anger, desires and thoughts that I am fighting. Is it for the sake of convenience, or because fighting suits my nature, that you have given the name “hostiles” to my own antagonistic movements?*

No—for no man really lives in himself alone. One can of course ignore the play of the universal forces and treat the whole thing as a case of one’s own psychology,—but the forces are there. Of course, it is the wrong movement that creates the possibility for the hostiles to intervene.

*I do not get enough time to read your letters well. You have asked me not to do anything else during work, but it is chiefly during work that the protection and help, even by reading your letters, is most needed. If I do not get to sleep early, it brings sleepiness during work and lethargy. When can one find time to meditate a little or even read carefully?*

There is no objection at all to your reading the letters during your work.

If you have not sufficient time for meditation, it ought to be possible to diminish the work sufficiently to allow of the need. The sadhana is obviously the first thing—work should be a means of sadhana—it should not become an obstacle.

16 April 1933

*I was not going to send this letter, thinking it will make Mother angry and that she will irritate me still more at Pranam by putting her hand only just a little, as yesterday. Anyway, it is now becoming impossible to live.*

Why should you think that the Mother will be angry? We have ourselves told you to write everything frankly and conceal nothing—so there is not the least likelihood that she will resent what you write. Moreover, she knows perfectly well the difficulties of the sadhana and of human nature and if there is goodwill and a sincere aspiration such as you have, any stumblings or falterings of the moment will not make any difference in her attitude to the sadhak. The Mother thinks you must have had a wrong impression about her putting her hand just a little only—for she was just the same with you inwardly as always and there had been no reason why there should be any change.

*It may be that the recent attack was due to my depression, which the hostiles took rapid advantage of.*

This was certainly the main reason—nothing gives them so much advantage. A quiet confidence in the midst of difficulties, a steady and firm faith in the Divine Grace and your own spiritual destiny as a vehicle of the Divine is the best protection—it does not prevent attacks, but it prevents them from disturbing the central attitude.

*For some days I was thinking of not writing to you because I felt I was only moving in a circle. The idea of discontinuing took firm hold yesterday, so though I wrote I did not post my letter till this morning, when there was so much pressure of sex-impulse and self-destruction and going away that I fell into an almost hysterical fit of weeping. I felt that the hostiles had almost completely taken hold of me. Then I ran and posted the letter. But why should the idea of not writing cause so much disturbance?*

It is because the idea came from a wrong source and was an attempt of the wrong forces to enter and disturb. It was not so much the idea in itself, but the ideas as an expression of dissatisfaction and impatience. Immediately the hostiles took hold of it as a line of entry for all the old movements once associated with this kind of dissatisfaction and impatience. Moreover these letters of yours and my answers have been a strong means for canalising our help and making it habitually available to you and effective—not by the words themselves alone but by the forces behind them.

*As for reducing the work, I do not want to decide just now. During work one has to keep the consciousness, at least most of it, outward-turned. But more meditation would keep the brain in an intoxicated-like state and bring about an inability for work.*

What is possible is that you should not go on with the supervision of several places, which must be rather a pressure. You asked for this because of drowsiness. But if this arrangement gives no time for meditation—no time for going inside and establishing there the peace, wideness and joy in which you can meet the Divine inside and in work, it seems defective. What I meant is that it is not necessary either to work all the time or intoxicate the brain by unrelieved meditation as some do. The result of meditation can be obtained by work, but then you must be able or learn to live inwardly even in the work and to do all from within.

17 April 1933

*Did the hostiles want to break the time-rhythm of our letters?*

Yes, that was no doubt part of the strategy.

*The supervision of several places is not a pressure on me. On the contrary, I feel much lighter and easier when I have more places to supervise. As for meditation I*

*don't think it is possible for me at the moment—either I would sleep or go on thinking. And if the results of meditation can be obtained by work, there is no need to give up even an hour of work. But does not turning inwards itself mar the efficiency in work?*

No—it is only if it is an inner absorption that it would come in the way. But what I mean is a sort of stepping backward into something silent and observant within which is not involved in the action, yet sees and can shed its light upon it. There are then two parts of the being, one inner looking at and witnessing and knowing, the other executive and instrumental and doing. This gives not only freedom but power—and in this inner being one can get into touch with the Divine not through mental activity but through the substance of the being, by a certain inward touch, perception, reception, receiving also the right inspiration or intuition of the work.

*I thought that it was good to be dissatisfied, that it was psychic dissatisfaction. So inwardly I was in a quarrelling mood.*

No, the quarrelsomeness is a vital element; that is why it can be a door for the wrong movements.

The psychic movement is an aspiration intense in its own way but without impatience.

*When children pass, I cannot but love them. Similarly with young girls, there is some attraction. But if there is any undesirable feeling, I do not wish to keep it in me. How does physical beauty appear to the higher consciousness? Can I not see physical beauty that way?*

If it is purely aesthetic and impersonal, yes.

*At the Dining Room there is usually somebody else sitting at the table. I feel that he wants to talk and I have to avoid it. Then I think that he may think I am serious or proud. Is this due to the consciousness being outward-turned or to an active mind?*

To both. For in some cases at least it may not be what he is thinking, but merely an active formation of your own mind—and even if he does think so, it would not matter to the mind if it were not turned outward.

18 April 1933

*In writing about physical beauty, I did not mean any desire to see aesthetically, but I wanted the purity of aesthetic sight in me.*

Yes, I so understood it. The aesthetic and impersonal vision of things can develop into the sight of the Divine Beauty everywhere which is in its nature entirely pure.

*Yesterday I was able to keep a little inward, but today so many heterogeneous thoughts came that it was hard to step back from them.*

If the thoughts are not regarded as one's own, it should become possible to look at them from a silent mind, detached and separate from the thoughts.

19 April 1933

*(To be continued)*

SRI AUROBINDO



### **SHE FRONTED TIME**

A mightier influx filled the oblivious clay:  
 A lamp was lit, a sacred image made.  
 A mediating ray had touched the earth  
 Bridging the gulf between man's mind and God's;  
 Translating heaven into a human shape  
 Its brightness linked our transience to the Unknown.  
 A spirit of its celestial source aware  
 Descended into earth's imperfect mould  
 And wept not fallen to mortality,  
 But looked on all with large and tranquil eyes.  
 One had returned from the transcendent planes  
 And bore anew the load of mortal breath,  
 Who had striven of old with our darkness and our pain;  
 She took again her divine unfinished task:  
 Survivor of death and the aeonic years,  
 Once more with her fathomless heart she fronted Time.

Sri Aurobindo

*(Savitri, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 353)*

## COUNTERCHANGED

PAINT the music of the starworld,  
Sing the hues  
Of thunder fret and birds a-herrying;  
All that accuse  
Our darkening ears, our eyes' hush-burying  
Show now unfurled.

Timid clamour-pomps we see  
Whose mingled sound  
Leave naked yet the limbs of earthly faring:  
While all around  
The undraped silences go Selfward, wearing  
Form's ecstasy.

July 1, 1935

ARIJVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: Very original and suggestive in its strong conciseness which is much more poetically expressive and convincing than a less compact development of the thought would have been. The rhythm is admirable.

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## SPIRITUALITY

... spirituality is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. These things are of considerable value to mind and life; they are of value to the spiritual evolution itself as preparatory movements disciplining, purifying or giving a suitable form to the nature; but they still belong to the mental evolution,—the beginning of a spiritual realisation, experience, change is not yet there. Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 857)

## ART AND YOGA

*...if one does Yoga can he rise to such heights as Shakespeare or Shelley? There has been no such instance.*

WHY not? The Mahabharata and Ramayana are certainly not inferior to anything created by Shakespeare or any other poet, and they are said to have been the work of men who were Rishis and had done Yogic *tapasyā*. The Gita which, like the Upanishads, ranks at once among the greatest literary and the greatest spiritual works, was not written by one who had no experience of Yoga. And where is the inferiority to your Milton and Shelley in the famous poems written whether in India or Persia or elsewhere by men known to be saints, Sufis, devotees? And, then, do you know all the Yogis and their work? Among the poets and creators can you say who were or who were not in conscious touch with the Divine? There are some who are not officially Yogis, they are not *gurus* and have no disciples; the world does not know what they do; they are not anxious for fame and do not attract to themselves the attention of men; but they have the higher consciousness, are in touch with a Divine Power, and when they create they create from there. The best paintings in India and much of the best statuary and architecture were done by Buddhist monks who passed their lives in spiritual contemplation and practice; they did supreme artistic work, but did not care to leave their names to posterity. The chief reason why Yogis are not usually known by their art is that they do not consider their art-expression as the most important part of their life and do not put so much time and energy into it as a mere artist. And what they do does not always reach the public. How many there are who have done great things and not published them to the world! [...]

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters,—although his art did not stop at painting alone.

Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life. But, here too, we have turned it into something independent and self-sufficient, a mushroom art, such as in operatic music. Most of the artistic productions we come across are of this kind and at best interesting from the point of view of technique. I do not say that even operatic music cannot be used as a medium of a higher art expression; for whatever the form, it can be made to serve a deeper purpose. All depends on the thing itself, on how it is used, on what is behind it. There is nothing that cannot be used for the Divine purpose—just as anything can pretend to



be the Divine and yet be of the mushroom species.

Among the great modern musicians there have been several whose consciousness, when they created, came into touch with a higher consciousness. César Franck played on the organ as one inspired; he had an opening into the psychic life and he was conscious of it and to a great extent expressed it. Beethoven, when he composed the Ninth Symphony, had the vision of an opening into a higher world and of the descent of a higher world into this earthly plane. Wagner had strong and powerful intimations of the occult world; he had the instinct of occultism and the sense of the occult and through it he received his greatest inspirations. But he worked mainly on the vital level and his mind came in constantly to interfere and mechanised his inspiration. His work for the greater part is too mixed, too often obscure and heavy, although powerful. But when he could cross the vital and the mental levels and reach a higher world, some of the glimpses he had were of an exceptional beauty, as in Parsifal, in some parts of Tristan and Iseult and most in its last great Act.

Look again at what the moderns have made of the dance; compare it with what the dance once was. The dance was once one of the highest expressions of the inner life; it was associated with religion and it was an important limb in sacred ceremony, in the celebration of festivals, in the adoration of the Divine. In some countries it reached a very high degree of beauty and an extraordinary perfection. In Japan they kept up the tradition of the dance as a part of the religious life and, because the strict sense of beauty and art is a natural possession of the Japanese, they did not allow it to degenerate into something of lesser significance and smaller purpose. It was the same in India. It is true that in our days there have been attempts to resuscitate the ancient Greek and other dances; but the religious sense is missing in all such resurrections and they look more like rhythmic gymnastics than dance.[...]

There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth. For instance, there is a certain line of music, consisting of a few supreme notes, that was behind the productions of two artists who came one after another—one a concerto of Bach, another a concerto of Beethoven. The two are not alike on paper and differ to the outward ear, but in their essence they are the same. One and the same vibration of consciousness, one wave of significant harmony touched both these artists. Beethoven caught a larger part, but in him it was more mixed with the inventions and interpolations of his mind; Bach received less, but what he seized of it was purer. The vibration was that of the victorious emergence of consciousness, consciousness tearing itself out of the womb of unconsciousness in a triumphant uprising and birth.

If by Yoga you are capable of reaching this source of all art, then you are master, if you will, of all the arts. Those that may have gone there before, found it perhaps happier, more pleasant or full of a rapturous ease to remain and enjoy the Beauty and the Delight that are there, not manifesting it, not embodying it upon earth. But this abstention is not all the truth nor the true truth of Yoga; it is rather a deformation, a diminution of the dynamic freedom of Yoga by the more negative spirit of Sannyasa. The will of the Divine

is to manifest, not to remain altogether withdrawn in inactivity and an absolute silence; if the Divine Consciousness were really an inaction of unmanifesting bliss, there would never have been any creation.

28 July 1929

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers*, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 107-13. See also: A compilation by Georges van Vrekhem, *The Mother's Vision*, pp. 385-88)

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### TAMAS—LAZINESS

*What is "physical tamas"?*

You don't know that, you don't? Then, congratulations! For instance, does it never happen to you that being seated you don't want to get up? that having something to do you say, "Oh! I have to do all that...."

*Is it the same thing as laziness?*

Not quite. Of course, laziness is a kind of tamas, but in laziness there is an ill-will, a refusal to make an effort—while tamas is inertia: one wants to do something, but one can't.

I remember, a long time ago, having been among some young people, and they remarked that when I decided to get up I used to get up with a jump, without any difficulty. They asked me, "How do you do it? We, when we want to get up, have to make an effort of will to be able to do it." They were so surprised! and I was surprised by the opposite. I used to tell myself, "How does it happen? When one has decided to get up, one gets up." No, the body was there, like that, and it was necessary to put a will into it, to push this body for it to get up and act. It is like that, this is tamas. Tamas is a purely material thing; it is very rare to have a vital or mental tamas (it may occur but through contagion), I believe it is more a tamas of the nerves or the brain than vital or mental tamas. But laziness is everywhere, in the physical, the vital, the mind. Generally lazy people are not always lazy, not in all things. If you propose something that pleases them, amuses them, they are quite ready to make an effort. There is much ill-will in laziness.

28 April 1951

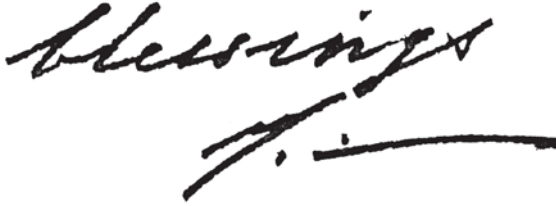
The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 4, pp. 366-67)

## THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

*(Continued from the issue of December 2003)*

(10)

The word "Blessings" is written in a cursive, handwritten style. Below the word is a long, horizontal flourish that starts with a small dot and ends with a sharp, upward-pointing hook.

Mother Divine,

I beg Your indulgence to write to You again.

When I entered the new flat, a gift of God, I expected a new life and a new dimension in the consciousness. But the opposite has happened. A tremendous inertia has come up bringing in its trend a sinking in the consciousness. Eczematic eruptions which subsided when I was in Bengal have once more reappeared as if with a vengeance. Faced with these problems I am rethinking about the question of my going to Bengal now. It seems to me that it is better to make the process of purification complete and to get cured completely before I go outside for Your Work. How can I help others when I am struggling with my own difficulties?

I pray for Your help and guidance.

With pranams,

14-4-69

Your child  
Abani

*(To be continued)*

## TWO LETTERS

### 1

You have asked me:

“Would I be wrong if I said that one could word Sri Aurobindo’s definition of poetry as in the draft below?

“‘Poetry is the power of the word; the word that comes accompanied with vision; both the word and the vision mostly rising from their source in a higher consciousness—in Eternity—and coming up not necessarily to amuse, or teach, or earn, but as the inner being’s own expressive impulse, an impulse for self-expression seeking liaison with Reality, the meaning of Existence, our real Home,—with Eternity, and affecting the ‘hearer’ in an intense fearful way, putting him in a whirligig of sense and sound.’ ”

Yours is an interesting definition but perhaps as much *à la* Rameshwar Gupta as Aurobindonian. Below I have attempted one which I think is more Aurobindonian than Amalian and avoids the sudden sensationalism of your ending:

“Poetry, dealing with whatever themes are congenial to the poet, is intensity of vision, intensity of word and intensity of rhythm, caught from an inner intuitive consciousness. This consciousness is in touch with a one-yet-manifold universal being as well as with a higher realm of reality whose creative Delight and Truth-Consciousness have manifested all the worlds as its progressive self-expression. On the one side poetry may be called a happy play of the Gods; on the other it is a great formative and illuminative power. We have to listen to it across a thrilled silence within us, so that what has come from the inner intuitive consciousness of the poet may be received by our own ‘soul’ and open in us

A golden temple-door to things beyond.”

27.3.1976

### 2

I have two letters of yours to answer. That doubles my guilt of delay. But, please believe me, your letters have not been unappreciated—they haven’t been *Margarita ante porcum*.

You ask me what sonorous names the initials K.D. veil. K is the modest facade of Kaikhushru, the Persian equivalent to the Latin Cyrus. I suppose it means something like “King of Kings”. D is for Dhunjibhoy—literally the Gujarati for Brother Opulence. So, you see, the names are not only sonorous but also splendidous. However, to suit the needs of day-to-day life I am called Kekoo—which reduces me to the same level as Maggie reduces one whose full name in English bears like an oyster the secret pearl of its latin significance.

Your mention of “Lewes” and of your studio-flat there brings me a strange nostalgia. I haven’t been to the place, but all places in England are, like the Kingdom of Heaven,

within me. I have only to let my thought dwell on them and I feel them at once as part of my soul's history on earth! It is the same with Greece. Ancient Athens is never dead for me. More than in the Rome of the Caesars, more than in Renaissance Italy—with both of which I feel rather familiar—I am at home in the circle of Socrates and the assembly of Pericles. It is a little disturbing at times to find oneself with so many native lands. There is Persia too, from which my forefathers came to India with the sacred fire saved from extinguishment by the loud fanatic cry of “Allah!” The Oxus, “rejoicing through the hushed Chorasmian waste”, flows still through my dreams and the white pillars of Persepolis have not fallen yet for me, nor have the great winged bulls taken flight. Every time I enter a Fire Temple the ages are abolished and the presence of Zoroaster mingles with the aroma of sandalwood rising from the flames. I am haunted also by a sense of lonely vigils in the deserts where the monks of early Christianity used to flee the world of Thais.

But, of course, the strongest “country of my mind” is the India of the Upanishads, the Gita and Sri Aurobindo. There are many Indias and, though all of them meet and fuse somewhere, it is spiritual India that particularly holds me as its native and in fact shuts me off to a certain extent from the other Indias, for when a country's very core is spiritual the lack or diminution of the inner light in the outer ordinary domains renders them all the more foreign by contrast to that core than the same domains in any other country. But one thing kins me to the masses in India in spite of so many things that make me a stranger to them: let them hear a flute playing and immediately the touch of a far-away twilight comes into their eyes and their heart-beats echo, however vaguely, however ignorantly, the footfalls of Krishna.

How different is the flute's effect in India from what it is anywhere else! Plato speaks of flute-music as being martial. I suppose that in the modern West it sounds a note of rich gaiety. With us here it is the very voice of the secret soul—the lure of a divine distance across a mist of tears that are sweeter than any joy.

Bombay, 4.1.1952

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

## OUR INVOCATION

THE stately revelation from time immemorial has been, “Great is Truth and it shall prevail.” As the Avatar of Supramental Truth, Sri Aurobindo gave us the Gayatri Mantra for the next phase of evolution and terrestrial existence for divine life:

Tat savitur varam rupam jyotih parasya dhimahi, yannah satyena dipayet.

“Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri,<sup>1</sup> on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth.”

The celebrated Gayatri Mantra of Veda was given by the Vedic Rishi Vishwamitra, the early forerunner of transformation from a Kshatriya to a Brahmarshi and the creator of a new world for Trishanku: “We meditate upon that excellent splendour of the Lord Savitur. May he activate our thoughts.” Even after the passage of aeonic time it is still relevant to the seeker of the Truth. Sri Aurobindo had commented: “...in the Gayatri, the chosen formula of the ancient Vedic religion, the supreme light of the godhead Surya Savitri is invoked as the object of our desire, the deity who shall give his luminous impulsion to all our thoughts.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, “The Gayatri mantra is the mantra for bringing the light of Truth into all the planes of the being.”<sup>3</sup> He also asserted its mystic significance: “The power of Gayatri is the Light of the divine Truth. It is a mantra of Knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo gave us the following four Mantras for our yoga sadhana and life because, after all, “All life is Yoga”—his *mahavakya*—profound utterance:

Om Tat Sat Jyotir Arvinda

Om Satyam Jnanam Jyotir Arvinda

Om Anandamayi Chaitanyamayi Satyamayi Parame.<sup>5</sup>

“Om Sri Aurobindo Mira. Open my mind, my heart, my life to your Light, your Love, your Power. In all things may I see the Divine.”

The Mother used her old favourite Mantra<sup>6</sup> during her Yoga of the Body to keep her outer being very tranquil. She found it had power to calm everything. She explained on March 14, 1973 what each term meant to her:

*Om*: I implore the Supreme Lord.

*Namo*: I obey Him.

*Bhagavate*: Make me divine.

Self-expression with true aspiration transforms itself into a prayer of God-quest, God-affinity, and God-sublimation where the infinitesimal acquires oneness with the Infinite. Sri Aurobindo had revealed this to us in his *Synthesis of Yoga*,—“He who chooses

the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite.” This magical alchemy is a spiritual truth, presented to us by Sri Aurobindo:

A prayer, a master act, a king idea  
 Can link man’s strength to a transcendent Force.  
 Then miracle is made the common rule,  
 One mighty deed can change the course of things;  
 A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.<sup>7</sup>

We have assurance from Sri Aurobindo that, “If you have a sincere aspiration to the spiritual change in your heart and soul, then you will find the way and the Guide.” However, he also warned us that, “A mere mental seeking and questioning are not enough to open the doors of the Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> The Mother’s revelation, “The more we advance on the way, the more the need of the Divine Presence becomes imperative and indispensable.”<sup>9</sup>— is very helpful in recognizing the mysterious ways of the Divine and keeping things in perspective.

Worshipping for a brief time at a special place as done in traditional religious practices is not the way to pursue the Integral Yoga. For a pursuer of the Integral Yoga, every aspect of life offers an opportunity in the form of some sort of a challenge for integral transformation. Work constitutes the major component of our daily activities and thus work is a crucial component incorporated in our yoga sadhana. The Mother supported and promoted the Karma Yoga of Bhagavat Gita. The Mother integrated prayer and work and gave us her luminous guidance to follow:

- Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body’s best prayer to the Divine.
- To work for the Divine is to pray with the body.
- It is said there that the work, consecrated work or service is the prayer of the body. Mind’s prayer is expressed in words, body’s prayer in works. Work is the prayer in its dynamic and concrete form, it is the utterance of the physical, the language it knows in order to ask for and seek the union with the Divine. It is the holy ritual expressing and embodying in the physical, material life, one’s adoration, one’s adhesion to the ideal, the deity one worships.
- It is not what you do that matters, but the way you do it and the consciousness you put into it. Remember the Divine unceasingly, and all that you do will express the Divine Presence. When you consecrate all your actions to the Divine, there will no longer be any higher or lower activities, all will have an equal importance: that conferred on them by the consecration.

These cherished ideals can progressively be realized as we strive for perfection in our actions and sincerity not in hopes of reward, recognition, or advancement, but to make our labor a more fitting offering to the Divine. What is truly significant is the

attitude in which any work is performed regardless of its perceived socio-economic importance and the success of the endeavours. The work-attitude and work-ethics founded on these principles are conducive to the transformation of individual consciousness and have serene ripple effects in the workplace and collective living. Consequently, it may lead to synergy of collective consciousness and at some point it may reach the “critical mass” of spiritual consciousness to set the chain reaction to facilitate integral transformation of humanity. It may enable the Supramental consciousness to become the direct operative force to manifest Sat-Chit-Ananda (Sachchidananda)<sup>10</sup>. “What will be, will be as Thou wiltest.”

Let us be reflective in our actions, contemplative in our thoughts and seek Truth in all our being.

ARUN VAIDYA

### *Notes and References*

1. ‘Savitri’ referred to is the Sun-God *savitur* symbolizing the Truth.
2. *The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 480.
3. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 747.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sri Aurobindo’s Mantra was distributed by the Mother on Mahakali Puja on November 11, 1955.
6. February 19, 1965: The first word represents invocation to the Supreme. The second word represents total self-giving, perfect surrender. The third word represents the aspiration, what the manifestation must become – the Divine.
7. *Savitri*, p. 20.
8. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 138.
9. The Mother’s Message of February 21, 1973.
10. Existence, consciousness, bliss are the three attributes of infinity, the three basic aspects of the Absolute.



## DYUMAN “THE LUMINOUS”—KARMAYOGI

AN ARTICLE under the above title has appeared in *Mother India*, October 2003. Written from her heart by Krishna Chakravarti, who had the privilege of working with Dyumanbhai in the later part of his life, and in fact, till his last day, it stirred in me some old memories of him. At the end she speaks of the August 1992 Darshan after which Dyumanbhai was admitted into the Nursing Home: “He also did office work on the 19th and then suddenly left his body in the evening. At the end of the month, I took out the daily diary to work on the accounts. To my disbelief, it was filled up to 19 August! Was it premonition or a coincidence? Or was it *ichchamrityu*?” She continues, “I remember vividly my last meeting with him. He was sitting on his bed, we discussed office work, and then I left. But before closing the door of his room, I looked back. He was sitting on his bed looking in my direction, and with both his hands, he was doing namaste. I was surprised and thought I had seen wrong. But that night when the news of his passing reached me, I realized it was not a hallucination, he was bidding me adieu.”

I was in Germany at that time on a visit and have nothing to say from firsthand experience on the subject, but am tempted to relate what Bernard V. Dreesmann had told me last year in the course of a chat. He is based in Germany and works for the needy and aged. For the past 32 years he has been frequently visiting the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. This is what he said:

“In 1992 I arrived in Pondicherry on August 15, and when I went to see Dyuman in the Ashram, he was very busy because of Sri Aurobindo’s Birthday. So I did not disturb him, but when I went to see him the following morning, I was told that he had been hospitalized. I went to see him on that Saturday in the Nursing Home and we talked a while. I also visited him on Sunday and Monday, in the late afternoons. When I went to see him on Tuesday, August 19, I told him that I would leave the following day for Madras, but would bid him farewell the following morning. Dyuman asked me to go to the Samadhi around 7:00 pm and I answered that this time was not very convenient for me, since I had invited some friends for my usual farewell dinner for 7:30 pm. But Dyuman insisted in his friendly way and said: ‘Bernard, I ask you for a favour. Please, go.’ So I agreed and I will never forget his sweet smile, when I left the room. I went to the Samadhi, not very long though and looked also into his room and at Mother’s photo hanging there. When the dinner was over and I had seen off my last guests at the gate of the “Grand Hotel d’Europe”, somebody walked towards me from the other side of the street and told me that Dyuman had passed away and I would be able to pay my respect to him in the Ashram. I went there and saw him back in his room. I tried to control my emotions, since Dyuman had been for many years my best friend in the Ashram, and stayed a couple of hours at the Samadhi until they carried his body several times around the Samadhi and laid it in another room in the Ashram. I asked somebody, when Dyuman had actually passed away and was told: ‘Around 7:00 pm’.

“Maybe everything was just a coincidence, but my personal belief is that our friend Dyuman knew, when I saw him in the late afternoon, that his time had come. He had

accepted this in his own calm way and was ready to accept the call he had received. I hope, we all will react and act the same way, when our time comes.”

In fact, there have been a number of instances, both inside and outside the Ashram —of people facing their death calmly, squarely, yogically, as if they had premonition of the event and had readied themselves for it. But Dyuman’s passing, I would say, had another dimension to it.

At the very outset of her article Krishna Chakravarti speaks of the round-the-clock readiness of Dyuman, the karmayogi, to serve Mother, and gives an instance: “Occasionally, late at night, one would observe an interesting and amusing sight inside the main Ashram building. The Mother would call from Her room on the first floor, ‘Dyuman!’ Instantly, a man in his early thirties would rush out of his room below with a ladder in his hands, place it near the open terrace of his room, climb it and announce, ‘Yes, Mother, I am here.’” He would be there to know Mother’s wish and carry it out. I recall what he said to me sometimes, “When Mother calls me I go to her and say, ‘Yes, Mother, I am here; tell me.’ She tells me and I simply do it. I do not question.” Why would he question? He had his ladder of devotion and obedience and karmayoga as his short cut to the Divine Mother. I can still feel the vibration of his words: “Yes, Mother, I am here; tell me. She tells me and I simply do it.” The added dimension to the last moments of Dyumanbhai’s life is indicated in the closing words of the article: “He must have heard the Mother call ‘Dyuman’ from the other world and must have immediately rushed up that invisible ladder that connects this world with Hers and said, ‘Yes, Mother, I am here.’”

SHYAM SUNDER JHUNJUNWALA

## PUBLISHING SRI AUROBINDO'S COMPLETE WORKS

[What does it mean to prepare the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo for publication? In an article in the August 2003 issue of Auroville Today (reproduced here with slight revision), Carel of Auroville interviews Bob Zwicker, Richard Hartz, Peter Heehs and Matthijs Cornelissen of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library, who speak about the joys and difficulties of this immense endeavour.]

### The Original Schedule

It was good tidings for all lovers of Sri Aurobindo's writings. In 1996 the Sri Aurobindo Ashram announced that it would bring out The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo in 35 volumes. The set would include around 2,500 pages of texts that were not part of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, the 30-volume set published around 1972 and no longer available. Publication of the Complete Works would begin in 1997 and was expected to take four years. But by 2003, six years later, only 21 volumes have been published. Why the delay?

"The estimate of four years was made by Jayantilal, the founder of the Archives, who initiated the project and has since passed away," Bob explains. "It was based on his experience with publishing the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library in the remarkably short period of about three years (except for the Index and Glossary). But the new Complete Works differs from SABCL in that all the texts are being compared with the manuscripts and early editions. It is always difficult to make long-range estimates and it now seems that the four-year schedule for the present project was too optimistic. Rather than cut corners in order to stick to the original schedule, we are concentrating on doing the work as well as possible, however long it takes.

"When we began, we had twenty years of work behind us. In 1975 Nolini-da passed on to the Archives all of Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts in his possession—more than 150 notebooks and thousands of loose sheets. In 1977 we started the journal *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research* in which over the next eighteen years more than 2,000 pages of previously unpublished writings appeared, including most of the *Record of Yoga*. During this period we also brought out *Essays Divine and Human* and new editions of *The Future Poetry* and *Savitri*. By 1997 when the Complete Works began, we had half-a-dozen volumes ready or almost ready for publication and another half-a-dozen well underway. But after those books were printed, things slowed down. We have ten people working full-time on the job, another ten working part-time, but it is still a long process."

Why is it taking so long? "First," answers Richard, "because we feel that Sri Aurobindo's writings deserve to be published in the most faithful and accurate editions possible. This kind of work, by its very nature, takes a lot of time. We compare the text of

each volume at least twice with Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts and the early editions of his works. The exact procedure differs from one book to another, but to do it with concentrated attention to every detail is always time-consuming. Second, we are including much more previously unpublished material than we had originally planned. The volumes we are bringing out are getting bigger and bigger. In the beginning they were four or five hundred pages each on the average, but the new ones are six or seven hundred pages or even more, and there will be more than the projected 35 volumes. Part of the reason for this is that we have had some surprises, especially with the letters. We received a large collection of the manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo's letters after the publication schedule of the Complete Works had been announced. When we started this work, we did not expect that we would be spending much time on Sri Aurobindo's letters since most of the manuscripts had not come to the Archives. Now several members of the department are spending all their time going through thousands of pages of letters, leaving less manpower available for other volumes of the Complete Works.

"Actually, the whole project is going pretty quickly by normal standards for this kind of work. Recently I was looking at the critical edition of the Mahabharata which was brought out by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. In the introduction to one of the early volumes, the chief editor remarked that he had been in charge of the project for seventeen years. During that period, critical editions of four of the eighteen Parvas had been published. Sri Aurobindo's writings do not pose exactly the same kinds of problems as the Mahabharata, but it takes time to produce a good edition."

### **The Old Edition and the New**

How does the new Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo differ from the old Centenary edition of his writings? Bob explains: "Wherever the Complete Works differs from the Centenary edition, it is as a result of our checking the manuscripts and the editions published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. Besides these differences in the texts that were already available, there is a lot of new material; there will be well over 3,000 pages that were not in the Centenary Library. *Essays Divine and Human* has about 300 pages of newly published writings on philosophy and yoga. The *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo's diary of his sadhana between 1909 and 1927, is a 1,500-page text that has been published for the first time. His writings on the Upanishads now fill two volumes, not just one as in the Centenary. The Vedic material, likewise, will take up three volumes instead of two; most of the new texts will go in a volume we are calling *Vedic Studies with Writings on Philology*. Many autobiographical writings will be added to *On Himself*, which will become two volumes. The *Letters on Yoga* may take up four volumes, not just three, because so many letters will be added."

### **Letters on Yoga**

Does the Archives now possess all of Sri Aurobindo's writings? How complete will the

Complete Works be? “With the exception of the letters, it will be fairly complete,” answers Peter. “We have virtually all the surviving manuscript material for his books, essays, poems and plays, and we will include almost everything that is not too fragmentary to publish. But the letters will not be complete. More letters could still turn up unexpectedly, and we can’t even use everything we have. In some cases we have the whole correspondence, including the disciple’s own letters, such as Nirodbaran’s and Nagin Doshi’s. In other cases only Sri Aurobindo’s answers have been preserved, but sometimes these are meaningful only if you have the questions.” Matthijs elaborates: “Many people have cut out the personal stuff, sometimes literally with scissors. So you have these frustrating cases where you are left with a remark by Sri Aurobindo such as ‘Yes, this is a perfect description of the psychic emergence’ and you don’t know what experience it refers to. That is one reason why editing the letters is so difficult. To include a single line like this out of context doesn’t make sense. Neither is it possible to include the disciples’ complete letters. They often went on for pages at a time, with a few words written here and there in the margin by Sri Aurobindo. The *Letters on Yoga* are likely to expand to four volumes, as Bob said, even if we give only Sri Aurobindo’s answers as in the previous editions. In the other volumes—*Letters on Poetry and Art*, *On Himself* and *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*—we will include the disciple’s question when it helps. The preparation of these volumes of letters is now our main focus.”

### **Letters on Poetry and Art**

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the early days was a hotbed of poets, with Sri Aurobindo, in his own words, “directly responsible for the poetry department”. For him, writing poetry could be part of one’s sadhana if practised with the right inner attitude, and he helped his disciples in their poetic efforts. “Hundreds of his letters on poetry and literature will now appear in a new volume, *Letters on Poetry and Art*,” explains Peter. “In the Centenary edition these letters (about 500 of them) appeared in three different books: *The Future Poetry*, *On Himself* and *Savitri*. But now we have some 1,000 letters, so we decided to put them in a separate volume; it will be almost 800 pages long. Even so, it will not contain the detailed comments that Sri Aurobindo made on specific poems of his disciples. Nirodbaran and Amal Kiran have published some of their poems with Sri Aurobindo’s corrections and appraisals. We decided that only Sri Aurobindo’s remarks of general interest will be included in *Letters on Poetry and Art*.” Bob adds: “Some day we plan to publish the letters not by subject but by correspondent. In this format the disciple’s questions are included as well as Sri Aurobindo’s replies. In the case of literary correspondence, the disciple’s poems can be printed along with Sri Aurobindo’s comments. The material will be left in chronological order and we will be able to include more of it. The correspondence really springs to life when it is presented as a day-to-day exchange between master and disciple. We may eventually wind up with twenty or thirty books like this. But we will take this up only when we have finished the Complete Works.”

### Preparing Editions of Sri Aurobindo's Writings

On what basis do the editors in the Archives prepare the texts for publication? And what does "editing" mean when applied to the writings of Sri Aurobindo? Answers Peter: "We don't 'edit' in the way the term is usually understood. Our aim is to publish Sri Aurobindo's works in accurate and authentic editions. When we have to make decisions, they are based on textual evidence and not on subjective factors such as our own stylistic preferences. If a sentence is somehow defective due to a slip of the pen or incomplete revision, we may emend it, just as previous editors have done in such cases, but only when we feel sure that the emendation is what Sri Aurobindo intended to write. He used to joke about his slips of the pen, so that possibility has to be taken into account when something in the manuscript doesn't seem to make sense. But we are extremely cautious about making such emendations."

Richard gives an example of an incompletely revised sentence. "In the second paragraph of the essay 'The Entire Purpose of Yoga',<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo originally wrote: 'It does not matter if for the present you fall short of your aim so long as you give yourself wholly to the attempt.' He then revised the sentence and changed 'wholly' to 'wholeheartedly'. He also crossed out the two occurrences of 'you' and wrote 'we' above them. Where 'your' appeared before 'aim', he crossed out the 'y' so that it became 'our'. But he did not touch 'yourself'. So the manuscript reads: 'It does not matter if for the present we fall short of our aim so long as we give yourself wholeheartedly to the attempt.' The ungrammatical phrase 'we give yourself' obviously came about due to an oversight in revision. No editor would print it, even though it is what is in the manuscript. When the essay was published in the first edition of *The Hour of God* in 1959, 'yourself' was corrected to 'ourselves' as Sri Aurobindo presumably intended. In *Essays Divine and Human*, where such essays reproduced from his manuscripts are now published, we have accepted this emendation and others like it. In newly published material we have made similar emendations ourselves where necessary."

Peter continues: "Any time there is a doubt about a sentence, our first response is to look at the manuscript. Sometimes a translator will come and ask if a certain sentence is okay or not, and give all sorts of reasons why it should be changed. (This usually happens with translators, because they have to understand every word before they can translate it.) The answer is always found by analysing the physical evidence. It is never a question of making a purely subjective decision. It is the same when we evaluate previous editions. In practice, when we prepare Sri Aurobindo's writings for publication, part of our work consists of restoring texts to their original form where they had been edited according to ideas of correctness or consistency which we feel need not be imposed on these writings."

Matthijs clarifies: "Our effort is to keep the texts as Sri Aurobindo wrote them. There had been quite a bit of regularising of capitalisation and punctuation by previous editors which we now consider unnecessary. In the Centenary edition, for example, the policy adopted for Sanskrit words was to capitalise the first letter of all words that are not italicised. In *Essays on the Gita* the word 'guna' occurs a couple of hundred times. Sri



Aurobindo rarely italicised or capitalised that word. In the Centenary edition, it has been systematically capitalised; 'guna' has become 'Guna' everywhere. In the Complete Works, we have gone back to what was printed during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. Another example, also in *Essays on the Gita*, is the word 'dharma', which Sri Aurobindo wrote with or without capitalising the 'd', depending on what he meant. In the Centenary edition the word was uniformly capitalised, blurring the distinction he intended to make. For example, he wrote of "the maintaining of all in their dharma and the Dharma", with a small 'd' the first time and a capital 'D' the second;<sup>2</sup> in the Centenary edition they are both capitals.<sup>3</sup> Here too we went back to the original.<sup>4</sup> In this one book, there are more than a thousand small differences such as these between the new edition and the previous one. People say that we have 'changed' it, but in fact what we did was to reverse changes that were made previously and revert to the original, that is, we restored what Sri Aurobindo himself wrote."

### *Savitri*

The Archives has been severely put to the test in connection with the edition of *Savitri* that was published in 1993. Many people were taken aback at the number of differences from previous editions. Sri Aurobindo had worked on *Savitri* for 34 years—from 1916 until the month before his passing in 1950. During this time the poem grew from a narrative poem of moderate length into an epic of almost 24,000 lines. He revised the poem again and again, filling notebooks, chit-pads and loose sheets of paper with his alterations and additions, and revising by dictation when he could no longer see well enough to do it with his own hand. The text was undoubtedly a challenging one. Only after seven years of careful checking and rechecking of the original manuscripts was it announced in the *Archives and Research* journal of December 1986 that a new edition of *Savitri* was ready. But this turned out to be just the beginning. The long list of corrections published in the journal caused a controversy and it was seven more years before the new edition was finally released with the authorisation of Nirodbaran and Amal Kiran. Even so, there were people who were reluctant to accept it. After all, had not the Mother said to Amal in 1954 that she wouldn't allow him to change even a comma in *Savitri*?

Richard answers: "There has been a lot of confusion because that statement of the Mother's has been misinterpreted by people who don't know about the editorial work she actually authorised. Taken out of context, what she said to Amal may sound like an unanswerable argument against the new edition of *Savitri* and, by extension, against the work of the Archives as a whole. But the fact is that in 1954 the Mother approved of plenty of changes in the printed text of *Savitri*. More generally, she sanctioned the method of basing corrections on a comparison of the copies, typescripts, etc., with the manuscript—the method that was later applied more systematically by the Archives. Her approval of the editorial process is mentioned in Amal's book *Our Light and Delight* in the next paragraph after he reports that she told him he was not to change 'even a comma'. So her words have to be understood in this context.

“Contrary to popular belief, the published text of *Savitri* was in a state of flux in the early days. Mistakes were gradually being noticed and were corrected almost every time there was a reprint up to 1976, after which the Archives began its work and it was decided not to make any further corrections until the new edition was ready. There are more than 170 differences between the 1950-51 edition and the 1954 edition, including about 80 involving commas and others that are much more significant. In the last two pages of Book Four, Canto Two, several lines of the first edition were replaced in 1954 with versions whose wording is entirely different. These versions were taken from a typescript revised by Sri Aurobindo, which had been overlooked when the first edition was prepared. The Mother was aware of the work that was done on *Savitri* in 1954. Since she approved of the corrections then being made, her remark to Amal cannot possibly have meant that she wanted the text printed in 1950-51 to be kept exactly as it was. She could not have meant anything other than what Amal himself explained in an interview a few years ago, namely, that he was not to change anything according to his own ideas. In the same interview, he mentioned another conversation he had with the Mother in which he explained to her that corrections in *Savitri* might be necessary because Sri Aurobindo’s words had sometimes been misread. She said, ‘That’s a different matter.’

“The discovery of errors in the published text of *Savitri* continued after 1954 and led to many further corrections when the Centenary edition was published in 1970. But most of these mistakes were obvious enough to be noticed by someone reading the printed book. In those days, the manuscripts and typescripts were checked only when an error was suspected. (It was while doing this kind of spot-checking in 1954 that the revised typescript I mentioned was found.) Yet the only way to be sure about the accuracy of the text is to read the final manuscripts all the way through and look at all the subsequent stages of copying, typing and printing to see whether differences from the manuscript were due to Sri Aurobindo’s dictated revision or to someone else’s inadvertency. This is what the Archives has spent so many years doing.

“After completing three such readings of the manuscripts of *Savitri*, we published our first list of proposed corrections in 1986. There was some criticism of that list, and this had to be dealt with before we could proceed further. But this was intelligent and constructive criticism, in contrast to much of what the Archives has faced more recently. It had the valuable effect of stimulating Nirodbaran and Amal, who had worked on the earlier editions under the Mother’s supervision, to play an active role in preparing the new edition of *Savitri* and ultimately to take full responsibility for it. They spent four years looking at the manuscripts and other materials related to each point in our list of proposed corrections. It was they who decided every detail of what was finally printed. What was remarkable was to witness Nirodbaran’s absolute integrity. He had been the one who had copied the manuscripts of *Savitri* for Sri Aurobindo and he had done a very impressive job. But if our readings were right, he had made some mistakes in copying the hundreds of pages of difficult manuscripts. He now had the authority to make the final decisions. He could easily have justified his own copying where we doubted its correctness. Nobody could have challenged him. But he never once took that attitude. His only concern



was with seeing what Sri Aurobindo had written and following it.”

### The Handwriting

Gradually, Sri Aurobindo's finely etched handwriting became almost illegible. In his *Correspondence*, Nirodbaran cites an instance where he protested, “Good Lord, your writing is exceeding all limits, Sir!” Sri Aurobindo retorted, “Transformation of handwriting. The self exceeds all limits, the handwriting should do so also.”<sup>5</sup> Peter comments: “There are early periods of his handwriting when almost every letter is distinctly formed—except sometimes when he revised between the lines or wrote in pencil which has now faded, and then even the early manuscripts can be very difficult. There are later periods when you often have just the general shape of a word and have to see from the context what word fits, looking at a combination of form and meaning. The last stage of the handwriting, around 1947 when Sri Aurobindo's eyesight was failing, looks almost illegible at first sight. Often it is hard to figure out where one word ends and the next begins. But when you study this handwriting it turns out to be rather systematically illegible, making it not impossible to read. For example, sometimes in trying to decipher a word it helps to count the dots of the ‘i’s; generally they are all there somewhere. And if we are lucky, there may be an earlier draft of the same text that is clearer. Meanwhile, as we struggle to transcribe the texts, the pressure to finish the book and get it to the press is mounting, because we are always behind schedule.

“A lot of what we do is essentially glorified proofreading. That sometimes brings the danger that the work becomes just the grist of the day, where you go through another twenty pages of text. Doing this kind of work is entirely different from reading Sri Aurobindo's writings for yourself, where you can enjoy the flow of the argument and the beauty of the language. We sometimes miss the forest for the trees. But there is a reward in this work. It is fascinating to study the way in which Sri Aurobindo revised his own texts—a privilege which others cannot share with us. This work does take you into his consciousness, so to speak, and it gives a kind of precision and in-depth understanding, looking at the exact nuances of the words he is using and seeing why he is changing one word to another. It gives a particular intimacy.”

Richard describes the experience of deciphering words that have almost been given up as illegible: “In front of you is the manuscript of a writing that has never been published before. It is to be included in a book that is nearly ready to go to the press. But in the print-out there are still places marked with ‘[. . .]’, meaning an illegible word. I know that this piece of paper has been lying around for maybe ninety years or so and that something is written there between the lines, something that came from Sri Aurobindo's consciousness, which nobody has been able to decipher. This is the last chance to read that word or phrase for this edition. And that is exciting. At this point I have locked myself in the cold storage room where we keep Sri Aurobindo's original manuscripts and I will remain there until I solve the problem. I feel somewhat like a yogi doing tapasya in a cave in the Himalayas. Taking my small loupe with 8x magnification, I put it on the

word in the manuscript and sit there looking at it, aware of the context but preferably with no preconceived ideas about what kind of word it might be. I have found that it is mainly a question of tenacity, of not giving up. After staring at a word sometimes for hours, there is a mysterious moment when suddenly, without my knowing exactly when or how it happened, I know what is written there. You can call it intuition or whatever you like. That is one of the satisfactions of this work.”

### Explaining the Texts

Preparing an edition of Sri Aurobindo’s texts is one thing, understanding them is something else. Peter remarks: “Our aim is to provide an accurate text by following Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts. Obviously, to be able to do anything in the English language you have to know the language, and of course we try to understand the text ourselves as part of the process. But it is not our work as editors to interpret the text for readers. Here and there we have added factual footnotes about the manuscript or some textual difficulty, but we do not comment on the text. For the *Record of Yoga* we will publish a glossary and a structural outline of the system of terminology, because it is so unusual and inaccessible. But even there, we try to keep the element of subjective interpretation to a minimum. We study the contexts in which Sri Aurobindo has used a particular word, in the *Record* and in his other works, and on that basis we formulate a definition, as close as possible to his own words, taking the Sanskrit dictionary definition and if necessary the etymology into account. That is as far as the responsibility of the Archives goes, as we see it. Any interpretation of the text or commentary on it is an individual’s personal business.”

### The Mother’s Works

Is there any chance of bringing out a Complete Works of the Mother—a revised and enlarged edition of the Collected Works? Bob shakes his head. “Not at the moment. We are fully absorbed in Sri Aurobindo’s works. The Mother’s works are on hold. What is being done for now is to reissue the 17-volume Collected Works of the Mother in a new edition. Its text will be the same as that of the first edition, apart from the correction of a few errors. A CD-ROM of these 17 volumes will also be issued. I may add that the 17 volumes are now available not only in English but in French. So for the moment we are concentrating on Sri Aurobindo’s works, but a Complete Works of the Mother will come.”

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3. *Essays on the Gita*, SABCL, Vol. 13, p. 165.
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5. *Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Volume Two (1984), p. 689.

## HERE THE ADVENT AWAITS THE APOCALYPSE

THE rains of November in the midnight came when there was no moon,  
And lost in that patter of silence the Insensible lay in grounded sleep;  
Suddenly the will of the frozen Past trembled like a deep purple furrow,  
And as though in the elsewhere stretch of a farm-yard stirred unbegun life;  
Roots of the conifer finely drew the soil's half-risen contents heavenward,  
Even as the spring-fires soared in happy youth of Time for the Evergreen;  
Then kindled by a briskly-seeing gaze that fell godlike into the Summer's eye  
Marvels of thought blazed, and to intenser noons swiftly the days moved;  
Above the head in a fusing splendour of the hush that holds many wisdoms  
The gold-glimmering peaks of climbing hues leaped into the Featureless;  
In that luminous Blank no word quivered, and the sevenfold was not there,  
All movements ceased, as would substance and force in the etheric Calm;  
Crossing the doors of Ignorance domains of a strange Void were reached,  
Haloed vastnesses of annulment wherein disappears the various Becoming;  
But in a queer swing of grandeur as Eternity turned into an alert moment  
The lake of nenuphars tilted downward, jubilant, pouring a million miracles;  
The Dream descending through the amber trance entered a twilight world,  
A Form like the purity of a sunbright goddess of the early quickening hour;  
Soon the sky returning from the All-above gathered into denser spheres,  
And the growing Infinite's rapture found abodes of the flaming Multitude;  
Crashing through lion-gates the Truth-lustrous Person roared in triumph,  
And a cry flaring from the remote Transcendent's edge tore the Negation;  
But the Afflatus in a mystery of pause stayed awhile beyond invisible sight,  
And hence must the other earths, and the Advent too, await the Apocalypse.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

# INTEGRAL YOGA AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

*(Continued from the issue of December 2003)*

## **Yoga in a Materialistic World**

SRI AUROBINDO foresaw that the knowledge developed and preserved over the ages in India under the name of Yoga is destined not merely to survive, but to triumph and usher in an age of spiritual discovery that will fulfil the work now being done by science to attack the causes of human ignorance and misery. He wrote:

The generalisation of Yoga in humanity must be the last victory of Nature over her own delays and concealments. Even as now by the progressive mind in Science she seeks to make all mankind fit for the full development of the mental life, so by Yoga must she inevitably seek to make all mankind fit for the higher evolution.... And as the mental life uses and perfects the material, so will the spiritual use and perfect the material and the mental existence as the instruments of a divine self-expression.<sup>1</sup>

But what is this Yoga that can “make all mankind fit for the higher evolution” and turn our mental and physical life into “instruments of a divine self-expression”? It is not what most people think of nowadays when they hear the word “Yoga”. The popular notion of Yoga at present, especially in the West and consequently to some extent even in India, is that it means Hathayoga, an elaborate physical discipline based on a system of postures and breath-control exercises. Hathayoga, however, is just the tip of the iceberg of Yoga. Though its mechanical processes, in a simplified form, appeal to the materialistic modern mind for their tangible benefits, real Hathayoga is a long and strenuous path to reach a goal which it has in common with all forms of Yoga.

The goal of every method of Yoga, according to the meaning of the Sanskrit word *yoga* itself, is union—union, that is, with the eternal Reality hidden behind the transient appearances of the world. This Reality is one and not many; but because of the complexity of our nature it can be approached in a variety of ways. There has been no limit to the resourcefulness, audacity and intuitive insight of the Yogis in finding methods of sublimating each element of man’s being to the point where it passes beyond the finite and enters into contact with the Infinite.

To attain the Yogi’s traditional objective of release out of bondage to the body into communion with the Divine, any one of these established techniques practised with an all-absorbing intensity is enough. But if Yoga is to enter dynamically into the mainstream of life, specialised methods that require the individual to shut himself off from the world will not serve the purpose. To adapt them to modern conditions by diluting them, as is often done, means to lower the ideal instead of enlarging it. Therefore Sri Aurobindo found that the time-honoured knowledge and practice of Yoga have to be reformulated to regain their relevance in an evolving world. Proposing a new synthesis, he wrote:

Yoga has long diverged from life and the ancient systems which sought to embrace it, such as those of our Vedic forefathers, are far away from us, expressed in terms which are no longer accessible, thrown into forms which are no longer applicable. Since then mankind has moved forward on the current of eternal Time and the same problem has to be approached from a new starting-point.<sup>2</sup>

A life-embracing Yoga that keeps pace with the forward movement of Time and does not confine itself to an existing tradition is bound to be an adventure into the unknown. In this respect, it would have much in common with the adventure of modern science, whose discoveries in the last century or so have revolutionised our conception of and mastery over the physical world. The Yoga of the future could have much more far-reaching consequences, since its exploration would not be confined to the material surface of existence. It would plunge into the depths of consciousness, soar into undreamed-of heights of the spirit and bring the truths and powers of those realms back with it to reshape our lives.

Much of what we can expect to be discovered when Yoga takes over from science as the leader of the human quest is sure to be a rediscovery of things that were known in ancient times; but this knowledge will no longer be restricted to a few initiates. Science itself has already opened windows upon a world that differs startlingly from the one presented to us by our senses. The Sanskrit word for the illusoriness of appearances is *māyā*. The perception of the world as *māyā* does not mean that the world does not exist at all, but that its reality is different from its appearance. A gulf has still to be bridged between the scientific and Yogic views of the nature of reality, but their agreement about the unreality of sensory appearances is an important step towards the unity of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo commented on the convergence of the conclusions of science with those of the ancient Indian knowledge in his major philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, where as far back as 1914 he wrote:

Nothing can be more remarkable and suggestive than the extent to which modern Science confirms in the domain of Matter the conceptions and even the very formulae of language which were arrived at, by a very different method, in the Vedanta,—the original Vedanta, not of the schools of metaphysical philosophy, but of the Upanishads. And these, on the other hand, often reveal their full significance, their richer contents only when they are viewed in the new light shed by the discoveries of modern Science,—for instance, that Vedantic expression which describes things in the Cosmos as one seed arranged by the universal Energy in multitudinous forms.<sup>3</sup>

This idea of a single “seed” multiplied and arranged to form myriads of objects is found in the Shwetashwata Upanishad in the phrase *ekam bījām bahudhā yaḥ karoti*. It is the subject of a sonnet by Sri Aurobindo called “Electron”:

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,  
 Leaped into being, a particle of God.  
 A spark from the eternal Energy spilt,  
 It is the Infinite's blind minute abode.

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.  
 The One devised innumerably to be;  
 His oneness in invisible forms he hides,  
 Time's tiny temples to eternity.

Atom and molecule in their unseen plan  
 Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,  
 Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man,—  
 Man on whom the World-Unity shall seize,

Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany  
 Of the timeless vastness of Infinity.<sup>4</sup>

In this poem the vision of modern physics is inextricably fused with the vision of the ancient mystics. But the consummation foreseen at the end of the poem, the widening of the human soul into infinity, will come only when we consciously allow ourselves to be seized upon by the World-Unity. This is the essence of what is called Yoga, and it goes far beyond the limitations of science as it is now understood.

Yoga is scientific in a sense, but it is a kind of super-science that properly begins where ordinary science ends. Science is based on the observation of the objective world. It assumes the objective to be more real than the subjective, even though it ends up proving that the objective appearances it started from are illusory. Most forms of Yoga, on the contrary, are based on subjective self-observation. They assume the inner to be more real than the outer, since without consciousness the outer world would not exist for us, or possibly would not exist at all. With regard to the distinction between the validity of subjective and objective experience, Sri Aurobindo remarked in a letter:

Yoga... is scientific to this extent that it proceeds by subjective experiment and bases all its findings on experience.... As to the value of the experience itself, it is doubted by the physical mind because it is subjective, not objective. But has the distinction much value? Is not all knowledge and experience subjective at bottom? Objective external physical things are seen very much in the same way by human beings because of the construction of the mind and senses; with another construction of mind and sense quite another account of the physical world would be given— Science itself has made that very clear.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, ordinary subjective experience may be as misleading as the objective

data received through the senses. But to dismiss for this reason all data except what the admittedly unreliable testimony of the senses provides, is to restrict arbitrarily the field of knowledge. It is legitimate for scientists to limit their own investigations in this way, as part of the discipline of their field. It is not legitimate, however, to claim that the results of Yogic research are in any way disproved by physical science's inability to confirm them by its own kind of tests.

The fact that such claims are becoming less and less fashionable is an encouraging sign. Science and spirituality are rightly viewed as complementary, not as mutually antagonistic. Using a simple analogy, Sri Aurobindo explained how Yoga is in the psychological domain what science is in the physical. In the opening chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga* he wrote:

Yogic methods have something of the same relation to the customary psychological workings of man as has the scientific handling of the force of electricity or of steam to their normal operations in Nature. And they [Yogic methods], too, like the operations of Science, are formed upon a knowledge developed and confirmed by regular experiment, practical analysis and constant result.<sup>6</sup>

The normal manifestations of electricity in its various forms in Nature seemed to be of little importance for human life until rather recently. If we consider how much difference the harnessing of this force has made to our outward lives in a relatively short time, we can imagine the effects of an inner revolution through Yoga which would make it possible for large numbers of people to begin to tap their latent inner power.

Of course, it is not likely that Yoga will ever become as easy as switching on an electric light. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to a disciple who underestimated the difficulty of "bringing down" higher planes of consciousness:

You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental, etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to press and there you are. It may be one day but meanwhile I have to discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils, etc., construct roads of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made foolproof and all that in the course of a single lifetime.<sup>7</sup>

This gives a faint idea of what was involved when Sri Aurobindo set out to develop the spiritual path which he called integral Yoga. In another letter, he wrote:

I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane.<sup>8</sup>

This was written in 1932, nearly twenty years after Sri Aurobindo began to enunciate the basic principles of an integral Yoga in his monthly journal, the *Arya*, where from

1914 to 1921 he published the original version of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. A few years before he began to write that book, he had started keeping a detailed diary of the experiments and experiences on which his Yoga is based. This diary, recently published for the first time in two thick volumes under the title *Record of Yoga*, is a unique document which substantiates Sri Aurobindo's statement that he had been testing the processes and results of his Yoga "day and night for years upon years". That this was literally true is shown by the fact that part of the Yoga, concerned with the mastery of states of *samādhi*, went on even during the hours of physical sleep.

(To be concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

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## THE TIDE COMES

CRY the beloved country,  
 Can you hear the rumbling of mud?  
 God protect the weak ones  
 When the strong ones fall!  
 Who will hear the cry—  
 Will there be new life,  
 Will endurance last  
 Till the floods subside?  
 Beloved land don't cry.

The promise O loved one  
 The promise is New Life!

GEORGETTE COTY



## MOTHER'S FLAG ATOP GOLCONDE

WE'VE gazed at you for years and years.  
Often you move us beyond tears.  
Above the reach of manmade fibs,  
Above mind's deepest roofed-in lie,  
Sovereign you are, your spire a silver scepter of  
dominion hoists you

high beyond cement and tiles and slate  
"I am Her Truth" is what you state.  
Let no one scoff or come with doubt  
I am the flag of Her who came down death to rout.  
And when a strong wind blows  
Her Truth you even shout.  
In storms I've heard your clap louder than the thunder  
A warning to offenders, a warrior's challenge  
that makes the ill-willed founder.  
Sometimes with metronomic beat  
You slap and slap and slap and slap,  
A booted army in the street.

I've even seen you dance like a mad dervish  
And sometimes Kali-ish with furious whirls and twirls  
and all about the sound of thudding feet  
while you whip around and furl-unfurl furl-unfurl,  
The wild palm fronds with rattle of rain  
attempt to mimic you, in vain.

Our wind-thrashed Patience tree that took so many years  
to reach your height

Trembles in awe and marvels at this sight  
A flapping crow tries to alight  
Thinks better of it and is buffeted away.

You tug so passionately at your moorings  
As though to sail the universe  
And sow the Milky Way with offspring: bright white-lotus seed  
So that She may Her image in star and nebula read.  
And then again and suddenly all is still,  
So still and quiet  
Morning. A bird begins to tweet  
Surya slowly comes out to dry you in his gentlest heat  
And all is calm and sweet, sweet, sweet.

Some days the world around is damp  
 And delicately tuned to grey in minor key  
 And down you flop clinging to your mast.  
 Ah where's our courage? why so limp?  
 Our heart begins to falter then stands still.  
 A tiny cloud approaches on a breath  
 And then with slightest shudder and like a sail you rise and fill.  
 With you my heart again begins to flutter and then to beat.  
 You were only playing dead?  
 The fears were all in my head?  
 You begin to ripple with silent mirth  
 O befuddled child of Earth!  
 And as your cloth resists  
 A tiny sort of snort escapes you:  
 And you double over folded into two.

I should have known better.  
 Indeed I do.  
 Nothing will hold you down.  
 A half a century ago from Mother's terrace  
 Ignorant hands would have torn you  
 But Her Truth held you aloft  
 As it had always borne you,  
 High above this God chosen town  
 Where you tangle with the wind  
 And play shades and shadows with the sun.  
 As long as we are here we'll take your darshan every day  
 Upheld by you we'll do our part as you do yours.  
 We salute you in every way  
 But specially from an overflowing heart  
 With words no tongue can utter  
 Yet... Bande Mataram!  
 For you are our living Mother.

## TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of December 2003)

### Songs of Tagore: the Metaphor of Beyonding - II

How important are the songs as poetry? Are they very fine lyrics when the tunes or *sur* are not set to them? The collection entitled *Gitobitan*<sup>1</sup> shows that most of the songs have immense poetic value. They are compressed and their economy of expression indicates the class of Tagore as a lyric poet. They are strangely beautiful lyrics: religion verges on spirituality; the mystic sense spreads out in different directions; love is mellow and refined with all the foresight of things to come, the prescient memory of the supernature leaning on our small lives.

He hopes that his silent moments will become full with the Divine's music. At the end of the day, when it is dark, stars of music will show up in millions. One day his emptied flute will ring out. He prays for silence again and again to listen to the flute to be played by someone else. He wishes all his words to float away so that he may be able to enjoy the music of silence. Nights are soothing and intensely silent in song no. 256. Tagore discusses here the poetry of incantation in the line "*Nirob mantr hriday majhe shanti shanti baaje...*"

Peace, peace and peace—  
That is the *mantra* whispered in silence  
Inside my heart....<sup>2</sup>

Wonder is quite often coloured by the psychic. The poet wonders how the Lord sings. He pines for expression, which will echo that ethereal song. He broods over his incapacity. He could not see the presence inside him. The vital obstructed his sight. And the psychic wept. Song no. 139 speaks of an authentic sadness pushed forward by the inmost being:

If I do not meet you, my Lord, in this life,  
then let me remember that I didn't get you  
in the last life.  
Let me not forget,  
let me feel the pain then  
in sleep as in waking.

Time floats away in vital cravings. All is lost in this life of indiscipline. An unusual call to the World Mother enters into poem no. 160. Mother-worship is rare in Tagore, but who can ignore the spell of the charmed name? The poet prays to her for a supreme inwardization. The psychic sadness is frequent in the poet who is caught between the two worlds. Why is it that I catch a glimpse of you only from time to time? Why not forever?

Why are the clouds obstructing my sight? Where can I find that great love to trap you forever? These are real moments of real pain and only the earth-bound soul having an eye for heaven knows the reality in Tagore's psychic sadness. All the pilgrims pass by and time too. Where lies the light beyond the seas? In no. 426, the dark night of the soul is obvious and yet that Tagorean or Aurobindonian optimism is the final note. One day the deep dark shall be changed to an intense delight with the sound of the *Veena* of the All-Delight. The winds of spring shall bring in the Lord's frankincense into the centre of the poet's heart.

The full operation of the psychic is rare in world literature as Sri Aurobindo tells Sethna in a letter:

The psychic being usually expresses itself through its instruments, mental, vital and physical; it tries to put as much of its own stamp on them as possible. But it can seldom put on them the full psychic stamp... it comes fully out from its rather secluded and overshadowed position and takes into its hands the direct government of the nature.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the little of his best self that Tagore applies to his songs has given them a rare status. He addresses the Divine softly to remind Him of the songs he had sung for Him and the songs He had sung to him. In the rainy nights and in the fragrant air of the spring memories will never cease to come. There were sports at one time with the Divine without the knowledge of His identity. There was no fear, no shame in those spontaneous moments. Life moved on restlessly. There were calls from Him, repeated calls, in the dawns, as if they were calls from his best friend. The poet smiled and ran with Him in the forests and beyond them into the far away lands. Alas! who knew the meaning of His songs then? Only his restless heart sang and danced with His songs. It was a strange blend of the psychic and the finer vital. Now a sudden moment of the soul sees what was never seen before:

What image do we see at the end of the game?  
 The sky stands still, the sun and the moon are quiet,  
 the universe stands still  
 with his eyes down on your feet!<sup>4</sup>

Between despair and psychic sadness, the psychic prayers creep in frequently indicating the aspiration in the past. He wishes his love to move always towards the Divine. Quite often he feels that this life is a failure and that only grace can bring in a miraculous success. He wishes the eternal songs of the Divine to ring in his heart all the time, in the night as in the day. Time and again, we find Tagore brooding over distractions and the loss of time. Fear rises in his heart quite frequently—the fear of the quickly moving time, the fear of the sun going down, the fear of the darkness enveloping the earth, the fear of the capsizing boat. Where lies the Ocean? How far is it? Without the Divine, everything

is painful. Nothing counts but that—just a small place on the soil under His feet. He wishes to be the last in the procession of pilgrims, to occupy the last seat. But he needs a place by His Grace. Sometimes there is an intense prayer to keep his head down on His feet, as we see in that famous *Gitanjali* poem, which is poem no. 492 in *Gitobitan*. The great Aurobindonian caution rings out in the poem: let me not glorify myself by using Your name and nothing but Your wish be my wish. There are such moments of high living in Tagore's *Gitobitan*.

Quite a few songs echo the theme of Sri Aurobindo's *The Dream Boat*. Poem No. 8 in *Gitobitan* speaks of this call coming from a boat, in times of thunder and tempest, in the rainy nights of July, the call for death. The poet looks at the boatman and keeps sitting on the shore. In song no. 102, the poet prays to the Lord to stay even when he is not responsive and to wake him up with a painful stroke. In song no. 403, the poet has realized that those whom he had chosen instead of God are no more responsive to him. They came and left him alone in the desert. Transient smiles pass by and the lamps go out in the dark. Who remains then to wipe away his tears? He sees none around. The sun and the moon and the stars are lost. And the Lord does not come. One instantly remembers the last lines of Sri Aurobindo's *The Dream Boat*.

Now within the hollowness of the world's breast inhabits—  
 For the love died and the old joy ended—  
 Void of a felicity that has fled, gone for ever,  
 And the gold god and the dream boat come not.<sup>5</sup>

In quite a few songs, Tagore's theory of surplus is seen in practice. Things come to the poet more than he needs, more than the frame requires. The mud wall of the self is flooded. Tagore's boat is not just an ordinary boat; it is a singing boat floating towards the edge of the Infinite. Sometimes, he is painfully aware of the incapacity of his songs. It is then that he invites the Lord to sing or to play on the flute. The incapacity of his songs gives birth to some remarkable lyrics. The effective song is elusive. But, the wish to sing is too intense. Let me use Tagore's own translation here from the English *Gitanjali*:

I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat.  
 In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes  
 without a purpose.  
 When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight,  
 command me, my master, to stand before thee to sing.  
 When in the morning air the golden harp is tuned, honour me, commanding  
 my presence.<sup>6</sup>

Sad to say, this was one of the miserable failures of translation. However, the importance of song in his life is unmistakable even in this poor translation. The search for the true song continues. In song no. 24 in *Gitanjali*, the poet prepares a seat by the road with the

help of his songs. He addresses the Lord as a 'pilgrim' and invites Him to take a seat again and again. The shadow of the clouds falls on the forest; in the corner of the blue eyes of the sky water is taking shape. Today, the Lord comes in a new dress to the forests of palm trees at the end of the meadow. The poet urges him not to pass by secretly; he urges him to stay in the cloudy dark of his rain-songs. The game of songs is a leisurely game, which has no material benefit. But, the immaterial is immensely valuable to the poet. The pilgrim soul is a singer. He waits with his basket of songs outside the Great Palace. Who knows which song will touch his heart? The search for the true song is the search for the poetry of incantation. Poetry goes on searching for the word beyond words. Poetry is song. It is a passion to utter the *mantric* word, which is immense joy. Footsteps come closer and then they move away. Song no. 13 in *Gitanjali* is a better translation, if we keep in mind the fact that English is a masculine language:

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.  
 I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.  
 The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only  
 there is the agony of wishing in my heart.  
 The blossom has not opened; only the wind is singing by.  
 I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice :  
 only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.  
 The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat  
 on the floor; but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.  
 I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.<sup>7</sup>

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

#### *Notes and References*

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitobitan* (1931), Visva Bharati.
2. Except for the two translations made by Tagore for the English *Gitanjali*, all other translations in the essay are by Goutam Ghosal.
3. *Overhead Poetry* (1972), Ed., K. D. Sethna, p. 7.
4. *Gitanjali*: 64.
5. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 561.
6. *Gitanjali*: 15.
7. *Ibid.*: 13.

## NO-PLACE

IF there is within, then there is without.  
But I do not find you in the worlds of duality.  
I find you where there is no-place.

If there is “this”, then there is “that”.  
If there is some thing, then there must be someone,  
And they must be somewhere.  
But I do not feel your heart’s intimacy  
In the marketplaces of multiplicity.  
I feel you where there is no-place.

If there is self, then there is also non-self.  
But I do not love you,  
And I cannot love you,  
Fully enough  
In that somewhere of two.  
In no-place, we are one,  
And love is complete.

In no-place, I am not.  
Nor are you.  
Nor is there otherness, nor sameness.  
For there cannot be two  
Where there is no-place.  
I contemplate existence wherein there is no-place  
And where the “you” and the “I” of my notions  
Become one.

ALLAN STOCKER

## INTIMATE PORTRAITS

### Hellas 2003 – More Notes & Some Conclusions

#### **Ikaria—the interlude continues...**

THE perfect moment passed at last, though its smile continues. I needed this time alone by myself and have settled perfectly in the solitary little house.<sup>1</sup> Sweet smelling air and deep draughts of loveliness are my basic sustenance along with the fresh fruit and vegetables stocked in the fridge.

I've been longing for solitude; life in Pondy has everything but this: that breath of fresh air and quietude, which can be found in silent communion with Nature. Pondicherry is a city. It lacks the possibility of long outdoor walks and the stimulating contact with an unaffected environment; one can never be away from it all and alone in a city. Athens only intensified the need.

With Loukia<sup>2</sup> gone, I hardly see anybody. Self-sufficient in my own company and comfortable in this rather solid base, I feel good. This is a perfect break from the constant movement and interchange. Scarcely anything is happening, yet the moments are luxuriantly real and saturated with events.

Up before twilight, the day starts with listening, with beauty first: so much beauty is out here and all on the move, waiting, creating.... Nature's waking up induces inner restoration and I too wake up and become attentive, alert, watchful.... So little needed and so much given, there is nothing I wish to hold in the world. (What to *keep*, anyway? What could I possibly call *mine*?) Only to love, see, feel and be part of, that's all. Most important, find the part that *is* and relates with all.

It is springtime and the season helps, as do the lizards, the bees and the nightingale, the silvery hues of the olive-trees, the pale yellow flowerings of the chestnuts catching the light, the morning dew that reflects it playfully. I watch and breathe it all in and listen. I greet the sun and feel myself part of the cycle of things. It is simple to dive into the heart and there find and kindle the fire.

#### **Athens—part two: most of June and meetings with ordinary people**

Athens was almost removed from memory whilst in Ikaria, and there was hardly any interaction with people. But the main reason for these visits to Greece is to keep the contact with the land alive, meet the people and speak the language. Now that I am translating Sri Aurobindo, this reason has become even more acute—obviously, a loner with a language deficiency won't do! So, I interact. Meetings with people help me update and get in touch with the living nuances of the spoken language.

I enjoy these meetings. People always fascinate me and not just because I like them. Not only, anyhow. What I like is a kind of rummaging into a person's world—an

1. See previous "Intimate Portraits".

2. See previous "Intimate Portraits".



indulgence, really, for how can anybody truly know another? However, and in this case, the interest is mutual and reciprocated.

I am an oddity here. No Greek in his or her right mind ever leaves Greece voluntarily, not unless pushed hard by necessity. Greece is a living entity and a being, the object of adoration of every Greek. They love her passionately and they ache longingly when away from her (like I do, sometimes). But then, I left her and went off to live in the East. To make matters worse, I did so by choice. There was no necessity that drove me away, only a need. This intrigues people here.

“Need? What kind of need was *that*?” They are incredulous and it is hard to explain. How to tell them, language is particularly inadequate when away from the safety of the ordinary and mundane!

Unknowingly, it is they who help me out. Not only friends, but also people I meet casually, feel a “difference” about me. About the attitude, they say, and about the ways, the speech, even the choice of the words I use. Somewhat strange, but they like it; it breaks the monotony of what they usually come across—there aren’t that many Greeks fresh out from India!

So I tell them about this India of mine and about the psychological needs and practices there, and about seeking and setting out on a spiritual quest. Some understand and want to know more; others simply switch off and consider the matter alien.

With close friends it is easier. There are a few of them; we have always been happy to meet and talk, this time our subject matters dig deeper. Maybe we have finally come of age and reached the stage when we can look at our lives and ourselves a little more dispassionately. We all agree that these are our “better years”. Although very little is altered, there is certainly a shift in our perspective. We have some extra life experience and now we are much less self-absorbed and not as self-indulgent. That’s all. We consider it progress.

We talk about it and we ask questions as we look at each other and see how very much alike we are. (And how different: we are both highly amused when Kiki puts on an easygoing smile and recalls that I was already “elsewhere” twenty years ago, when she and I were still walking the same streets together!)

But Kiki has been looking for “something else” too, and so have Loukia, Sophia, Mary and Yannis, the friends dear and near to my heart. That is why we have kept in touch throughout the many years of my absence. Not only have they been looking for something, they and I share the idea of practical seeking. This provides our meetings with a certain refreshing urgency and material.

This year’s visit is the best we ever had.

Compared to them, I am lacking in what they call worldly approach and they laugh openly at what they see as my apparent naïveté—that certain “difference” about me, which is true. Life in Pondicherry is not only sheltered and protected; it has different objectives as well. For my friends, family and work are the measuring rods for success, failure or progress in life. However, there is still more in it that they value. They tell me about motherhood and how good it is for developing tolerance and self-giving or how

helpful the work-environment (indeed, anything that requires engagement with life) for the practice of equanimity.

In the West they all drift. At least that's how the East sees it, and with good reason. Westerners seem to miss out on psychological finesse and their introspection tends to scratch only the most material and personal surface of things. Headstrong in their opinions and beliefs, it is inordinate criticism that supports and guides their competitive spirit. They work hard for a better world, but they envision and shape it only according to what they believe it must be. Harmony is a form of aesthetics and tolerance something to be demanded from others. Although part of the same consciousness, the western self is far more intent on its self-interests than its eastern counterpart.

Greece is neither East nor West. Greece is more like a bridge that connects and separates. It is neither this nor that, which perhaps explains the almost-schizophrenic attitude it often adopts—Greeks look west with their minds and east with their hearts! And they have a simple goodness, strength and determination in putting up with the hysterical normalcy of their lives.

It is a rather bizarre normalcy and I try to figure it out through the lives of my friends. They trust their feelings whilst keeping their reason intact and they are aware of psychological states that are real enough to live for and base their life on. I edge closer to their hopes, aspirations and needs and try to place their strife and objectives side by side with mine to see how they compare. (Sounds rather mental, but it is helping my pet comparative study between Greece and India to come out of abstraction. What has been isolated musings is now changing to something far more intimate; these are real people.)

My friends and I mirror each other in what we are. After all, they could be a version of myself and I can easily be placed in their position. (How would I now be, had I not left Greece? And, where would they, had they been more specific about their seeking?) We talk about the different parts of the being, and the psychic in particular. They have no difficulty in absorbing and using these terms. They have been looking at and for themselves for long enough. These are no mere philosophical speculations for them; they have detected these parts and known the rare soulful moment.

We feel further linked and our ties are no longer just emotional.

### **Santorini—another interlude; with Mary this time**

There was a “click” between Mary and me the moment we met. Mary is my dentist. We liked each other instantly and I simply forgot all past fears; I trusted and abandoned myself in her hands. Her practice is on the sixth floor and it faces Lycabettus, one of Athens' quaintest hills with a tiny white church to St. George perched at its top and pine trees scrambling up its sides. It is the combination of the view and Mary's feather-light hands that changed dentistry into something almost enjoyable for me. Splendid sunsets spread before my eyes whilst Mary is busy with her routine of probing and poking into my mouth!

We usually arrange to have our sessions in the late afternoon in order to spend the

evening together. It has been the pattern through which our friendship has evolved. Happily, this time around we can do more; there is a long weekend coming up and the attractive offer of a friend's house on Santorini Island. We sail off.

Home is now one of those Santorini dream-houses carved in and out of rock. Its miniature courtyard hangs over the awesome view of the caldera and from there we can see the small black island that cradles the volcano. It is the very same volcano which, three and half millennia ago, brought the Minoan civilisation to an abrupt and violent end. Today the island is one of the world's tourist destinations and gets very crowded during the summer months.

But it is still early in the season and there are mostly Greeks wandering about. Mary and I blend easily with them as we all go through the rituals of holidaymakers, although the two of us have a little more going on. We are here to catch up with all that was hinted or left half-said in the past. We swim and we walk, and we play house and we talk and talk and talk.

As Mary unfolds her reality, I am surprised at its charm and chivalry. She's been a single mother and hard-working professional for most of her adult life, yet there is neither hardness nor bitterness in her. Instead, she is well grounded, sweet and considerate. Although she has fought and fended for herself, there are no ugly scars left from her defeats and victories. There is something alluringly flitting about her, an endearing charisma that I like.

The middle-aged woman sounded frantic, "Octopus! Help, it's an octopus!" Not even knee-deep into water, she was in great distress. "Giorgos, be quick. The harpoon! Oh, God... it's around my ankle! Quick, bring your mask too!" Obviously, Giorgos was the man swimming further in, her husband probably, now coming out. But he had no harpoon with him. Did she actually want him to go home, fetch it, then come and save her? The scene bordered on the absurd and ridiculous and I looked on enjoying it. "Be quick!" she yelled again and then I saw Mary reaching for the unfortunate leg. Moments later she had successfully pulled the octopus off. It is tiny! What was all the fuss about?

"Do you do this often?" I asked as I took my turn pulling at the tentacles, now fastened around Mary's wrist. "First time!" she grinned and lifted her arm, "Hurry up, this is a good photo!" I obliged by taking several.

"Ah, this feels good!" Mary was beaming with contentment. Adventure over, we went for a snack and a drink at a nearby tavern. "Well, my dear..." I joked, "Just like a knight would, seeing a damsel in distress, you saved her from peril and killed the monster!" She flashed what I thought was a chivalrous smile then confessed that the incident had freed her from a deep-seated fear of sea-lurking creatures.

The day after the octopus we drove to the other end of the island to see the excavation of a three and a half thousand-year-old city. It is an amazing archaeological find. The ancient thriving city (complete with public squares, magnificent paintings, three-storey buildings and a very advanced sanitary system) had been buried under tons of volcanic debris and lava and was unearthed just a few decades ago. We had enough time to swim and lunch quickly before visiting it. Someone warned us of sea urchins, those dreadful

spiky things, and I was careful to keep off rocks whilst in the water.

Coming out, I met Mary equipped and ready for an expedition, knife and plastic bag in hand. "Eating sea urchins is good for health, granny always said," she announced, "especially during full-moon!" (True, it was full moon; we had fallen silent watching it rise silver-gold and majestic last evening.) "It is said to have a potent effect on sea urchins' eggs." Mary added, marching off, tool-swinging.

Only three tables were occupied in the tavern, and ours was one of them. A family from Crete and a mixed group of French and Japanese sat at the other two. Under normal circumstances, I would probably never have spoken to them. But Mary came back and spread her catch around (good for health and plenty enough to feed the lot!) and soon she had everybody sitting together. Even the owner joined us to drink to our health and his mother contributed with fresh fruit from her kitchen when she served us the coffee. It was a testimony to Mary's charming naturalness; she made us laugh and feel good and we all enjoyed this impromptu gathering.

We practically ran through the site, we were so late. But it didn't really matter. Mary's interest in archaeology was very new and I had seen it several times before.

### **Athens—the end**

The countdown has now started: fifteen days, a week, then six, five, just a few days left still. The pace quickens as each day goes by and I ignore the urgency they bring. Right from its start, this visit to mama-Hellas has been exceptionally good, and very different from all others. Time stood still and it rushed by, and its passing brought much to wonder, think and feel deeply about. It all centred on people and their essential beauty and I feel privileged to have seen and taken part in it.

Tranquillity holds me and deep affection swells from within as I look back at the last three months—so little, and yet so much in all those simple things done simply. We get what we need and I must have needed this.

My plane leaves very early in the morning and farewells are over. It is the evening before my departure and I am spending the night at good old Hotel Byron; it would have been ungainly to conclude the visit with an emotionally charged atmosphere. After a prolonged quiet contemplation, I check my travel documents and shut the suitcase.

I am ready for the journey back home.

KATI WIDMER

## VEDAPURI

THE sun beamed down on the Bay of Bengal  
in Pondicherry, known in earlier times as Vedapuri,  
“The city of Vedic Illumination.” In the morning  
I walked along the Marina Drive  
toward the Gandhi Memorial on Goubert Salvi Beach Road.

People sped by the sea-wall on motorbikes  
or in busy cabs. Crows shrieked in the tropical air  
and lush trees.

In my first view of the Bay, I was startled  
by the sea’s astonishing beauty  
in one of its glorious personalities.

I gazed out at the cosmic horizon to radiant waters,  
recalling the “waters of multiplicity” in Sri Aurobindo’s symbol,  
which represent the creation, the lotus blossom  
floating at its centre in the central square  
symbolizing the perfect manifestation  
and the “Avatar of the Supreme.”

The Symbol’s descending triangle is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*  
and the ascending triangle  
stands for the “Aspiring answer from matter  
under the form of life, light and love.”

On the blue waves—evoking the Supermind—the Lotus Symbol  
appeared to my subtle sight  
in love breezes of the Indian sea.

Endless shores stretched under cumulus clouds  
north and south. I searched the shoreline  
of the subcontinent whose palms sway in monsoon rains,  
coastal seawinds, cyclones, and torrid heat.

I dwelled on the Symbol’s eternal meaning  
and the triple poised Brahman.

In the streets water-buffaloes drew carts,  
cows lumbered past hawkers, goats, beggars.

Urchins frolicked. Dusky maidens smiled  
in saris on the promenade.

Is it not here in matter  
that we must manifest the Life Divine? O world to come!

Often I reflect now on the Symbol. I recall flowers  
and pilgrims, spray and cresting surf and winds  
of *ananda* from the Bay of Bengal, *the Samadhi*  
and *peace that passeth understanding...*

JOSEPH KENT

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## NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

*(Continued from the issue of December 2003)*

### O Star

O STAR, drawing radiant lightning's collyrium  
Did you on the tree-top, in the forest-dawn  
Bring Creation-hour's flower-song,  
Full-blossomed, poison-annihilating?  
Untimely whose moment-span merged its breath  
At Consciousness' further bank in insentient  
Waters of Death's dark well—did that lost Speech  
A hundred-years-submerged, trance-absorbed,  
Tearing its veil, arise in rebellion's  
Blood-voiced snake-hood?  
Where pierced that sudden fang, now a cataract's  
Sweet warble-toned incomparable stream  
In Ocean's blue current's speed flows on,  
In the thousand branches of the Elixir-Tree.

*(To be continued)*

DEBASHISH BANERJI

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of December 2003)

## 4. Drink the Nectar

INSPIRED by Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita came to India in 1895 to help in the Swami's work in the field of education. She was astonished to find that there were already two major "educational agencies" at work: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The characters in these epics were living presences for the Indian. As she wrote in the preface to her *Cradle Tales of Hinduism*: "...in the life of every child amongst the Hindu higher castes, there comes a time when, evening after evening, hour after hour, his grandmother pours into his ears these memories of old. There are simple forms of village-drama, also, by whose means, in some provinces, every man grows up with a full and authoritative knowledge of the Mahabharata."<sup>1</sup>

The epics and Puranas constantly go around the people carrying their themes and messages thanks to the age-old institution of the *kathaka* (the story-teller). The Bhagavata is the most popular among the subjects for discourse-series. It is either read regularly with just the meaning explained by the local priest or there are the seven-day readings and explications (Sapthahams) to mark a special happening. Followed to this day in the most obscure of our villages, one can confidently say that India is definitely Bhagavata-literate in a very big way. When the Bhagavata is taught, one learns about all our yesterdays documented in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the two great epics. Unlike the earlier recordings which lend themselves to historical, archaeological, disputational seminars, the Bhagavata is stern in conserving its arena of devotion. The Purana does call for a willing suspension of disbelief but the very telling sharpens our intuitive faculties to recognize the message in each of the episodes. Understood thus, and accepted as such, the Bhagavata becomes our sustenance to face life here and now.

A recent example of this phenomenon is sighted in Chandrasekhar Rath's Oriya novel, *Yantrarudha*. Rath has depicted the life of a village priest apparently modelled on his father. The priest, Sanatana Dase is able to rise above all the ills of life thanks to his firm faith in the Bhagavata which is iconised by the presiding deity Jagannath of Puri. When Oriya received Jagannath Das's Bhagavata in the sixteenth century, the message of Sanatana Dharma percolated to the most obscure hamlets.

"It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the Bhagavata of Jagannath Das has familiarized the lettered and the unlettered Oriya alike, with the Vedic philosophy and world-view... The poet combines the mystic and the magical in *kavya* styles and recreates the vast universe of messianic characters operating in the world of classical values. The ways of man, abstracted from the coils of mortality, and attaining identity with the Brahman have been charted out by these sage poets without ostentation or sophistry."<sup>2</sup>

Rath's Sanatan Dase is aptly named so. We watch his progression from material life to the twilight zone of living in emotions associated with particular places and icons (the



Manikarnika ghat in Varanasi, the Garuda sthambha at Puri), and can understand that his life-long involvement with the Purana has not been just a pastime. One realizes that the Supreme has imposed a natural order on things human like the celestial music of the spheres. Prof. Nayak rightly says that the novel restores our faith in the Divine order of things.

“This (*Yantrarudha*) is a thesis novel providing the Brahmanic soul of the universe, just and kind. It also establishes that the intuitive perceptions of scholars, philosophers and sages were true insights into the nature of reality ...Chandrasekhar Rath reinvents the metaphorical design of India’s vedic core. This is a Hindu novel. A novel about the Hindu experience and vision of life.”<sup>3</sup>

So much for a village priest who derived job-satisfaction from what he did: perform ritual worship at the local Lakshminarayan Temple, read the Purana for the villagers, copy the Puranas and sell them for a negligible sum. Sanatan Dase represents the millions who keep spreading the message of the Vedas through the Puranas even today. Their strivings have not been in vain because the Indian nation has endured to wake with health into the twenty-first century, inspite of the darkness that engulfed the world during the last one hundred years. This is because a Purana like the Bhagavata is *experienced* by the listener or reader, not merely heard or read by him. The opening slokas of the first canto of Skandha One make this clear. The Bhagavata is not mere theory, it is practice! And we may be speaking of ever so many legends swirling innumerable names, but the real Ordainer of the universe is the Unknowable Supreme. It is to Him we pay our homage in the first sloka:

“He from whom the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe take place; who is both the material and instrumental cause of it; who is omniscient; who is the only One having self-mastery, being the one independent entity; who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest of sages; in whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three Gunas, subsist in reality without in the least affecting Him, just as the combinations of material elements like fire, water, and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature; in whose light of consciousness there is no place for anything false—on that Truth Supreme we meditate.”<sup>4</sup>

The immediate meaning of this verse is simple enough. It is a call for meditating upon the Truth Supreme. By the received definition the Truth Supreme is Unknowable because it is beyond thought and speech, *avaang maanasa gochara*. The Isha Upanishad says, Truth is covered by a Golden Lid. It is significant that the Bhagavata does not say the Supreme is Unknowable. He can be known if we make the effort to come face to face with him as all this universe is indeed he! As Sri Aurobindo has assured us, the Supreme is described as unknowable because we choose to remain ignorant of the Unknown and have not striven to know it:

“The Unknown is not the Unknowable; it need not remain the unknown for us, unless we choose ignorance or persist in our first limitations. For to all things that are not unknowable, all things in the universe, there correspond in that universe faculties which



can take cognisance of them, and in man, the microcosm, these faculties are always existent and at a certain stage capable of development. We may choose not to develop them; where they are partially developed, we may discourage and impose on them a kind of atrophy. But, fundamentally, all possible knowledge is knowledge within the power of humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

If the Supreme cannot be known by thought, we can certainly make an effort to reach out to It through “a supreme effort of consciousness”. We may not be able to reproduce our gains in thought and speech but still we are ourselves so well transformed that we become vehicles that convey the Truth to others. In any case, the Truth Supreme has the attribute of compassion for its creation and so reveals itself to help the creation. “Moreover, there is also a kind of Knowledge through which That does reveal itself by all these names and forms of phenomenal existence which to the ordinary intelligence only conceal It.”<sup>6</sup> The Purana is very helpful in this area and leads us from the known tradition of our culture to visualize the Supreme.

So the Bhagavata assures us that He looms above as the cause of creation we have learnt to call Brahma; he is the sustainer of this creation and we call him Vishnu; and there is a time for dissolution as there is for creation. We call out to the power of the Supreme who dissolves this creation as Rudra. From Him comes this Matter and from Him the power that moves it. He is beyond Time and hence is omniscient. Withal, where is one as self-controlled (*svaraat*) as He? The Supreme taught the Vedas to Brahma, the same Vedas whose wisdom surprises the great sages with joy. These rishis who contemplate on the Vedas are overwhelmed with joy (*muhyanti*), and that remains the characteristic of Brahman-consciousness which is one of Ananda.

As for this phenomenal existence which has come with the play of the three *Gunas*, it is contained in this Supreme (later on we will have this concept as imaged in *Yasodha* finding the worlds in the mouth of *Krishna*), and yet, wonder of wonders, the presence of these worlds in no way affects the Supreme or marks a change in Him. Do the elements change their nature? Fire, water, earth, wind and space do not change their elemental nature though they meet and interlink to produce the phenomena we see around. Above all, this Truth is so impregnable and pure that there is no place for even the wisp of a shadow of falsity in its presence. This is going to be the Bhagavata experience for us. The Supreme will be present before us all the time, in ever so many forms and yet remain the Supreme, unchanged, unchanging, eternal.

But then, the Bhagavata experience is not merely a batch of old wives’ tales. The Purana is not aimless story-telling. The nature of Indian religion and spirituality has always been a turn towards the integration of the sacred and the secular to posit Sanatana Dharma. There is no clinical isolation of any aspect of man’s life. Hence, the Bhagavata is a book of dharma, to make us understand the ways of men and the compassion of the Lord to make men rise higher by their own means, by their aspiration, moral stature, tapasya.

The legends presented are inspirational, and flow with *rasaanubhava* that can draw us into the ecstasy of self-forgetfulness. The Krishna cycle given in the tenth Skandha

is particularly famous for granting ecstatic experience that unites the Supreme with the Jivatman in a very natural manner. The Gopika Geetham, the wedding of Krishna with Rukmini, Sathyabhama, Jambavati and other damsels are eternal favourites with aspirants. It may be remembered here that when the Bhagavata went through regional versions, there were understandable changes. Yet, this only adds to the charm of the Purana world. Thus the Tamil version by Arulala Dasa (16<sup>th</sup> century) which has 9147 verses presents interesting variations. One whole canto is devoted to the legend of Nappinnai's marriage to Krishna. Another to Krishna's marriage with Kaychinachithu is also mentioned. These legends give rainbow tints to the flow of devotion in the Purana.

The metaphysical passages in the Purana are for formatting these devotional inspirations to proper channels of dharma and transform one's consciousness in such a way as to build up a better approach to man, nature and god. For, no aspect of life here and beyond are excluded from the Bhagavata world. What is the Sanatana Dharma but the collective experience of aspirants in the Indian clime? One never knows when the Purana will spring upon us a lesson to be retained throughout our life. Here is Draupadi who has lost all her children and brother by the nefarious act of Aswaththama. Arjuna brings her the culprit and waits for her decision. Draupadi who is pictured as a vengeful fury by some scholars<sup>7</sup> is taken aback and addresses Arjuna as "Dharmajna". Such a person who knows and follows righteous conduct should not harm a Guru's son: "In the form of his son, here stands before you Dronacharya himself—the one who taught you the whole of the science of arms, together with all the secret Mantras connected with the release and retracting of the powerful missiles."

This is the theme of the Purana. Though it is bhakti that is the Great Bass, the subject is Dharma. Without Dharma nothing is! Hence, the Bhagavata is very much a compendium that helps us distinguish between what is moral evil and what is moral good. Once we are enabled to do this, automatically we will gain faith and devotion.

The Bhagavata world repeatedly quietens our inimical passions of hate, revenge and greed. Through the Purana, Vyasa taught us the glory of tapasya of the body, of the mind and of speech. In fact, one may not call this a "teaching" at all. Vyasa is like a loving mother feeding a hungry person, a sick person, a clod-like person with energizing liquids. That is why the third verse of the Purana sings: "O connoisseurs! O devotees! Quaff, quaff, to inebriation this nectar that is the Bhagavata—the nectar of the fruit of the Tree of the Vedas, flowing from the mouth of the great parrot, Sri Suka, perched on that Tree of Wisdom and pecking at its fruits."

*Pibata Bhaagavatam rasamaalayam.* A couple of millennia are linked by the verse which assures us that it is the Vedic truth that comes to us as the Bhagavata. The wish-fulfilling tree of the Vedas (*nigama kalpa taru*) has become rich with tasty fruits, having been enriched by the growth of the Upanishads and the Itihasas. A pure soul, Suka Maharishi imaged as a parrot sits on its branch and is tasting the fruits. The droplets that fall from the parrot are here for us. It is for us to drink the juice full of varied richness and gain the experience of the riches! To do so, one must be a person who can know and enjoy the taste, a rasika. The Purana calls out! O rasikas! O devotees! Come and drink

this nectar that grants eternal life as Ananda consciousness! It may be remembered here that Sri Rupa Goswami, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's devotee, unerringly titled his classic on bhakti yoga as Bhakti-rasamrita Sindhu, an ocean of nectar that is bhakti rasa.

The opening is an indication of how our ancients preserved texts through memory power. Today we speak of bits and bytes but the concentration exhibited by these scholars of yore is breathtaking. They too did spend their leisure time (*kaala-kshepa*); and spent it in telling stories (*kathaa kaalakshepa*). Only, they preferred to spend even this leisure time in telling stories of the Lord (*Hari kathaa kaalakshepa*). They spoke of the interaction between man and the Ideal Man, Purushottama. The garnered information about the history of rules settled by centuries of human experience, the lives of the great, the lives of the common man, high reaches of spiritual achievement, despicable moral turpitude: everything was grist to the Pauranika's mill.

When the Bhagavata opens, we are already in the Kali yuga. Already enough has happened in this yuga for people to be worried about spending their lifetime on earth without a proper guide or help to strengthen their drooping spirits. The Kurukshetra War has brought unprecedented misery upon the people. The sages assembled in the Naimisharanya forest speak of all this to Suta Pauranika. The setting is memorable for it was through such tellings in the leisure time during yagas that the Puranas grew to their enormous size. Saunaka and other sages had started a Brahma satra (a fire-sacrifice of 1000 years duration) so that they could reach the heavens, the realm of Mahavishnu. One day the sages request Suta to speak to them of what would give them salvation as it was difficult to master the entire scriptural data.

Apparently they do not find life on earth hopeless. Dharma still seems to limp around, somehow, anyhow as it does even in this century. It may not be Krita yuga, but even in Kali yuga man instinctively follows some kind of righteous conduct. Unlike many other important significance-laden words, the term dharma has not lost its deep vibrations. Even the farmhand or rickshawman uses the word with reverence. In fact, the poorer and less literate live by Dharma's lights as well as they can. All this indicates that Dharma has still some support. The Divine Light has not withdrawn totally from God's creation.

Yet, one longs for the golden yuga. For the time when the Lord incarnated and put to an end the wrong-doer with speed. For the time when the Lord was one like us, and sported with us in the groves of Brindavan. When living was not difficult and dying was no terror. But now has come a time when the line between good and evil has blurred almost completely, one needs to at least recapitulate the golden past, and receive some comfort from the memory. Who else can do the recapitulation but Suta Pauranika as he knows well the purpose for which the Supreme was born as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva? The sages place before him five questions:

1. Why did the Supreme incarnate as Krishna? For Krishna's story chases away the evil of Kali (*kalimalaapaham*).

2. What are his special manifestations as the Kalas (Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra) to

undertake the work of creation, preservation and dissolution?

3. What were his Lilavataras? We cannot understand them easily. What was the significance behind such sportive play?

4. What were the superhuman deeds Kesava performed along with his brother Balarama? For, he had come disguised as a human being (*kapatamaanushah*) and yet had openly performed many a miracle.

5. When Krishna withdrew, from where did Dharma get support?

It is obvious that the Bhagavata is thus mainly about Krishna. Call him Leelavatara or Poornavatara, he fills the spaces of the Purana. We do conclude with his withdrawal, yet is He present as always. That is the charm and glory of Krishna avatara. Unlike the other incarnations, Krishna satisfies every angle of approach. Between the cowherd who fills the spaces of Brindavan with the Delight of Existence and the statesman who manages the Kurukshetra battle, the whole of life is covered in a single arc. He is also the most reviled of the incarnations, but he continues to have the last laugh. Certainly he never forgets to show a pleasant (*saumya*) face to his devotee. For he is one who can smile in the gravest moment of his life. We have to watch the Purana carefully to realize the nuances imbedded in each verse of the recital and each movement of the story.

Here is Krishna leaving the Pandavas for good after the war. Arjuna holds the royal umbrella to escort him to the outskirts of the city while flowers are showered upon him for having been a never-failing friend in need. All the same it is a moment of great anguish for every one. However, the Purana records: "Sri Krishna passed along the street, acknowledging the compliments of the city women by his smiling look (*sasmitena*)". Krishna is the same then, whether he is smiling at these city women, or laughing with the cowherdresses or talking to Arjuna on the battlefield, as if he were smiling (*prahasanniva*). That is why Krishna remains the Lord of Ananda Consciousness in the Bhagavata.

The sages are curious. They have known all about Krishna and yet he is a mystery. Their knowledge of the Mahabharata is not enough. There must be more to this incarnation than the statesman of the itihasa. They have heard enough to kindle their curiosity and would like to know more about him. Obviously, here is a personality who goes beyond mere historical data. Krishna the human avatar is also a cosmic godhead. What are the forms he has taken as such? There are then the incarnations as a fish or a boar or a swan. Even when born as a child of Vasudeva, the miracles he performed make him one with indescribable capabilities, one possessing *aghatita ghatanaa saamarthyam*, to use a phrase which is familiar with Srivaishnava expounders of the Lord's activities.

While he was on earth, there was instant redress for people in distress like Draupadi. Surely, the Supreme who has created all this including the incarnations as well, would not allow his work to be destroyed by evil forces. He must have made arrangements for the continued good of humankind. What may they be? Till He comes as Kalki, humanity has to sustain itself by being constantly on guard against evil. From where does humanity get the sustenance to do so?

These are the questions of the embattled man today. It is very obvious that mankind

has been on the march since the dawn of civilization. There have been wonderful creations, and the spirit of man has dared challenges and overcome dangers and built like Titans. But the spiritual power within man has been pushed into increasing darkness as there has been no comparable moral growth. Why so?

The Bhagavata sets out to suggest answers to such questions. The Purana uses a variety of approaches. Sometimes the winding arguments could be glittering logic; often it is an emotional prayer to the Lord for guardianship. Now and then the sheer beauty of the Lord's Presence is enough to make us forget the phenomenal world and be caught in the net of Vishnumaya and achieve at-one-ment with electrical ease. If the Purana is a story-teller's paradise, it is also the playground of disputants of various Darśanas. Swami Tapasyananda, commenting on the first verse of the Purana rightly says: "Many of the cardinal words in it (the verse) are vague in their import, capable of diverse interpretations. So all the commentators have interpreted the verse in the way it suits the metaphysics of their school—whether monistic, dualistic or positions between these extremes. It looks as if the author of the Bhagavata has introduced this vagueness purposely. For, from the examination of the Text as a whole, one will find that he has no objection to any metaphysics provided it supports and fosters Bhakti, which according to him is the *summum bonum* of life."<sup>8</sup>

Ah, *pibatha bhagavatham rasamaalayam...*

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

#### *Notes and References*

1. *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* (1972 edition), p. vi.
2. Jatindra Kumar Nayak, *Astride the Wheel: Yantrarudha* (2003), p. xiv.
3. *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.
4. All translations from the Sanskrit Bhagavata are by Swami Tapasyananda.
5. *The Life Divine* (1989 edition), p. 13.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. "In a sense the heroine of the epic is Draupadi, but from the beginning she is subjected to misfortunes which make her character seem somewhat harsh because of her continuous cries for vengeance." (C.V. Narasimhan, *The Mahabharata: An English Version Based on Selected Verses* (1996), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
8. *Srimad Bhagavata*, Volume I (1980), p. 3.

## SONNET TO THE MOTHER\*

STILL by Her feet my soul awoke  
And the crust of ego's hardness broke,  
Within the heart Her brilliant flame  
And deep inside installed, the Name.

In that little room in a burning land  
She blessed me with her radiant hand  
And smiled a smile that grew a fire  
Igniting within the heart's desire.

Full forty years have nearly flown  
And the fledgling spirit hardly grown  
Through long travail and late awaking  
Sees through clouds a new sun breaking.

Ablaze upon creation's morn  
The supramental child is born.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

\* Late evening, 20 February 1999, U.S.A.—the Mother's birthday in India.

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## GLIMPSES OF CHINA— CIVILISATION VS DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from the issue of December 2003)*

### **05 March—Beijing**

A GREAT day and one would not expect anything less after we drove 2 hours north of Beijing to visit the Great Wall of China. The Wall or rather the section (the wall these days does not exist as a continuous piece) we visited was nice; it was long, wild, hilly and forested. The wall not only winded all over but had its continuous cycle of troughs and crests. The terrain was hilly, rugged and quite picturesque and even the approach was interesting, as one was entering a huge gorge unaware of what awaits one on the other side. We set off on the wall walk and the ascents and descents were part of the fun. I reached the highest point where I triumphantly bought a T-shirt which proclaimed 'I climbed the Great Wall'. One could have diverted and walked further along the wall but then we had to visit the Ming Tombs and I had a tired guide in tow—she never had walked so much on the wall. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is an engineering feat of Herculean proportions not only for its length, width and height; its rugged terrain made it very difficult to carry the material to the top of the ridges across steep-forested hillsides (where the Wall runs through). To keep one's balance on the steep slopes while the building is going on could easily qualify one to be an acrobat. The 7-metre high and 7-metre thick Great Wall stretches for 6000 kms and was begun in the 5th century BC; it was still being built or stretched until the 16th century. And if that does not stretch your imagination then, if the bricks of today's surviving sections of the Great Wall were made into a wall 5 metres high and 1 metre thick, it would more than circumvent the world. I believe the astronauts from space could only see one man-made creation and that was the Great Wall. And Richard Nixon had the following to say: "This is a Great Wall and only a great people with a great past could have a great wall and such a great wall will surely have a great future." In the 3rd cent BC the Emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China and extended the wall to form one continuous defence against the barbarians. Not that he could be absolved of being a barbarian himself, for he was a cruel tyrant who used draconian laws to subdue his subjects. But he was very energetic (and ambitious) and moved everywhere to control his empire instead of rotting in the palatial lap of luxury. He had the novel idea of keeping his army busy building the wall so as to curb any potential rebellion.

Late afternoon visit to the Ming Tombs—yet another World Heritage Site. They were the burial chambers of the Emperors of the Ming Dynasty which were spread around a huge area and the lovely natural surroundings were enough to set me off for a longish walk whiffing the crisp spring air, while the countryside coolness of the air hits you gobsmack on the face so hard that it transports you into another consciousness. With the eyes soothing themselves on the green mountainous landscape the three senses were combining to make a heady mix. Like the Egyptian Emperors of BC fame the Chinese



Emperors too took their valuable possessions into their burial chambers in the belief they would remain with them in the afterlife.

### **06 March—Beijing/Xian**

The morning flight took me to Xian, the North Western part of China. Xian is one of the oldest cities in the world and began in the bronze age about 3000 years ago. The already spoken about larger than life Qin (pronounced as Chin—from which the word China has been derived) Shi Huang (who united the empire in 3 BC) had his capital at Xianyang just north of Xian. His successors, the Han dynasty, also ruled here for 400 years and were contemporaries of Rome with an empire of comparable size and power. It may be of interest to some that Xian was the start of the Silk Road (among other things) where Chinese Silk reached to dress the senators and their wives in the court of Augustus Caesar. On arrival in Xian my guide Richard (many Chinese have English names to make it easier for the foreign tourists to remember their names) took me for a hotpot Chinese meal. Hotpot is a real curious way of eating. There is a pot of boiling water and on the side are vegetables and various dry meats that one dips into the boiling water until it cooks. Then there is a wide assortment of sauces one can choose from and then blend these sauces in a cup. After the boiling and toiling is over, one dips the meats and vegetables into the blended sauce and then crunch munch. It is important you choose the right sauces to blend. A rather novel way of eating, but I personally found this was a pot too hot for me to handle. Xian is a real old city and it shows. In the centre there is the bell tower which is really old. The city was walled all around against invaders, with various entry gates, and we walked on top in one stretch. It was nice and gives you super-views all over.

It was quite a fashion (or rather a military strategy) in olden days to create a wall around the city. The two most historical cities of England, York and Chester have their walls. In all these places it's great having a stroll on the wall especially since you get panoramic views; it gives you a perspective of the city. The round trip on the walls of Chester was great fun and had an assortment of views of mock Tudor houses, a Roman Amphitheater, a Roman Garden, the oldest race course of England and the hills of North Wales to boot. However it appears that the Chinese had got the idea hundreds of years earlier; besides, of course, the Great Wall of China was a barrier against invading armies, invading a whole country let alone a puny city.

Visited a Pagoda which was also a Buddhist monastery. It was a neat place where robed monks quietly went about doing their daily chores. It is a matter of interest that the Buddhist tradition still survives in Communist China.

In the evening I attended a wonderful Chinese music and dance performance. It was all in costumes from the Tang Dynasty (6th-9th cent. AD) which is considered the golden period in Chinese history where arts, calligraphy, ceramics, painting and poetry reached new heights. The singing and the playing of the traditional instruments was very sweet and melodic, indeed, enchanting and deeply moving.



### **07 March—Xian**

In the morning we set off to visit the place where the famous Terracotta warriors are. The Terracotta warriors are just magnificent and all the wonderful descriptions and photos that I had read and seen could not do full justice to this World Heritage Site. These standing warriors were all made of clay and there were about 6000 of them; these also included horse-chariots and kneeling archers. The warriors were made for the tomb of China's most powerful emperor (of whom we have already spoken) as he believed that he would take his army to the next life. Each warrior was a piece of art in itself and no two warriors were alike. Each had its individual personality and regal charm. It was fascinating watching these soldiers as a complete army or in groups or individually. Each gave a different perspective. I was amazed and had to forego visiting a Neolithic village to give myself time to get over my awe. I wandered and wandered around this wonder of true wonders.

At last time caught up with me and I had no option but to leave as the Xian Provincial Museum was also a "must see" site. The museum has a collection of some fabulous ancient pottery, bronzes and ceramics. Then my train was beckoning for my overnight journey to Nanjing (formerly Nanking).

Speaking of the Chinese, my guide Richard was great fun and we shared many a laugh. I was beginning to feel a bond with China. Probably seeing my enthusiasm earlier in the day he could not curb his by presenting me two replicas of the terracotta warriors. My overnight train journey further revealed that the Chinese people are friendly and helpful and, as proof, I was offered something to eat by a co-passenger. People mix and help on the trains, as in India.

### **08 March—Arrive Nanjing/Shanghai**

Arrived Nanjing in the morning and yet another friendly guide took me on a sight-seeing tour. I was taken to a restaurant where the locals eat and had a typical Chinese breakfast. There were all kinds of dumplings and other dishes I had never seen before. I missed the memorial of Sun Yat Sen. Sun Yat Sen is considered the father of the Chinese revolution when his Nationalist Party overthrew the last Emperor of the Qing/Manchu dynasty. There were a lot of local warlords in different parts of China and he had to go in exile but in the early 1920s, with the help of the Soviets, he allied with the Communists to unify the country. During this process when he went to Beijing in 1925 he died and Chiang Kaishek, who had married his sister-in-law, took over. However Chiang was anti-Communist and soon he started purging the communists. That is when Mao escaped and took the long march with others. When the Japanese invaded in 1937, Chiang had to follow the public mood and concentrate on fighting them. After WWII the Japanese surrendered (after inflicting considerable damage as about 20 million Chinese died during this 8 year war) and then the civil war between Chiang Kaishek and the Communists lasted from 1945 to 1949 and ultimately Chiang was forced to flee to Taiwan where he

was a dictator until 1975. This was when Mao came to power and he had the acumen to involve the peasants in his struggle as they comprised of 90 per cent of the population, while Chiang Kaishek focused on the wealthy landlords.

I spent a lot of time in the Nanjing museum going around following my latest pursuit, porcelain wandering. It is a prosperous city and the capital for many dynasties besides being a provisional capital in 1911 when the last dynasty collapsed. It is here, after the Opium War, that the treaty of Nanking was signed in 1841 which ceded Hong Kong to Britain. I don't know if you know about the Opium War but it all started when the British started selling Indian-produced opium in China in exchange for many Chinese-produced goods like silk, etc. A lot of people got addicted and the country regressed until the Chinese Emperor wanted to stop any sale of opium and hence followed the war. The British had a strong Navy and they always plundered in order to invest in superior arms, so that they could plunder more. Once they started controlling the economy (as they did in India) they started controlling the citizens—as you said, Robin-da was shunted out of the house for being a terrorist; for if the British got to know they would have taken his father's job and the family's livelihood. Nanjing is the place where Japanese soldiers butchered 3 lakhs of civilians during WWII. This could be the reason for the animosity of the Chinese towards Japanese. Now relations are improving slightly, thanks to the horde of invading Japanese, tourists this time.

The museum was great and by now China was also having a great artistic impression on me. I loved the porcelain and, to see how the pottery evolved from 300 BC until today, was not only educational but also a walk through a very beautiful garden with many unknown species. The colours, glazings, shapes and paintings were so lovely and intoxicating that I have become a fan of fine porcelain. Though pottery has been in all civilizations, porcelain has been a privilege of only a few. The other day I was in the British Museum with a guide and just impromptu (without ever having consciously thought over the importance of it) I gave him a few reasons why pottery pervades in all civilizations and is perhaps the single most important facet of all ancient civilisations: (1) It stores water and even grains; (2) being of a porous nature it keeps the water cool and all ancient civilisations were in the tropical belt; (3) it normally is a spherical form which means with the minimum of materials it allows the maximum volume of water; (4) its spherical shape also means it can easily be carried on the head; (5) because of the importance of pottery, pretty figurines and paintings were made on it to make it very attractive. In fact in the Athens Archaeology museum I saw a broken piece of pottery with a very attractive colour and design that was from the Neolithic age i.e. it was 6500 years old. Imagine even before civilisation started and humans were relatively primitive, they were trying to reach out to something beautiful. At least that's what that small piece of Neolithic pottery told me. And of course pottery was also used by the Minoans (Greek civilisation—2000 BC) to bury their dead. And then Greece, around 8th cent BC, produced some of the finest red pottery with mythical figures on them. And then of course you must have heard of the Terracotta Warriors.

Later I took the afternoon train to Shanghai. In the evening I went to what locals

call the bund area—where the river meets the sea. Along the bund were old British Victorian buildings. Across the river was the financial and commercial complex with all its New York type skyscrapers with glitzy and flashy lighting in the night. It was quite a sight but one which I did not really cherish.

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

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## TENDENCIES

THEY rise,  
 And they pass away.  
 I am watching them from a place of inner stiffness.  
 Because I watch,  
 They do not mate with the outer world;  
 They do not propagate themselves.  
 My tendencies grow only to wither and die,  
 But they do not blossom and bear fruit.  
 Because I am watchng,  
 The seeds of future tendencies will not be sown.  
 The soil of my life  
 Will yield no future harvests.  
 In the sky of Infinity,  
 The light of my inner eye  
 Is watching the play of tendencies.  
 They rise,  
 And they pass away.  
 They pass away, never to return.

ROGER CALVERLEY

## AN 'AMERICA' TO DISCOVER...

THERE is an 'America' trying to reveal its secret—to unburden itself of the load of achievement it carries! That one should have been initiated into this mystery makes one beholden to it,—and holds one responsible also to share the secret with others....

Thirty years ago was the first visit. Three weeks in the U.N. building in New York, in the large setting of a World Youth Assembly. Where about two thousand young people spoke earnestly about the 'wholeness' they sought—by developing the 'whole' personality through education, by visualizing a world society where economic barriers did not exist, where cultures and politics transcended their limits into a wide understanding.

We spoke for three weeks—into the early hours of each morning. And started all over again by mid-day! At the end of this time, we flew back to our homes round the world. And held deep in our hearts the dreams of a new world. A world that we wished to build—first, in our own beings and then, one day, to create it around us too.

Yes, we did start on the work. And experience flowed on and enriched us... in a million ways, along myriad paths. Paths that lead, in their slow progression, to a single one. One that still awaited our discovery.

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It came in a strange way, this discovery—fulfilling and most compelling.

Another visit to America was on the horizon. And a question arose. That which America has created as the dominant civilization of our times, what purpose is it meant to serve in man's evolution on earth? What deep, essential purpose? What is it meant to trigger off to make the next step possible? An interesting question that shone, bright and steadfast, like the red light on the wings of the plane as one flew through the skies.

One settled into the heart of Manhattan—a core of 'matter', compact with density. One is not speaking here of 'activity' that exists there or is constantly generated there. It was like being *in matter*—in its base reality of existence. Free of 'activity' that man generates from it or around it. It was like being *inside* matter—matter in a kind of collective presence of itself. And one found oneself within a great 'whirring' of energy—one 'heard' the sound of the energy, one 'felt' the current of its power whiz past. What a circulation of these currents of energy—like this! The energy was 'pure'—devoid of any human touch or activity, or even presence or indication of it. The energy of 'pure matter'! What a speed, what a 'coherence' in the movement of that energy—a conscious coherence! An order in the power of its rhythm. Contained in itself—existing by itself.

The scene changed—and across the country, one was in San Francisco. A city like a jewelled encrustation! Quiet, indrawn—one tried to sense whatever was there....

A morning of deep silence—and one was again in the 'heart of matter'—its welcoming depth, that held one softly. And 'matter' was waiting—it was so very silent, unbelievably silent. As the French say, *dans l'attente*! It was waiting—the wait was so palpable. Such a quiet feel of 'waiting'—waiting for 'something' to fill it up—the hollow

of its depths. Soft, almost rounded—not impatient at all. Just ‘offered’ to that waiting.... Like, like—waiting for its ‘Lord’. To come and fill it—and make it...*whole*.

Things seemed to come together unexpectedly in the days that followed. Experiences came—unasked, unknown. Being flowed into being—wrapping all in a hue of molten gold. A flow of gold—light in substance—spilling over into space. In a space without frontiers—a space of which ‘being’ was part, inseparably.

Is this what the perfection of matter can lead to? As the next step in our evolution on earth?

One leaves America in this haze of gold! What an amazing discovery!... A return to the great Himalayas—and then back in Pondicherry.

One is more than a trifle bewildered! But the experience stabilizes itself... and bubbles with the fullness of joy. A joy that is as boundless as it is full. As irrepressible as it is unexpected. The joys of ‘matter’, it is said, are greater than the joys of the ‘mind’. The joys of ‘matter’ filled with the presence of the Spirit—and making it *whole*.

Whither is one headed? In this experience where all known contours—contours of form, of body, of the ‘being’ as such—are no more? They are merged in a vastness of space—where existence *is*, but all else has changed. Changed into a substance—light and spreading and soft, very soft in its touch. Its hue of gold, its fragrance unlike any that one has known....

Is this a glimpse of our future—of a way *to be*? Is this the ‘feel’ of totality we are looking for?

Is this why civilizations come, to mark the next step forward? Is this why we, as beings, come together—to enrich and fulfil?

For, nothing stands by itself. Knowingly, or unknowingly, we move towards the ‘Whole’. The experience of that totality of existence and of being of which Matter and Spirit are the twin poles. Till, “Even the body shall remember God.”

ASTER PATEL

On writing the date,  
one found that it was  
September 11, 2003

## THY PROMISED CHANGE

THY promised change is here,  
The things once far are near;  
My soul's long night has passed  
To dawning Truth-light vast.

An inner flame uncurls,  
Its upward current hurls  
Surrounding darkness back  
And frees from fell attack.

My heart is open wide  
To thee my Master-Guide;  
My mind becomes a hush  
Awake to thy still touch.

In streams a bliss-force flows,  
Thy Presence constant grows;  
The walls of ego's case  
Dissolve in thy embrace.

LARRY SEIDLITZ

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### THE MOTHER

By Sri Aurobindo, with the Mother's Comments, pages 213, Rs. 60.00.  
ISBN 81-7058-671-2

This book contains *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's spoken comments on passages from that book, made during her evening classes at the Ashram Playground. The first set of comments was made in 1951 and the second in 1954. The publisher's note says, "These comments do not form a systematic commentary on Sri Aurobindo's work, but are rather explanations of certain passages, phrases and words. The Mother usually began the class by reading out a passage from the book, then commented on it or invited questions from those gathered around her."

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# DEFINING INDIAN IDENTITY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

## I

MY ESSAY is divided into three parts. In the first, I shall underline the crisis we in India currently face in terms of defining our identity in a globalized and unipolar world. I shall secondly suggest that in order to grasp the real meaning of this crisis, we need to review the predicament India faced in the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century *vis-à-vis* the British colonialism and the hegemony of the West. Finally, I shall argue, with the help of some of the insights of Sri Aurobindo, that it is possible to devise strategies of resistance and negotiate with the West on equal terms.

Interestingly, some of these strategies of decolonization and empowerment, in accordance with the Aurobindonean viewpoints, reflect recent developments in cultural theory in the West. Today, we confront a world that is Janus-faced: we are increasingly witness to the loss of national sovereignty. Paradoxically enough, while cultural and economic frontiers today recognize few barriers, much of contemporary conflicts worldwide seem to be rooted in rival claims of the Nation States.

## II

Several terms that have circulated and gained currency in recent times seem to characterize the present crisis of culture at the international level. For instance, Gulf War-I, during 1990, front-paged “Islam and the West”. Similarly, George Bush Senior and Junior spoke, respectively, of the “New World Order” and the “Crusade” against “the axis of evil”. Likewise, Japanese American historian Francis Fukayama spoke of “the end of history”, just as International Affairs specialist and Harvard academic, Samuel P. Huntington referred to the “clash of civilization” which heralds, according to this school of thought, the ultimate triumph of the American system and way of life.

There seems to be continuity between this note of Triumphalism and the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial mission of the West. In a schizophrenic manner, the liberal discourse of progress of Victorian England, represented by John Stuart Mill’s important essay “On Liberty” and Cardinal Newman’s “The Idea of a University”, went hand in hand with the “containing” mission of the West. Mercantilism and the spread of the empire rested on the judicious amalgamation of knowledge and power. For, unlike earlier invasions, European imperialism used culture as a tool of colonialism. This entailed, among the “natives”, the internalization of their secondary or servile status at the psychic level. In ethics, law, jurisprudence, literature, theology and religion, the West was shown to be superior. Through a series of binary polarities such as: rational-irrational, scientific-unscientific, masculine-feminine, developed-undeveloped, the imperial discourse paved the way for conquest and colonization. Even in a fine essay like “On Liberty” that has an universal appeal, J.S. Mill castigates the Chinese for their alleged denial of individuality.

Mill's statement is an eye opener:

“What is it that has preserved Europe from this lot? What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which, when it exists, exists as the effect, not as the cause, but their remarkable diversity of character and culture.”

As Edward Said declares insightfully in a recent article: “There is considerable irony in the realization that as today's globalization world draws together, we may be approaching the kind of standardization and homogeneity that Goethe's ideas were specifically formulated to prevent.”<sup>1</sup>

The colonial agenda did not go unchallenged, however. The Indian Renaissance, represented and spearheaded by a host of luminaries such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo offered resistance to the intellectual challenge of the West.

Sadly post-independent India, as indeed postcolonial societies world over, do not show adequate signs of economic and cultural emancipation. There is a continued control, domination and containment by the West in significant spheres of our national life. Our economic and/or developmental model is still inspired by the West. In education and culture, we are still the children of Macaulay. Our polity, press and parliamentary system of election and governance continue to be the relics of our colonial past.

Around 1918, Sri Aurobindo, an early cultural critic of India, wrote a powerful rejoinder to the hostile work of William Archer. In the last chapter of his seminal book *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, entitled “Indian Culture and External Influence”, he outlined several important ways the Indian Self could negotiate with the West. I wish to argue that some of these principles could be imaginatively applied in our cultural context today. They make Sri Aurobindo's thought extremely relevant to our present milieu.

### III

The exponents of globalization—economic and cultural—argue that it promotes unity among divergent people and nationalities. It creates a global village and therefore is a source of cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo seems to make a fundamental distinction between true internationalism and the the so called globalization of today. He argues that “it is not by abolishing ourselves, our own special temperament and power, that we can get at the living oneness, but by following it out and raising it to its highest possibilities of freedom and action.... I have insisted that uniformity is not a real but a dead unity: uniformity kills life while real unity, if well founded, becomes vigorous and fruitful by a rich energy of variation.” (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol. 14, p. 386) He regrets that in the last century we imitated the European civilization and attempted to make ourselves a sort of brown Englishmen: “...to throw our ancient culture into the dust-bin and put on the livery or uniform of the West was a mistaken and illegitimate endeavour....” (*Ibid.*, p. 387)



Sri Aurobindo maintains that when two cultures meet and one is superior, some imitation is inevitable. But it has to be a creative imitation. For instance, we see that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during our cultural transactions, we learned several things from the West. In literature, we acquired the novel, the short story, the critical essay; in science, not only discoveries and inventions but methods of inductive research; in politics, the press, the platform and forms of agitation. These have been necessary and welcome additions to our culture.

Some argue that we can take the *good* from the West and reject the *bad*. This is a refrain that is voiced now as it was expressed during the colonial period: "Take the good work-ethic of American culture and discard the the so called materialism and consumerism of America!"<sup>2</sup> Sri Aurobindo believes that this would not be easy! "Obviously, if we 'take over' any thing," he argues, "the good and the bad in it will come in together pell-mell. If we take over for instance that terrible, monstrous and compelling thing, that giant Asuric creation, European industrialism,—unfortunately we are being forced by circumstances to do it,—whether we take it in its form or its principle, we may under more favorable conditions develop by it our wealth and economic resources, but assuredly we shall get too its social discords and moral plagues and cruel problems, and I do not see how we shall avoid becoming the slaves of the economic aim in life and losing the spiritual principle of our culture." (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, SABCL, Vol. 14, p. 388)

He elaborates upon the notion of the 'good' and the 'bad' further and offers the following argument: "But, besides, these terms good and bad in this connection mean nothing definite, give us no help. If I must use them, where they can have only a relative significance, in a matter not of ethics, but of an interchange between life and life, I must first give them this general significance that whatever helps me to find myself more intimately, nobly, with a greater and sounder possibility of self-expressive creation, is good; whatever carries me out of my orientation, whatever weakens and belittles my power, richness, breadth and height of self-being, is bad for me. If the distinction is so understood, it will be evident, I think, to any serious and critical mind which tries to fathom things, that the real point is not the taking over of this or that formal detail, which has only a sign value, for example, widow remarriage, but a dealing with great effective ideas, such as are the ideas, in the external field of life, of social and political liberty, equality, democracy. If I accept any of these ideas it is not because they are modern or European, which is in itself no recommendation, but because they are human, because they present fruitful viewpoints to the spirit, because they are things of the greatest importance in the future development of the life of man." (*Ibid.*, pp. 388-89)

Thus, there need be no inherent antipathy between India and the West. Sri Aurobindo offers an effective antidote to the insular and chauvinistic position, currently espoused among sections of our countrymen: "Mentally, vitally and physically I do not grow by a pure self-development from within in a virgin isolation; I am not a separate self-existent being proceeding from a past to a new becoming in a world of its own where no one is but itself, nothing works but its own inner powers and musings. There is in every individualised

existence a double action, a self-development from within which is its greatest intimate power of being and by which it is itself, and a reception of impacts from outside which it has to accommodate to its own individuality and make into material of self-growth and self-power. The two operations are not mutually exclusive, nor is the second harmful to the first except when the inner genius is too weak to deal victoriously with its environmental world; on the contrary the reception of impacts stimulates in a vigorous and healthy being its force for self-development and is an aid to a greater and more pronouncedly characteristic self-determination. (*Ibid.*, p. 390)

It is important to recognize, Sri Aurobindo adds, that unlike the Greek and the Chinese, “at no time did Indian culture exclude altogether external influences; on the contrary a very great power of selective assimilation, subordination and transformation of external elements was a characteristic of its processes...” However he concedes that such “strong separative aloofness that distinguished the ancient civilisations, is no longer possible; the races of mankind have come too close to each other, are being thrown together in a certain unavoidable life unity. We are confronted with the more difficult problem of living in the full stress of this greater interaction and imposing on its impacts the law of our being.” (*Ibid.*, p. 392)

What then should be the ideal way of dealing with the West in an era of globalization? Although answers are hard to come by, clearly revivalism is not a viable option. Sri Aurobindo says aptly: “...we cannot get rid of a certain element of inevitable change it has produced upon us, anymore than a man can go back in life to what he was some years ago and recover entire and unaffected a past mentality. Time and its influences have not only passed over him, but carried him forward in their stream. We cannot go backward to a past form of our being, but we can go forward to a large repossession of ourselves in which we shall make a better, more living, more real, more self-possessed use of the intervening experience.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 392-93)

Selective appropriation is a valuable concept advanced by Sri Aurobindo. But, in order to undertake this task, first we need to discover our soul, the genius of our true Being, our inmost Self. This can be founded ultimately upon a spiritual foundation. That again is a direction given by the Master.

These then are some of the principles enunciated by Sri Aurobindo that can guide and help us define our cultural identity today. We must decolonize our mind just as we need to discard models of development and empowerment that are inspired by the West and bear no connection to the reality of the Indian situation.<sup>3</sup>

Defining the Indian mind in an era of unipolar world is no easy task. There is no single principle, formula or panacea that can be applied in a uniform or dogmatic manner. The approach requires imagination, critical intelligence and flexibility. As suggested in this article, Sri Aurobindo provides many answers. It is time we made a beginning in the light of his approach.

*Notes and References*

1. Edward Said, "A Window on the World", *The Guardian*, August 2, 2003. (Adapted from a new edition of *Orientalism*, published by Penguin Books on August 28.)
2. <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story>.
3. The colonial underpinning of historiography and other disciplinary formations have been unearthed in recent critical works. James Mill's three-volume history of India provides a more blatant attempt of this kind. It is worth recalling that Mill Senior, the father of J.S.Mill worked for the British East India Company for several years before retirement.

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## THE PICTURE OF YOU

THIS picture of you, that flirts with my mind  
 One moment in, then lost for ever—  
 I have caught you entirely  
 (Or so it seems) on mind's screen  
 To freeze you, an engraving as on rock.

These sculpture hands will not unclasp  
 Lest a thousand figures of light and darkness  
 Cast their shadows and pass pageantlike.

I have caught you, far from the world's eye  
 No prized possession to trumpet my triumph.  
 You, the prize catch shall now be frozen  
 A picture cleaved on the granite walls  
 A thousand figures shall pass, casting no shadows,  
 The picture, that is you, is my lone treasure.

K. N. VIJU

# THE INDIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from the issue of December 2003)*

THIS brings us to another important reason for the stagnant condition of the Indian society. It was the life-denying ascetic tendency which crept into Indian spirituality during the post-Upanishadic era and began to dominate it later after two great spiritual figures Buddha and Shankara gave powerful thought-forms to this ascetic impulse. After this rather unfortunate turn in India's cultural evolution, most of the spiritual seekers and thinkers lost interest in the regeneration of the society, looking at it as an illusion. This means society as a whole lost the spiritualising impulse.

The Vedic aspiration and ideal to transform human society into a perfect ex-pression of the fourfold powers of the creative Godhead in man passed away from both thought and practice. Those thinkers who were interested in society and politics laboured from the intellectual, ethical and pragmatic mind and created mostly uninspired but very practical manuals for regulating society according to the traditional ideals of Dharma. They also brought a certain amount of moral idealism and some ennobling traditions into politics which helped in creating a heritage of intellectually enlightened, morally sensitive and benevolent leadership into this rather dark and murky area of the collective life. The leaders of action in society and politics accepted in general the ideals given by the thinkers and tried their best to enforce these ideals in society and in their own lives. But the mental and moral ideal of Dharma, trying to govern the collective life of man through the intellectual and ethical mind of the thinker and the intellectualised and moralised pragmatic mind of the leaders of action, was ultimately found to be too weak for the task. As happens many times in the case of individuals, and more so in the case of the collectivity, the violent ambitions and desires of the rajasic life-forces in man and the rigid conservatism of the tamasic qualities of his physical nature ultimately prevailed over the much milder and gentler sattwic forces of his mind.

But the most debilitating effect of the ascetic impulse injected by Buddhism into the culture and society of the Indian civilisation was the flight of the best of the Kshatriya force into the monastery. This was a fact which was noted by most of the perceptive thinkers on Indian history. Sisir Kumar Mitra in his illuminating study of Indian history says: "Another reason for this depletion of the Kshatriya power was that during the heydays of Mahayanism large number of princes left their kingdom in unworthy hands and became monks and lived in monasteries in their hundreds. Fa-hien saw these monasteries in the fifth century in the region from north-west India across Punjab along the Yamuna-Ganga valley down to Tamralipta in West Bengal".<sup>1</sup>

Thus the best of the Kshatriya manhood of the nation afflicted by the ascetic impulse of Buddhism relinquished its responsibility to the society and took refuge in the monastery. When a life-denying ideal or an ideal which holds no promise for the regeneration of life takes hold of the mind of the nation and the best of the Brahmana-Kshatriya energy of the nation is carried away by this ideal then all the creative energy generated in the

cultural mind of the nation turns within itself, and has no transforming effect on life. The enlightened Brahmana-force of the nation, acting through philosophy, religion and literature and art may produce a highly creative and vigorous efflorescence in the cultural life of the nation creating a lofty and grand intellectual and aesthetic temple to the ideal. But the temple remains aloof and isolated from life and the deity shows no interest in the progress and transformation of life. Even if the ideal conceived by the Brahmana-force were more optimistic, balanced and life-affirming, but the Kshatriya-energy of the nation does not possess a commensurate enlightenment and creative force to translate the ideal into life, then there would still be a yawning gulf between culture and society.

Harmony between Mind and Life, conception and execution, idea and action is the condition for a progressive life. The ideal created by the contemplative-conceptive Brahmana thinker and sage has to be made dynamic and creative in life by the equally enlightened Kshatriya energy and will of the Karmayogi. When this harmony is not there it is inimical to the progress of life. Hinduism in general recognised the need for this balance and harmony between the different powers and organs of the collectivity. But Buddhism with its predominantly life-denying ideal disturbed this balance. Sri Aurobindo sums up the effect of Buddhism on the Indian society:

Before the Bhagavadgita with its great epic commentary, the Mahabharata of Vyasa, had time deeply to influence the national mind, the heresy of Buddhism seized hold of it. Buddhism with its exaggerated emphasis on quiescence and the quiescent virtue of self-abnegation, its unwise creation of a separate class of quiescents and illuminati, its sharp distinction between monks and laymen implying the infinite inferiority of the latter, its all too facile admission of men to the higher life and its relegation of worldly action to the lowest importance possible stands at the opposite pole from the gospel of Sri Krishna and has had the very effect he deprecates; it has been the author of confusion and the destroyer of the peoples. As a result, under its influence half the nation moved in the direction of spiritual passivity and negation, the other by a natural reaction plunged deep into a splendid but enervating materialism. Our race lost three parts of its ancient heroic manhood, its grasp on the world, its magnificently ordered polity and its noble social fabric. It is by clinging to a few spars from the wreck that we have managed to perpetuate our existence and this we owe to the overthrow of Buddhism by Shankaracharya. But Hinduism has never been able to shake off the deep impress of the religion it vanquished; and therefore though it has managed to survive, it has not succeeded in recovering its old vitalising force.<sup>2</sup>

All the factors we have described above were more or less present in the classical age in India and the Gupta age in particular. Hinduism under the patronage of Gupta emperors was successfully emerging from the earlier domination of Buddhism and absorbing the latter into her own vast bosom. This process was accomplished through a process of slow and subtle intellectual and spiritual assimilation culminating in the formation and spread

of Mahayana Buddhism which Sri Aurobindo describes as “Hinduised Buddhism”. E. B. Havell in his *Aryan Rule in India* remarks with a touch of humour that in Mahayana Cult, Buddhism attained *pari-nirvana* in Hinduism! In this process Hinduism also got transformed by absorbing some of the weaknesses and strengths of Buddhism. It absorbed the ascetic impulse which disturbed the fine balance of the Hindu society and stamped on it a strong tendency towards life-denial. On the positive side Hinduism received from Buddhism some of its compassionate humanism and democratic social tendencies.

In trying to counteract the Buddhist influence using its own highly rationalistic terms, the Hindu mind has acquired some of the excessively scientific and analytic rationality of Buddhism. In this process, Hindu philosophy gained in intellectual strength but lost its innate synthesising intuition. The domination of the dividing rational mind over the holistic intuitive mind gave birth to the tendency towards increasing specialisation, minute analysis and scientific regulation in all the activities of mind and life. The classical age in India was the age of the Shastra. Every motive and every activity of life and mind were minutely and scientifically analysed, codified and put under the regulation of the Shastra. In fact this tendency towards specialisation, to pursue each motive and activity to their extreme limits is innate and natural to a developed mind. As the intellectual and rational mind develops this tendency towards dissective specialisation increases. But the unique feature of the Indian temperament and mentality is that this specialising urge of the intellectual mind is counterbalanced by an equally strong synthesising urge of the intuitive mind.

The analytical and specialising faculty of the Indian mind developed quite early in the evolution of Indian civilisation. It was manifest even during the early Upanishadic period. For example, in the Chhandogya Upanishad, one of the early Upanishads, we find Narada giving a long list of the subjects he had learnt. The list specifies many arts and sciences, some of them highly specialised, for example, the science of snakes. But in these early phases of the history of Indian civilisation, a holistic spiritual intuition and vision which perceived the unity of existence and the organic whole of life in every object and activity, held together all activities of mind and life in a living synthesis. But in the Gupta age this synthesising spiritual intuition was no longer dominant nor leading the mind and life of the nation. The intellectual and aesthetic mind without the harmonising intuition was not able to sustain the fine balance maintained between the four motives during the earlier epical and Upanishadic age. The life of the society was governed predominantly by the Artha-Kama (wealth-pleasure) motives. The social and political thinker in general extolled these motives above the other two higher motives paying only lip-service to the latter. This evoked sharp and critical reactions from the more ethically and spiritually minded thinkers of the age. An eminent Indian historian, writing on the different view-points of the thinkers of the Gupta age on the subject of the relation of politics to ethics, says the following:

The discussion of the relation of Politics to Ethics which is as old as Kautilya's Arthasastra and the early Smritis is repeated by the authors of this period. We may

begin with a few extracts from the stories in Aryasura's Jatakamala. The path of virtue (dharma), we read, is lost in "the royal science" (rajashastra) through following (the goal of) wealth (artha): that men enter the path made unclean by the deceit associated with statecraft, the cause thereof is verily pleasure (kama): the practices set forth in "the Kshatriya science" (Kshatravidya) are contrary to righteousness (dharma) as following the crooked path of statecraft (niti) and as being soiled by ruthlessness: the lesson of statecraft is that ministers and others exist for the king's sake and not vice versa: those skilled in the science of politics declare it to be impolicy (anyaya) and calamity (vishama) for kings to follow righteousness (dharma) which is demonstrably in conflict with wealth (artha) and pleasure (kama). The above extracts repeat the early Buddhist canonical principle of the fundamental antithesis and in fact antagonism between Politics and Ethics. Politics, it is held, is dominated by the ends of wealth and pleasure in opposition to virtue and in fact is based upon shameless and merciless exploitation of subjects in the ruler's interest. In the second place we may quote an extract from Bana's famous prose romance the Kadambari containing the advice of a wise minister to a prince on the eve of the latter's consecration. In this extract the minister condemns in the strongest terms those kings for whom the treatise of Kautilya, merciless in the cruelty of his teachings, is an authority and in particular their worship of Wealth, their application to the destructive sciences and their policy of exterminating devoted brothers. In the same censure the minister joins the priests habitually practising witchcraft who are the teachers of those kings and the deceitful ministers who are their advisers. It follows from the above that Politics as represented by the great work of Kautilya and as practised by worldly-minded and cruel kings and their hard-hearted and tricky advisers, is based upon a creed of gross materialism, heartless cruelty and base superstition. With the above we may compare an epigram of the epic poet Magha identifying Politics with a creed of naked self-interest. Winning success for one's own self and inflicting injury upon the enemy, in this he says, lies the double content of statecraft (niti).<sup>3</sup>

Thus the economic and political thinkers of the age followed the tradition of Chanakya, the tradition of scientific and practical pursuit of the economic and political self-interest of the kingdom without bothering much about ethical motives; in the social life the social thinker followed the tradition of Manu, the tradition of social control by the external codes of the Shastra. In the life of culture also there was a greater emphasis on intellectual and aesthetic motives than on the ethical and spiritual motives. Kalidas, the representative poet of the age, typified in a splendid fashion the cultural trends of the age. But one of the unique features of the Gupta age is the sanction to an indulgent sensuality. Vatsyayan in his Kama Sutra preaches a frank and open and scientific and practical pursuit of vital and sensuous enjoyment. Kalidas raises sensual and erotic motives to the highest possible levels of aesthetic sublimation. And the result is a splendidly material, sensuous and prosperous society governed by the Artha-Kama motives and a rich, varied and prolific



culture governed not by the ethical and spiritual mind but the intellectual and aesthetic mind. But the higher ethical and spiritual minds of the age revolted and turned away from this extravagant efflorescence of the lower motives in the society and went into ascetic seclusion. Bhartrihari is the poet who represents this aspect of the age, that is, the revolt of the inner ethical and spiritual mind of India against the splendid but unsatisfying life of the senses. Here is a representative, typical and almost symbolic personality of the cultural mind of the age, a forceful Kshatriya temperament and a powerful creative intelligence with a high ethical and spiritual aspiration, but afflicted by the ascetic impulse and trying to run away from the society in disgust and revolt. So the ethical and spiritual mind of the age plunged itself in extreme asceticism and the intellectual, aesthetic and pragmatic mind of the age was immersed mostly in the vital and sensuous side of life. Thus, as Sri Aurobindo points out: "It was a time in which one might expect to meet the extremes of indulgence side by side with the extremes of renunciation..."<sup>4</sup>

This means the Indian ideal of regulating the physical and vital life driven by the lower motives of Artha and Kama by the higher motives of Dharma could not be successfully translated into the collective life. The idea was accepted and revered in theory. The Gupta emperors made a sincere attempt to implement the ideal in the collective life. There was an all-round development and progress in all sections of the collective life, in economics, polity, society and culture. But our deeper examination shows that in actual practice, the higher motives were never able to take full control of the lower physical and vital life.

The central lesson we have to learn from the great attempt of the ancient Indian social endeavour is that it is not enough to create a spiritually inspired religious and philosophic culture acting through the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic mind and indirectly on the vital and physical life through the mental idea and the moral ideal. An integral spiritual intuition should take direct control not only of the mind of the collectivity expressing itself through its cultural life but also of the vital-force of the collectivity expressing itself through its economic, social and political life. This means, to begin with, the creative attention and government of a spiritually illumined and intuitive thought and a spiritually inspired will have to be brought into the economic, social and political life.

*(To be continued)*

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#### *References*

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4. *The Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 225.