

# MOTHER INDIA

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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## THE WITNESS SPIRIT

I dwell in the spirit's calm nothing can move  
And watch the actions of Thy vast world-force,  
Its mighty wings that through infinity move  
And the Time-galloping of the deathless Horse.

This mute stupendous Energy that whirls  
The stars and nebulae in its long train,  
Like a huge Serpent through my being curls  
With its diamond hood of joy and fangs of pain.

It rises from the dim inconscient deep  
Upcoiling through the minds and hearts of men,  
Then touches on some height of luminous sleep  
The bliss and splendour of the eternal plane.

All this I bear in me, untouched and still  
Assenting to Thy all-wise inscrutable will.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 131)*

## ‘THE PSYCHIC CHANGE’

ONE effective way often used to facilitate this entry into the inner self is the separation of the Purusha, the conscious being, from the Prakriti, the formulated nature. If one stands back from the mind and its activities so that they fall silent at will or go on as a surface movement of which one is the detached and disinterested witness, it becomes possible eventually to realise oneself as the inner Self of mind, the true and pure mental being, the Purusha; by similarly standing back from the life-activities, it is possible to realise oneself as the inner Self of life, the true and pure vital being, the Purusha; there is even a Self of body of which, by standing back from the body and its demands and activities and entering into a silence of the physical consciousness watching the action of its energy, it is possible to become aware, a true and pure physical being, the Purusha. So too, by standing back from all these activities of nature successively or together, it becomes possible to realise one’s inner being as the silent impersonal self, the witness Purusha. This will lead to a spiritual realisation and liberation, but will not necessarily bring about a transformation; for the Purusha, satisfied to be free and himself, may leave the nature, the Prakriti, to exhaust its accumulated impetus by an unsupported action, a mechanical continuance not renewed and reinforced or vivified and prolonged by his consent, and use this rejection as a means of withdrawing from all nature. The Purusha has to become not only the witness but the knower and source, the master of all the thought and action, and this can only be partially done so long as one remains on the mental level or has still to use the ordinary instrumentation of mind, life and body. A certain mastery can indeed be achieved, but mastery is not transformation; the change made by it cannot be sufficient to be integral: for that it is essential to get back, beyond mind-being, life-being, body-being, still more deeply inward to the psychic entity inmost and profoundest within us,—or else to open to the superconscious highest domains. For this penetration into the luminous crypt of the soul one has to get through all the intervening vital stuff to the psychic centre within us, however long, tedious or difficult may be the process. The method of detachment from the insistence of all mental and vital and physical claims and calls and impulsions, a concentration in the heart, austerity, self-purification and rejection of the old mind-movements and life-movements, rejection of the ego of desire, rejection of false needs and false habits, are all useful aids to this difficult passage: but the strongest, most central way is to found all such or other methods on a self-offering and surrender of ourselves and of our parts of nature to the Divine Being, the Ishwara. A strict obedience to the wise and intuitive leading of a Guide is also normal and necessary for all but a few specially gifted seekers.

As the crust of the outer nature cracks, as the walls of inner separation break down, the inner light gets through, the inner fire burns in the heart, the substance of the nature and the stuff of consciousness refine to a greater subtlety and purity, and

the deeper psychic experiences, those which are not solely of an inner mental or inner vital character, become possible in this subtler, purer, finer substance; the soul begins to unveil itself, the psychic personality reaches its full stature. The soul, the psychic entity, then manifests itself as the central being which upholds mind and life and body and supports all the other powers and functions of the Spirit; it takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unflinching so long as it is not complete. As a final result the whole conscious being is made perfectly apt for spiritual experience of every kind, turned towards spiritual truth of thought, feeling, sense, action, tuned to the right responses, delivered from the darkness and stubbornness of the tamasic inertia, the turbidities and turbulences and impurities of the rajasic passion and restless unharmonised kinetism, the enlightened rigidities and sattwic limitations or poised balancements of constructed equilibrium which are the character of the Ignorance.

This is the first result, but the second is a free inflow of all kinds of spiritual experience, experience of the Self, experience of the Ishwara and the Divine Shakti, experience of cosmic consciousness, a direct touch with cosmic forces and with the occult movements of universal Nature, a psychic sympathy and unity and inner communication and interchanges of all kinds with other beings and with Nature, illuminations of the mind by knowledge, illuminations of the heart by love and devotion and spiritual joy and ecstasy, illuminations of the sense and the body by higher experience, illuminations of dynamic action in the truth and largeness of a purified mind and heart and soul, the certitudes of the divine light and guidance, the joy and power of the divine force working in the will and the conduct. These experiences are the result of an opening outward of the inner and inmost being and nature; for then there comes into play the soul's power of unerring inherent consciousness, its vision, its touch on things which is superior to any mental cognition; there is there, native to the psychic consciousness in its pure working, an immediate sense of the world and its beings, a direct inner contact with them and a direct contact with the Self and with the Divine,—a direct knowledge, a direct sight of Truth and of all truths, a direct penetrating spiritual emotion and feeling, a direct intuition of right will and right action, a power to rule and to create an order of the being not by the

gropings of the superficial self, but from within, from the inner truth of self and things and the occult realities of Nature.

Some of these experiences can come by an opening of the inner mental and vital being, the inner and larger and subtler mind and heart and life within us, without any full emergence of the soul, the psychic entity, since there too there is a power of direct contact of consciousness: but the experience might then be of a mixed character; for there could be an emergence not only of the subliminal knowledge but of the subliminal ignorance. An insufficient expansion of the being, a limitation by mental idea, by narrow and selective emotion or by the form of the temperament so that there would be only an imperfect self-creation and action and not the free soul-emergence, could easily occur. In the absence of any or of a complete psychic emergence, experiences of certain kinds, experiences of greater knowledge and force, a surpassing of the ordinary limits, might lead to a magnified ego and even bring about instead of an out-flowering of what is divine or spiritual an uprush of the titanic or demoniac, or might call in agencies and powers which, though not of this disastrous type, are of a powerful but inferior cosmic character. But the rule and guidance of the soul brings into all experience the tendency of light, of integration, of harmony and intimate rightness which is native to the psychic essence. A psychic or, more widely speaking, a psycho-spiritual transformation of this kind would be already a vast change of our mental human nature.

But all this change and all this experience, though psychic and spiritual in essence and character, would still be, in its parts of life-effectuation, on the mental, vital and physical level; its dynamic spiritual outcome<sup>1</sup> would be a flowering of the soul in mind and life and body, but in act and form it would be circumscribed within the limitations,—however enlarged, uplifted and rarefied,—of an inferior instrumentation. It would be a reflected and modified manifestation of things whose full reality, intensity, largeness, oneness and diversity of truth and power and delight are above us, above mind and therefore above any perfection, within mind's own formula, of the foundations or superstructure of our present nature. A highest spiritual transformation must intervene on the psychic or psycho-spiritual change; the psychic movement inward to the inner being, the Self or Divinity within us, must be completed by an opening upward to a supreme spiritual status or a higher existence. This can be done by our opening into what is above us, by an ascent of consciousness into the ranges of overmind and supramental nature in which the sense of Self and Spirit is ever unveiled and permanent and in which the self-luminous instrumentation of the Self and Spirit is not restricted or divided as in our mind-nature, life-nature, body-nature. This also the psychic change makes possible; for as it opens us to the cosmic consciousness now hidden from us by many walls of limiting individuality, so also it

1. The psychic and the spiritual opening with their experiences and consequences can lead away from life or to a Nirvana; but they are here being considered solely as steps in a transformation of the nature.

opens us to what is now superconscious to our normality because it is hidden from us by the strong, hard and bright lid of mind,—mind constricting, dividing and separative. The lid thins, is slit, breaks asunder or opens and disappears under the pressure of the psycho-spiritual change and the natural urge of the new spiritualised consciousness towards that of which it is an expression here. This effectuation of an aperture and its consequences may not at all take place if there is only a partial psychic emergence satisfied with the experience of the Divine Reality in the normal degrees of the spiritualised mind: but if there is any awakening to the existence of these higher supernormal levels, then an aspiration towards them may break the lid or operate a rift in it. This may happen long before the psycho-spiritual change is complete or even before it has well begun or proceeded far, because the psychic personality has become aware and has an eager concentration towards the superconscience. An early illumination from above or a rending of the upper velamen can come as an outcome of aspiration or some inner readiness, or it may even come uncalled for or not called for by any conscious part of the mind,—perhaps by a secret subliminal necessity or by an action or pressure from the higher levels, by something which is felt as the touch of the Divine Being, the touch of the Spirit,—and its results can be exceedingly powerful. But if it is brought about by a premature pressure from below, it can be attended with difficulties and dangers which are absent when the full psychic emergence precedes this first admission to the superior ranges of our spiritual evolution. The choice, however, does not always rest with our will, for the operations of the spiritual evolution in us are very various, and according to the line it has followed will be the turn taken at any critical phase by the action of the Consciousness-Force in its urge towards a higher self-manifestation and formation of our existence.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 906-11)

*Everything is dangerous in the sadhana or can be, except the psychic change.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1095)

**‘IN PEACE AND SILENCE THE ETERNAL  
MANIFESTS...’**

**December 5, 1912**

IN Peace and Silence the Eternal manifests; allow nothing to disturb you and the Eternal will manifest; have perfect equality in face of all and the Eternal will be there.... Yes, we should not put too much intensity, too much effort into our seeking for Thee; the effort and intensity become a veil in front of Thee; we must not desire to see Thee, for that is still a mental agitation which obscures Thy Eternal Presence; it is in the most complete Peace, Serenity and Equality that all is Thou even as Thou art all, and the least vibration in this perfectly pure and calm atmosphere is an obstacle to Thy manifestation. No haste, no inquietude, no tension, Thou, nothing but Thou, without any analysis or any objectivising, and Thou art there without a possible doubt, for all becomes a Holy Peace and a Sacred Silence.

And that is better than all the meditations in the world.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 10)*



## ‘LIKE A FLAME THAT BURNS IN SILENCE...’

**December 7, 1912**

LIKE a flame that burns in silence, like a perfume that rises straight upward without wavering, my love goes to Thee; and like the child who does not reason and has no care, I trust myself to Thee that Thy Will may be done, that Thy Light may manifest, Thy Peace radiate, Thy Love cover the world. When Thou wilt I shall be in Thee, Thyself, and there shall be no more any distinction; I await that blessed hour without impatience of any kind, letting myself flow irresistibly toward it as a peaceful stream flows toward the boundless ocean.

Thy Peace is in me, and in that Peace I see Thee alone present in everything, with the calm of Eternity.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 11)*

## TO THE STUDENTS, YOUNG AND OLD

THERE are, in the history of the earth, moments of transition when things that have existed for thousands of years must give way to those that are about to manifest. A special concentration of the world consciousness, one might almost say, an intensification of its effort, occurs at such times, varying according to the kind of progress to be made, the quality of the transformation to be realised. We are at precisely such a turning-point in the world's history. Just as Nature has already created upon earth a mental being, man, so too there is now a concentrated activity in this mentality to bring forth a supramental consciousness and individuality.

Certain beings who, I might say, are in the secret of the gods, are aware of the importance of this moment in the life of the world, and they have taken birth on earth to play their part in whatever way they can. A great luminous consciousness broods over the earth, creating a kind of stir in its atmosphere. All who are open receive a ripple from this eddy, a ray of this light and seek to give form to it, each according to his capacity.

We have here the unique privilege of being at the very centre of this radiating light, at the fount of this force of transformation.

Sri Aurobindo, incarnating the supramental consciousness in a human body, has not only revealed to us the nature of the path to follow and the way to follow it in order to reach the goal, but has also by his own personal realisation given us the example; he has provided us, so to say, with the proof that the thing can be done and that the time has come to do it.

Consequently, we are not here to repeat what others have done, but to prepare ourselves for the blossoming of a new consciousness and a new life. That is why I address myself to you, the students, that is, to all who wish to learn, to learn always more and always better, so that one day you may be capable of opening yourselves to the new force and of giving it the possibility to manifest on the physical plane. For that is our programme and we must not forget it. To understand the true reason why you are here, you must remember that we want to become instruments that are as perfect as possible, instruments that express the divine will in the world. And if the instruments are to be perfect, they must be cultivated, educated, trained. They must not be left like fallow land or a formless piece of stone. A diamond reveals all its beauty only when it is artistically cut. It is the same for you. If you want your physical being to be a perfect instrument for the manifestation of the supramental consciousness, you must cultivate it, sharpen it, refine it, give it what it lacks, perfect what it already possesses. That is why you go to school, my children, whether you are big or small, for one can learn at any age—and so you must go to your classes.

Sometimes, if you are not in a very good mood, you say, "How boring it is going to be!" Yes, perhaps the teacher who is taking your class does not know how to amuse you. He may be a very good teacher, but at the same time he may not know

how to entertain you, for it is not always easy. There are days when one does not feel like being entertaining. There are days, for him as for you, when one would like to be elsewhere than in school. But still, you go to your class. You go because you must, for if you obey all your fancies you will never have any control over yourselves; your fancies will control you. So you go to your class, but instead of going there and thinking, "How bored I am going to be; I am sure it is not going to be interesting", you should tell yourselves, "There is not a single minute in life, not one circumstance that is not an opportunity for progress. So what progress am I going to make today? The class I am going to now is on a subject that does not interest me. But perhaps that is because something is lacking in me; perhaps, in my brain, a certain number of cells are deficient and that is why I cannot find any interest in the subject. If so, I shall try, I shall listen carefully, concentrate hard and above all drive out of my mind this aimlessness, this superficial shallowness which makes me feel bored when there is something I cannot grasp. I am bored because I do not make an effort to understand, because I do not have this will for progress." When one does not progress, one feels bored, everyone, young or old; for we are here on earth to progress. How tedious life would be without progress! Life is monotonous. Most often it is not fun. It is far from being beautiful. But if you take it as a field for progress, then everything changes, everything becomes interesting and there is no longer any room for boredom. Next time your teacher seems boring to you, instead of wasting your time doing nothing, try to understand why he bores you. Then if you have a capacity of observation and if you make an effort to understand, you will soon see that a kind of miracle has occurred and that you are no longer feeling bored at all.

This remedy is good in almost every case. Sometimes, in certain circumstances, everything seems dull, boring, stupid; this means that you are as boring as the circumstances and it clearly shows that you are not in a state of progress. It is simply a passing wave of boredom, and nothing is more contrary to the purpose of existence. At such a moment you might make an effort and ask yourself, "This boredom shows that I have something to learn, some progress to make in myself, some inertia to conquer, some weakness to overcome." Boredom is a dullness of the consciousness; and if you seek the cure within yourself, you will see that it immediately dissolves. Most people, when they feel bored, instead of making an effort to rise one step higher in their consciousness, come down one step lower; they come down even lower than they were before and do stupid things, they make themselves vulgar in the hope of amusing themselves. That is why men intoxicate themselves, spoil their health, deaden their brains. If they had risen instead of falling, they would have made use of this opportunity to progress.

In fact, the same thing holds true in all circumstances, when life gives you a severe blow, one of those blows which men call a misfortune. The first thing they try to do is to forget, as if they did not forget only too soon! And in order to forget, they do all kinds of things. When something is very painful, they try to distract them-

selves—what they call distracting themselves, that is, doing stupid things, lowering their consciousness instead of raising it. If something extremely painful happens to you, never try to deaden yourself; you must not forget, you must not sink into unconsciousness. Go right to the heart of the pain and there you will find the light, the truth, the strength and the joy which are hidden behind this pain. But for that you must be firm and refuse to let yourself slide.

In this way every event in life, great or small, can be an opportunity for progress. Even the most insignificant details can lead to revelations if you know how to profit from them. Whenever you are engaged in something which does not demand the whole of your attention, use it as an opportunity to develop your faculty of observation and you will see that you will make interesting discoveries. To help you to understand what I mean, I shall give you two examples. They are two brief moments in life which are insignificant in themselves, but still leave a deep and lasting impression.

The first example takes place in Paris. You have to go out into this immense city; here all is noise, apparent confusion, bewildering activity. Suddenly you see a woman walking in front of you; she is like most other women, her dress has nothing striking about it, but her gait is remarkable, supple, rhythmic, elegant, harmonious. It catches your attention and you are full of wonder. Then, this body moving along so gracefully reminds you of all the splendours of ancient Greece and the unparalleled lesson in beauty which its culture gave to the whole world, and you live an unforgettable moment—all that just because of a woman who knows how to walk!

The second example is from the other end of the world, from Japan. You have just arrived in this beautiful country for a long stay and very soon you find out that unless you have at least a minimum knowledge of the language, it will be very difficult for you to get along. So you begin to study Japanese and in order to become familiar with the language you do not miss a single opportunity to hear people talking, you listen to them carefully, you try to understand what they are saying; and then, beside you, in a tram where you have just taken your seat, there is a small child of four or five years with his mother. The child begins to talk in a clear and pure voice and listening to him you have the remarkable experience that he knows spontaneously what you have to learn with so much effort, and that as far as Japanese is concerned he could be your teacher in spite of his youth.

In this way life becomes full of wonder and gives you a lesson at each step. Looked at from this angle, it is truly worth living.

THE MOTHER

*(On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 72-76)*

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

MANY must have heard the name of Georges Carpentier, the famous sportsman of France. In spite of his being young in age, he was without a peer in boxing till only the other day. It is in his last encounter that he suffered his only defeat at the hands of Dempsey of America. But it does not seem to us that his greatness has in any way been tarnished even after this defeat, because Dempsey defeated him not through skill but through sheer weight. If a man beats a retreat from dashing against a mass of rock, he need not feel particularly humiliated. However, that is not the subject of our discussion; it is the advice given by Carpentier on physical exercise that is our subject. We value deeply what this talented sportsman said out of his own education and experience as to how the body should be built up. We have found it so interesting that we cannot resist the temptation of quoting *in toto* an extract from it:

“I have always made it a point to shun all exercises that are merely violent, for that which is physically hard to do, hurts and tires; it is harmful. For instance, of the prolonged swinging of Indian clubs or dumb-bells or muscle-making exercises, I do not approve. A man who claims perfect physical fitness because his body is bunched with muscle, I would not pass as the ideal or a perfectly trained athlete. The severely muscular man is strong only in a given test of strength; he may lift a tremendous dead-weight, he is imposing to look at, but he lacks elasticity, quick-footedness; oftener than not he has an indifferent carriage; he has made no special study of deportment.... I attach the utmost importance to ‘how to walk’. Perfect carriage—the knowledge that you possess a full share of that poetry of movement which we call deportment has a wonderful effect upon the mind, and as I hold that it is absolutely necessary in the striving after physical fitness, first to have a regard for your mentality, I would put deportment down as the beginning of the alphabet of physical culture. Having learned to walk correctly,... you have mastered one of the hardest and most exacting lessons of your athletic curriculum. You then know all about poise, balance; and awkwardness will not seize hold of you.... Training as training—a species of mechanics I would call it—is as appalling as it is monotonous and soul-destroying.... It is not uncommon to find the average trainer insisting upon his man working full steam until the very eve of a fight. There is nothing in my opinion more harmful to drill into a pugilist that he is just a fighting machine to be wound up and set working at will.”

These words are plain and simple, but very rich in content. All those who deal with educational matters of our country should pay special attention to these words. Carpentier says that in order to build the body one must above all learn ‘how to walk correctly’. Only that person who has learnt how to walk correctly and whose bodily deportment is perfect can have a solid physical foundation. He need not try to master anything else that may be required for the body. To know how to walk means to have the knowledge of its rhythm, measure and pitch. All the limbs of the person who can

walk correctly manifest a sort of melody, harmony, light and yet a compact look. If this is attained, then health, strength and beauty come very easily to the body. But we do not build our body in rhythm with the open sky and the air and the light in a simple and easy manner. We only torment our body subjecting it to rigorous rules and restrictions, to strenuous physical exercises, for we wish to become experts by enlarging certain muscles or by making certain limbs robust and strong. That is why Carpentier does not want to invest this capital of energy in some such arduous exercises like dumb-bells and clubs, *dund* and *baithak*. He says that the body can be made fleshy and muscular by this means, that some limbs can no doubt store immense amount of strength, but, what is the gain in it? Man may become successful in this manner in certain tests of strength—one may have an elephant on one's chest, one may lift a boulder weighing ten or twenty *maunds*, one may even become wonder-struck at the sight of someone's body marvellously sculptured, but we do not get here an all-round growth, an even distribution of power, a well-arranged, well-integrated strength, a beauty of rhythm in the whole body.

We shall not dwell any more on physical education, but on mental education. However, whatever Carpentier has said about the body is wholly applicable to the mind also. The education prevalent in our country and all over the world aims at preparing a severely muscular mind and brain as has been observed by Carpentier. What do we do in the existing system of education? We exert ourselves following some faculties of the mind or relying only on certain parts of the brain. We want to make the mind, the brain of the student expert and ingenious in certain branches of knowledge, that is, in certain tricks. As Ramamurthy inflating his chest snaps the chain rolled around it, so also our expert philosopher aims at solving the world-problems convincingly through the power of reasoning. As Tarabai can lift a huge and heavy boulder tied to her plaits, so also can some of us, with the help of a powerful memory, keep telling fluently the dates of all the events of the world in minutest detail. Or as the body of Sadow looks beautiful to our eyes, thanks to his bulging muscles, so also are there amongst us one or two erudite scholars or pundits who are a mobile storehouse filled with loads of learning. Our system of education is trying to produce specialists, but more often than not, we find that a specialist is rather ignorant, incapable or else indifferent to subjects other than his own—even in ordinary matters of our day-to-day life. The archaeologist is void of any literary taste, the chemist is at loggerheads with philosophy, the linguist is one in whose head science does not get easy access. Let me cite an instance; it is not a story, but an absolute factual truth. One of our friends, an M.A. examinee in philosophy, was asked in course of a conversation whether Mohammad preceded the Buddha or vice versa. Scratching his head, reflecting and re-searching a lot on the question, he answered that probably it was Mohammad! Terribly embarrassed, he at last offered this lame excuse that he was a student of philosophy and that history was not there in his syllabus. I do not know whether this example is uncommon or not, but a friend of

mine, a professor, assures me that it is not so—that the matter is very common; but there is no mistaking the fact that the specialists of this type are being produced by our system of education. Of late, in some quarters, however, it is being said and we are compelled to feel clearly that various domains of knowledge are somewhat inter-related, that one should not remain a frog in the well confined exclusively within a particular subject; we have begun to observe also that the more one has mastery over a variety of subjects, the more is he capable of unfolding the inner significance of his own particular subject and the more deeply and elaborately is he capable of expressing and elucidating it. We have begun to acknowledge these days that all knowledge is partial knowledge; it simply observes a certain portion separately cutting it from the whole. Hence, from the point of view of integrality, if we see partial knowledge in the light of other branches of knowledge, then and then only can we see it completely and recover fully its secrets. But by this method also we are giving more emphasis on specialisation: the main thing is the study of a specialised subject and other subjects are to be studied as optional ones only in order to focus their light on the specialised subject alone. Moreover, if we cultivate all branches of knowledge in equal measure, without any discrimination, even then it will be like the muscle-making exercises as observed by Carpentier; this may make the mind and the brain ornate with learning, but it is not possible to find in this way the entire mind and brain—the real man.

In fact, the defect of this muscle-making system of education about which we have just spoken is that here the attention has been focused on the outer, on a part—the inner, the whole has not at all been taken into consideration. We shall try to elucidate a bit more as to how it has come about. There are three levels or streams of education. Firstly, mastery over subjects; secondly, cultivation of various faculties; and thirdly, determination of the mould of mind, augmentation of its capacity. On the first level, it is to acquire proficiency in a few selected subjects, to know and discover as many relevant theories and information as possible. On the second level, it is to make certain faculties of mind sharp and solid through repeated practice and training—faculties such as the power of memory, the power of reasoning and discrimination, or the power of presenting something in a methodical and cohesive manner. And on the third level, it is not to become learned or well-versed in a particular subject or excellent in a particular faculty but to make the roots of the mind, the whole brain charged and strong. The existing system of education is preoccupied with the first level only, that is to say, it has made the inferior part of education, its lowest and the most superficial level all in all. If we find in this system the second level which is relatively inner, we find it rather as a secondary thing. And we do not keep any track at all of the third one which is the innermost.

In integral education all these three parts are mandatory, but its method must not be an attempt to go inside from outside but rather to come outside from inside—in a manner quite contrary to the present method. If you go on putting pressure from outside without keeping any trace of things within, the inner either becomes withered

or takes a distorted unnatural orientation. If the acquisition of knowledge on a particular subject alone becomes overwhelmingly important, the mental faculty, laden with the excessive weight of the subject, not only finds the way towards natural blossoming blocked but also fails to acquire adequate knowledge on the subject. This is because the mental faculty is forced to swallow the things coming from outside, it does not get the time and the capacity needed to digest them. Even cultivating the faculties is not the basic thing. It is necessary to enhance the power of memory, therefore, make efforts to memorise, consult the text repeatedly and learn it by heart. Or it is necessary to make the power of analysis keen, therefore, get down to the practice of applying your intelligence, exerting your brain in conformity with logic. It is very doubtful if it is thus possible to develop a faculty or to gain mastery over a subject to the fullest extent possible. Even if it succeeds, we get nothing more than an expertise in a particular faculty or in a particular subject. We can produce by this process a good number of persons capable of retaining whatever they hear or a certain number of persons well-versed in hair-splitting argumentation or an individual as good as a mobile dictionary, but they all become like a machine—you put certain things in it, it will disgorge finished products of a special kind. But it is difficult to have, by this means, a simple normal man endowed with a vibrant and strong mind. Not only that, the mind which is in this way cast and hammered to shape from outside, becomes in nine cases out of ten only a receptacle of something, it can receive what can be received like a machine; a creative mind, the mind that can offer, the mind that is capable of appreciation, cannot be obtained by this means. To create does not mean an accumulation of material things or placing them in order; creation is manifestation, a bringing forth from inside to outside, a burgeoning of the blissful Self through rhythm and melody and life. It is such a mind that not only knows but discovers its own strength, its own living being which it has at first obtained and experienced within; it is such a mind that becomes perfectly nourished and perfectly beautiful. As it gains mastery over a certain subject, over a certain faculty in a natural and vigorous way, so it acquires a natural talent which can deal effortlessly with any subject or with any faculty whenever it is necessary. Such an energy is stored at the root of the thought-force that in whatever way it may move, it can bring in a feeling of verdant and vigorous creation. If the thought-force of the mind attains this source, then a thing, whatever it may be, which used to be acquired before with great difficulty, with a lot of force and effort, exuding a good deal of sweat, now becomes its own by virtue of some innate power.

If we take into consideration the three levels of education which we have just discussed, then education may be compared to a sword. The purpose of a sword is to cut an object; similarly, the purpose of education is to acquire mastery over subjects. But what is needed first and foremost is to whet the sword, to sharpen it; likewise, in education too it is necessary to cultivate faculties. If you begin to cut something with a blunt sword, it may gather some amount of sharpness while cutting, but it cannot



cut many things, the edge breaks, and there is even a possibility of spoiling the sword altogether. Hence, it is necessary, before everything else, to cast the sword properly with wrought iron; similarly, in education also what is needed even before the cultivation of faculties is to give a strong, powerful and well-formed shape to the mind, to the brain.

For the development of the body what is of primary necessity is not rigorous physical exercise, but good health, a general capacity, that is to say, the vitality and the rhythm of the vital-force which have been described by Carpentier as the poetry of movement. This elemental force cannot be obtained by physical exercise, which is merely an application or a technique of application of this life-force; to obtain it you need things of a different nature. In the case of education too, you need at the very beginning this kind of health, general capacity of the mind, the vitality or the life-force of the mind as well. The life-force of the mind is the power of thinking or the intellect, thought-power or brain-power. The current system of education has overlooked totally the idea of sustaining and improving this intellect and brain-power. It is spending all its energies on the gymnastics of thinking and not on the specific application and on the simple and powerful rhythm of thinking. Not only that the existing system of education is not helping at all in the unfoldment of brain-power and intellect, it is also wholly obstructing it. It is superfluous to say that that education which stands for finishing a selected number of books within a few specified months, thrusting into the brain a fixed number of ideas within a fixed period of time and unloading them as and when needed, cannot but to a large extent be a kind of torture and oppression on the free power of thinking.

It is not the skill in applying the mind or the brain, but the manner in which its innate capacity, its rhythm of formation can be brought out effortlessly—that is the basic problem of education. Carpentier says that the first and foremost thing in the physical culture is a natural flowering of the body, a graceful movement in all its limbs and a free but firm physical discipline. We will add that to make the mind also refined and cultured, it too requires at the outset a similar kind of lucidity, a large and spontaneous movement, a concentrated power like that of the taut bowstring or the strings of a harp. To achieve this for the body, Carpentier wants us to learn to walk; similarly, to achieve this for the mind, our advice is to learn to think. What is ‘walking’ for the body is ‘thinking’ for the mind. Instances of the fact that the people of our country do not even know how to walk properly are seen everywhere. No wonder then that they do not know how to think—not deeply but in a general way—in other words, they do not know how to make their ‘mind walk’. At the mental level too we move about sometimes crookedly, sometimes with a bad limp, sometimes by leaps and bounds, sometimes pantingly or drowsily. We do not know how to walk in an easy manner—many parts of our mind too have become distorted owing to innumerable mannerisms. Sometimes we do not think at all and we move about like a flock of sheep with a mind vacant and blind; sometimes, however, goaded by necessity

we do a little bit of thinking required for the moment only. At times driven by emotional excitement we think erratically and at other times afflicted by others' thoughts we suffer. And with such a sick, neurotic and impotent mind we practise strenuous physical exercise and hope to become experts!

The first thing needed is, therefore, to learn to think, to master the art of thinking spontaneously,—there is no need to put stress on the subjects we are dealing with, the faculties we are cultivating. Whatever may be the subject or the faculty, we will have to activate the entire mind making the former only a pretext. When a child plays, his play does not depend on the playthings he uses; each thing supplies him the joy of playing. Likewise, in education too, the joy of thinking is the food for the mind. Hence, the mind must first be freed and allowed to move freely. Then and only then the mind will be getting the joy of thinking and the rhythm and the strength of movement. A child is by nature curious, that is to say, inquisitive and desirous to know; he must be allowed freedom to move and at the same time be guided to proceed on the path of enquiry. Nevertheless, he should not confine himself only to the queries that come spontaneously from within, new and newer queries also have to be inculcated gradually into the mind of the child. Unknown and unfamiliar things must be held before his mind's eye, they have to be made delightful, beautiful and captivating for drawing the attention of the learner. The child should be encouraged to give free play to his speculation and imagination about these things. The extent and the depth of the mind of a child or a learner are not much, hence the teacher has to offer him new and newer topics and supply him with stimulus for new experiences; but this should be done without applying any force, that is, playfully, through stories or through unrelated things. One must spread the bait, drop the hook to entice the fish and sit down patiently to see whether the fish nibbles at it or not. If it nibbles, well and good, one must then bring the fish completely under the control of the fishing-rod by playing with it slowly and gently. If it does not nibble, one should not be in a hurry or be impatient. Time and again, at every possible opportunity things must be offered at the mind's door of the learner, one must see whether he takes any interest in them or not, whether any latent string resonates or not—should the learner possess any talent it will be detected, it will come to light by these means alone. Furthermore, as there is no order in the child's mind, he leaps from one subject to another, all on a sudden, without caring for anything else. To follow a subject step by step in order to reach its logical conclusion is the characteristic of a mature intellect—it is not proper to expect it from an infant learner. Now he discusses the colours of a bird and now he starts babbling a poem, and, keeping it incomplete, perhaps suddenly asks what becomes of man after death. The teacher must with infinite patience follow the caprices of the learner, he must, little by little, in a half-finished manner, provide interest of various kinds. It is by this means that the mind awakens spontaneously, accumulates an invigorating strength and a dynamism bursts forth in rhythm and harmony, and then neither can inertia affect the thinking nor can rust contaminate the intellect.

This freewill of the learner to move according to his own will is the basic thing in education. However, if this alone were all, the problem of education would have been much simpler, there is no doubt about it; unfortunately it is not so. In education, there is a special role for discipline; it is this discipline that brings in all sorts of complications. The child must be acquainted with books, he must learn to read and write correctly. Though the way it is done now can be made more joyful, more interesting, yet in actual practice, a sort of pressure comes invariably at a certain stage. The fact is that whatever is or can be taught orally and playfully is in consonance with the rhythm of the child's normal life. But the moment the child starts getting introduced to the alphabet or reading books or even writing and drawing, a pressure comes upon his mind to rise and take his stand in a different kind of world. However smooth you may make this stage, however straight you may make this bend, the child is bound to feel a jerk. Why only for the child, for any learner it is always true that—since education signifies progress or gradual ascension, however beautifully, interestingly or charmingly it may be imparted—there takes place invariably somewhere in the mind a bit of tugging and tightening. If the reins of the mind of the learner are let loose altogether, then a state of indiscipline takes birth there. The mind may become vigorous but there also reigns a sort of rashness, immaturity and a lack of control over oneself. Our fault is that we make this discipline and control, this bridling and restraining as the be-all and end-all of our endeavour; but this is not the primary thing. The primary thing is to bring forth that which has to be disciplined and controlled, bridled and restrained. Moreover, the lesser the imposition of rules from outside, the better it is; we will have to see that the learner gets the inspiration and technique to acquire self-discipline. But all these things will come to fruition only when we have at the base a powerful mind, a vibrant brain and a creative power of thinking.

Whether this can be prepared in any school system or not is also an important question. We think that it is not possible or at least it is very difficult to prepare it. A school invariably means drawing the learner away from his natural surroundings at every moment and confining him within the classroom, creating a gap between his life and his education. However, a school can be made very open, very liberal and broad in outlook. Instead of having the classes in the classroom, we can very well arrange them under the shade of a tree, on the bank of a river or in the lap of a field or we can make the school a residential building for the students—but all that will not be a natural life for them, it will only be a simulation of life. All this means only a superficial change while the basic character of the school remains more or less unchanged by these means. When we try to tear out of their appropriate places the things which represent spontaneous manifestation of life, which are connected and united with a thousand and one things of life and arrange to place and embellish them in the midst of a particular institution, many a time we do not get the real and the living thing—we get only a fake image. Hence, it seems to us that even the schools

run by the most modern method of education (as for instance, those of Montessori or Tagore) are not the virgin forests of life but merely some decorated gardens copied from them. In olden days, there was no educational institution in our country, there was only the house of the Guru. The learner used to be included in the Guru's family. It is by staying there, participating in its various activities, tending the cows of the Guru that he used to get his education. We do feel that if we can turn the family into an educational institution—the family where the child is born, grows up, branches out and links himself with hundreds of relations, only then it will become a living institution. For this, however, a lot of rectification and reorganisation of the family is necessary. The social reformers have been mulling over this problem from the standpoint of morality, economics and even politics. We deem it imperative to put special stress on the fact that the family also can be viewed from the standpoint of educational policy, that the family also can become an ideal place for education. However, we have not sat down now to solve the question as to how the family should be reformed for the purpose of education. The long and short of what we want to say is that education will be ideal when and only when the family is considered as the living school, when the education of the learner will continue integrating him into his social life—in other words, when education is a living manifestation of a vibrant life.

The purport of narrating all this is that the moment we dissociate learning from life, education becomes a laborious exercise and the mind losing its vigour becomes an artificial instrument. If the mind remains spirited, its power develops through the sap of life: life from below will keep supporting the mind, the mind too will keep infusing its light into life—mutually helping each other by such free exchange both will attain the supreme good—

*parasparam bhāvayantaḥ  
śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha*  
(fostering each other, you shall attain  
to the supreme good).

There has been a lesion between these two levels of our education. Consequently, our mind has become artificial and our life sick. Not only does the mind acquire freshness and strength, but its mode of thinking and perceiving also becomes right and straight when this mind—this thought and perception—gets nourished and mobilised at the very outset by the experiences, feelings and questions of life and life only.

The foundations of education, we repeat, are therefore the two powers of the mind—the brain-power or the retentive power of the mind and the intellect or the formative power of the mind. A mind with brain-power is that which can retain without effort whatever pressure you put on it, which, having become broad, multi-faceted and profound, can pour itself out at its own will; the mind of the thinker is that which

is endowed with a movement global and harmonious, with a living and infallible order of Truth. If one leaves out these two things as something innate or gifted by nature, then one leaves out the very fundamental problem of education. If one is satisfied with the available foundations and if one directs the whole of one's endeavour in shaping the superstructure, then education turns out to be top-heavy, crippled or only eye-catching. We shall conclude citing here an old familiar analogy that if you want to see a tree rich in leaves, branches, flowers and fruits, then it would be of no avail if you simply wait for them avidly; what is needed is to find the root of the tree, clear it of the weeds, water and manure it.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Courtesy SACAR for this essay, taken from their publication, *Education and Initiation*, being an English translation by Amarnath Dutta of Nolini Kanta Gupta's Bengali *Shikkha O Dikkha*, published in 1926.)

*A true mental education, which will prepare man for a higher life, has five principal phases. Normally these phases follow one after another, but in exceptional individuals they may alternate or even proceed simultaneously. These five phases, in brief, are:*

*(1) Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention.*

*(2) Development of the capacities of expansion, widening, complexity and richness.*

*(3) Organisation of one's ideas around a central idea, a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life.*

*(4) Thought-control, rejection of undesirable thoughts, to become able to think only what one wants and when one wants.*

*(5) Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being.*

*The Mother*

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 24-25)

## STORM-LIGHT

THE immortal music of her mind  
Sweeps through the earth a lustrous wind—  
“Renounce, O man, thy arduous oar  
And, opening out faith’s song-charmed helpless sail,  
Reach on my breath of love the ecstatic shore!

My rush is truth self-beaconed, not thy pale  
Stranger-surmise:  
I am a cyclic gale  
That blows from paradise to paradise!”

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

Sri Aurobindo’s Comment: “This is now quite perfect. Only, the lines 2-5 are now of the Illumined Mind, with a strong undertone of the effective, the first and last four intuitive. This is not a defect.

“The poetry of the Illumined Mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the Truth vivid—it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have a play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them—it may be quite bare; it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The Illumined Mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.”

(*The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], 1993 ed., p. 161*)

*The supreme discipline is integral surrender to the Divine and to allow nothing else either in one’s feelings or in one’s activities. Nothing should ever be omitted from this surrender—that is the supreme and most rigorous discipline.*

*17 February 1972*

*The Mother*

(*On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 382*)

## THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of June 2004)

(14)

Mother Divine,

Ravindra requested me to see Navajata and take charge of the 'Mother India' Office in place of Hari Poddar. The nature of the work gave me some anxiety; because, firstly, I am not used to this type of work and secondly, I feared of my eczematic troubles coming in the way. I, however, saw Navajata and asked him if I could work for 'Mother India' from my own flat in consideration of my present state of health.

He said that he would put the matter before the Mother. He left for Delhi shortly afterwards. Since then I have not heard about this matter.

So I am now putting the matter before You. If it is Your will that I should work for 'Mother India', I am prepared to do so inspite of my weaknesses and bad health. Make me Your surrendered instrument and end my anxieties, this is my prayer to You.

With pranams,

4-8-70

Your child  
Abani

P.S.

My birthday comes off on 14-8-70. May I go to You for pranam on that day?


5-8-70

Abani

*Come for your birthday on the 14<sup>th</sup>  
at 3 P.M.*

*I did not ask you to work for  
Mother India, and did not think of it.  
So if you do not feel like doing it,  
it is quite all right.*

*Love and blessings*



Come for your birthday on the 14th at 3 P.M.

I did not ask you to work for Mother India, and did not think of it.

So if you do not feel like doing it, it is quite all right.

Love and blessings

The Mother

(To be concluded)

## SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PROBLEM OF POETIC TRANSLATION

(Continued from the issue of June 2004)

### A Fragment from *The Cloud Messenger*

THE ESSAY “On Translating Kalidasa” is important not only for its searching discussion of some of the problems that confront the translator of poetry, but also as the principal source of the few surviving passages from what must have been one of Sri Aurobindo’s finest translations. For in the later part of this essay he quoted and commented on some lines from *The Cloud Messenger*, his now lost version of Kalidasa’s *Meghadūta*.<sup>1</sup>

He chose these passages mainly to illustrate his manner of dealing with the special difficulties that can arise in translating between languages like Sanskrit and English whose literatures have evolved in very different cultural environments. He began with one of those references to mythology that are so common in the *Meghadūta*, allusions packed with meaning for Kalidasa’s contemporaries and countrymen, but without living associations for most foreign readers even if they are explained. These must somehow be brought to life in an alien tongue if this beautiful poem is to be appreciated outside of India. Otherwise Kalidasa’s poetry, which according to Sri Aurobindo “is hardly surpassed for truth, bold directness & native beauty & grandeur”, may appear to the world as merely “the artificial poetry of an artificial period”.<sup>2</sup>

In the last line of the verse in question,<sup>3</sup> the cloud carrying the Yaksha’s message to his beloved is imagined soaring through a pass in the Himalayas, elongated so that it looks “like the dark foot of Vishnu arisen to subdue Bali”:

*śyāmaḥ pādo baliniyamanābhyudyatasyeva viśṇoḥ.*

The problem is that in any more or less literal rendering of this into English, hardly a trace remains of the sublimity of Kalidasa’s line. Sri Aurobindo proposed the following translation, therefore, admitting it to be a “rather extreme” instance of his method of making explicit in such cases what is only implied in the original:

Dark like the cloudy foot of highest God  
When starting from the dwarf-shape world-immense  
With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.<sup>4</sup>

Little needs to be added to Sri Aurobindo’s own detailed explanation of how every word of this translation is intended to enable the reader of English to visualise what Kalidasa’s single line would have at once conjured up before the minds of his audience.<sup>5</sup> It must be clarified that it is not primarily a question of conveying



information to the intellect. This could be done, however clumsily, by attaching to a more literal rendering a note on the myth of the Titan Bali and Vishnu's incarnation as the dwarf, Vamana. But Sri Aurobindo's concern was with producing an English equivalent to the aesthetic effect of Kalidasa's magnificent line.

The undeniable grandeur of Sri Aurobindo's translation, as of the Sanskrit itself, owes much to its rhythm. While the similarity can be felt immediately, a closer comparison is needed to show how far the rhythm of the English is actually inspired by the Sanskrit. In order to make this comparison, some technicalities of prosody will have to be introduced at this point.

### **The *Mandākrāntā* Metre**

To begin with, it must be stated that the *mandākrāntā* metre of the *Meghadūta* cannot be reproduced in English. Unlike the accentual metres of English, Sanskrit metres are based purely on the length of the syllables. In this respect they resemble, but considerably exceed in complexity, the metres of Greek and Latin. Sri Aurobindo himself has shown, in his essay "On Quantitative Metre", how Greek and Latin metres can be naturalised in English to a greater extent than had been suspected. Distinctions of length (quantity) do exist in English, though they are not as well-defined as in the classical Western or Indian tongues. In order to write quantitative verse in English, the poet must make use of this element in the language in a way that is in harmony with the predominantly accentual character of its natural rhythm. But the metres of Sanskrit, due to their intricate structure, do not lend themselves to this treatment.

The distinctive feature of the *mandākrāntā*, with seventeen syllables in a line (*pāda*), is the subdivision of the line into three rhythmically contrasting segments: first, four long syllables whose slow opening pace gives the metre its name; next, a rapid sequence of five short syllables ending with a long one; and finally, a weightier movement of mixed long and short syllables, the former predominating. To imitate such a scheme in English would clearly be out of the question.

The variety built into this metre makes it possible to repeat the same rhythmic pattern without monotony from beginning to end of a poem of the length of the *Meghadūta*. In English, metrical variety has to be brought about by other means, such as the modulations of the iambic pentameter seen in the first two lines of the fragment from Sri Aurobindo's translation quoted above. But the avoidance of monotony is only a minimum prerequisite of tolerable verse, related to the "mechanical" and "sensational" elements of metre defined earlier.

The movement of refined aesthetic feeling under the control of the artistic intelligence creates poetry like that of the classical period of Sanskrit literature. Kalidasa uses the *mandākrāntā* with exquisite skill to enhance the expressive value of each perfectly placed word and to make his images live before the inner eye. Sri Aurobindo likewise marshals all the rhythmic resources of English to evoke here the

tremendous picture of the dwarf-Avatar towering to his divine stature and striding through the worlds.

At first sight, one could scarcely imagine two more disparate metres than the *mandākrāntā* with its complicated formula and the pentameter with its plain iambic framework. Yet Sri Aurobindo has taken advantage of the flexibility of the English metre to produce rhythmic effects astonishingly similar to Kalidasa's. He has done this, not by imitating the externals of the original metre, but by fathoming the inner significance of its employment in the present line and re-expressing it by the most effective means available in English.

### A Line-by-line Analysis

Kalidasa in his characteristic fashion focuses attention first on a precise visual image, that of the elongated cloud whose shape and colour call to mind the uplifted foot of the dark-hued Vishnu. This is accomplished in two simple words: *śyāmaḥ pādo*. These four long syllables<sup>6</sup> constitute the first metrical segment of the line.

All that has been presented thus far is a "dark foot" in the sky. Kalidasa's alert audience would, indeed, have experienced an immediate thrill of recognition, for the word *śyāma* is associated especially with the complexion of Vishnu and his Avatars. But the subtlety of the effect depends on the actual name of Vishnu being reserved for the end of the line. In English this obviously would not work. Sri Aurobindo solves the problem in a manner that makes the dark foot sufficiently sublime and unearthly without linking it as yet to a precise mythological context:

Dark like the cloudy foot of highest God....

We have before us now an image of a foot-shaped cloud compared to a cloudlike foot, but the legend behind the latter remains still in the background. The four long syllables of the Sanskrit, if they suggest motion at all, seem appropriate to the stately drifting of the cloud whose steady northward progress is being followed. This combination of extreme compactness of style with ample fullness of sound is a possibility of Sanskrit exemplified to an unparalleled degree in Kalidasa's poetry. It can hardly be emulated in English. Yet in the later part of Sri Aurobindo's line, an echo at least of Kalidasa's even-paced *śyāmaḥ pādo* can be heard.

The initial accent on "Dark" stresses, as in the Sanskrit, the visual resemblance between the cloud and the supernatural foot. But after this opening inversion, the rest of the line is conspicuous for its metrical regularity. It consists of four iambs, divisible into two rhythmically similar units of two feet each: "the cloudy foot", "of highest God". The symmetry of this, reinforced by the long vowel in the first foot of each unit and the more strongly accented short vowel in the second, is worth comparing with the opening sound-pattern of the Sanskrit line: two words of two long syllables

each, with an assonance of long  $\bar{a}$ 's between their first syllables. In the original as well as the translation, an almost static rhythmic balance frames momentarily the cloudy foot poised in heaven, while the larger scene it belongs to has yet to unfold concretely before our eyes.

Kalidasa has compressed the story of Bali and the dwarf into a single massive compound, *baliniyamanābhyudyatasya*, which forms the imposing centre-piece of his line. Rendered quite literally, this means, "of Bali-subdual-arisen (Vishnu)". The gulf to be bridged between the idioms of Sanskrit and English could not be better illustrated. It should be obvious from this typical example how useless a truly word-for-word rendering of Kalidasa's poetry would be for any but the most academic purposes.

Sri Aurobindo has managed, all the same, to find an impressive approximation to *bali-niyamana* in his "Titan-quelling". This occurs in the last line of the translation, however, while the second line brings out the meaning of *abhyudyatasya* which follows and completes the compound. Sri Aurobindo himself explains why an entire line was needed to do justice to this one word in the context:

The impetuous & vigorous term *abhyudyatasya* both in sound & sense suggests the sudden starting up of the world-pervading deity from the dwarf shape he had assumed....<sup>7</sup>

Kalidasa could suggest so much with a single word because he knew that at the mere mention of Bali, there would at once flash through the minds of his audience the legend of Vamana, the dwarf, and the boon he obtained from Bali, the Asura ("Titan"), oppressor of gods and men, of as much land as he could measure with three steps. But one cannot expect the normal reader of English to have such vivid associations with Puranic mythology. Therefore Sri Aurobindo found it necessary to expand the middle and concluding portions of the Sanskrit *pāda* into two mighty lines:

When starting from the dwarf-shape world-immense  
With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.

These lines owe much of their power to rhythms that echo to a surprising degree the movement of the Sanskrit. The first line corresponds rhythmically to *baliniyamanābhyudyatasya* (though the actual translation of *baliniyamana*, as we have seen, is reserved for the next line). This ten-syllable compound begins with a rush of short syllables and culminates in an energetic sequence of two pairs of metrically long syllables<sup>8</sup> separated by a short one. The English likewise has ten syllables, with a rapid pace in the first half of the line and an enormous broadening in the second half. As in the Sanskrit, four of the last five syllables are long.

A more effective rhythm cannot be imagined for suggesting by the very sound of the words the dwarf-Avatar's revelation of his universal form. Without violating the accentual, iambic basis of the pentameter, Sri Aurobindo has come as close as is possible in English to achieving a pure quantitative movement. He has altered the metrical balance of the line by two substitutions, unusual not in themselves but by their combination and placement, which create a series of three short syllables followed by three long ones.<sup>9</sup> The latter are long not only due to stress, but by their inherent vowel-length.

Thus the pace of the line is first contracted and accelerated, then dramatically retarded and expanded. An extraordinary amplitude is imparted in this way to "world-immense". Its juxtaposition with "dwarf-shape" makes the magnitude of the sudden transfiguration concretely felt.

The sense of superhuman amplitude is prolonged into the final line. Here the iambic beat returns with full force and a heightened significance. The effect is much like that of the last part of the Sanskrit line, though brought about by different means. Sri Aurobindo's aim was obviously not to reproduce in English the details of the original metre, which would be impossible, but to capture the expressive values Kalidasa has elicited from it. So we may legitimately backtrack a few syllables in the Sanskrit and take *abhyudyatasyeva viṣṇoḥ*, the whole last segment of the line, as that to which the third line of the translation rhythmically corresponds.

The Sanskrit line culminates in a majestic movement consisting of three pairs of long syllables, each pair separated from the next by a single short syllable. The first *a* of *abhyudyatasya* is combined by *sandhi* with the *a* at the end of *baliniyamana* to form a long *ā* that concludes the second metrical section of the line. As there is usually a word-break after the syllable that comes at this point in the metre, the overlap here produces an enjambment-like effect enhancing the explosion of sound in the aspirated consonant cluster of the second syllable of *abhyudyatasya*. This launches the resonant finale, where one can almost hear the reverberation of the three steps of Vishnu covering earth and heaven and thrusting the Titan down to the underworld.

The impact of Vishnu's strides is overwhelmingly felt in the English, evoked by a forceful and broadened return to the iambic ictus:

With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.

Though there are five accents here, the assonance of short *e*'s in the words "quelling", "step" and "heaven" reduces the number of different stressed vowels to three. The strongest accents fall most naturally at the beginning, middle and end, on "Titan", "step" and "strode", creating an accentual counterpart of the triple swell of long syllables at equally spaced intervals in the Sanskrit.

Whereas at the beginning of Kalidasa's line we glimpsed only a cloudlike foot,

now we see the cosmic form of Vishnu measuring the worlds. Naturally, when his upraised foot is compared to the cloud, it is the second of his three steps that the poet has particularly in mind. The translator has spelled this out for the English-speaking reader with the words “through heaven he strode”.

A last detail that might be noted is the exact or approximate echoing, in these concluding words, of some of the prominent sounds in the last four syllables of the Sanskrit line—especially the *e* and *v* of *-eva* in “heaven” and the *o* of *viṣṇoḥ* in “strode”. Such echoing not only of rhythms, but even of actual sounds, can be observed occasionally in Sri Aurobindo’s translations. This curious feature, if it is not a pure coincidence, perhaps came about as the spontaneous result of an intent listening to the original word-music.

### Poetic Delight and the Inspired Translation

This analysis of Sri Aurobindo’s translation of a single line of the *Meghadūta* shows the skill, depth and sensitivity displayed even in his relatively early work. More generally, it suggests how far his approach can lead in the direction of rendering aspects of poetry usually considered untranslatable.

The discussion has focused on the handling of metrical rhythm because this is the least understood aspect of poetic translation and it is perhaps here that translators could learn the most from Sri Aurobindo. What has been said relates mainly to the more observable components of rhythm, those which Sri Aurobindo termed “mechanical”, “sensational”, “emotional” and “intellectual”. His rare mastery on these levels has, I hope, been demonstrated as far as could be done by a single example. But his translations are not merely a *tour de force* of technical virtuosity. The mastery they reveal evidently has its origin on a higher plane, and it is from there that it derives its real significance.

The inspired translation becomes a meaningful concept in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s theory and practice of the art. This may well be regarded as his principal contribution. By inspiration we mean neither an unaccountable fluke nor an undisciplined impulse whose indulgence risks leading the translator away from a proper fidelity to the text. On the contrary, it may be plausibly maintained that an inspired poem demands an inspired translation. From this viewpoint, the difference between translating poetry and writing one’s own is that a translator seeks to receive his inspiration from the same source as the original.

Admittedly, this is a good deal easier to say than to do. The key to success may lie in the first and more accessible of the two higher principles Sri Aurobindo detected behind the movement of all authentic poetry. This is that “poetic delight” which in his later writings he calls “the Ananda of creation”. If the translator can relive the aesthetic exaltation which accompanied the creative act, this could be his gateway to the living spirit of the poem.

In the fragment from *The Cloud Messenger*, we have seen how a translation can breathe the exhilaration of an intense response to the poem and express this response with a disciplined freedom in which every word helps to recreate the same image, atmosphere and total effect. Though not a literal rendering, it can arrive at a kind of poetic equivalence which rewards a critical comparison with the original.

To claim that a perfect identity of style has been achieved or could ever be achieved in translating between languages as remote from each other as Sanskrit and English would be unrealistic. Sri Aurobindo himself recognised that his “method of eliciting all the idea-values of the original” had compelled him to sacrifice “one of Kalidasa’s finest characteristics..., his power of expressing by a single simple direct & sufficient word ideas & pictures of the utmost grandeur or shaded complexity”.<sup>10</sup> But it is doubtful whether this characteristic can be emulated with the same effect in another language. Sri Aurobindo felt that even with the utmost literalness it could not be done in English and that only a style suited to the language of the translation can suggest something of the atmosphere of Kalidasa’s poetry.

The example discussed above illustrates how he tried to accomplish this. The compact resonance of the Sanskrit conveys with a superb economy—helped by cultural associations shared by the poet and his audience—all that is brought out more explicitly in the translation. The latter indeed compensates for its comparative diffuseness by unleashing an explosive power of language and rhythm that may seem to introduce an element alien to the spirit of the original. Yet a similar power can be felt in Kalidasa’s line behind its restraint and perfection of form. This is the quality, concealed by the poet’s careful artistry, that led Sri Aurobindo to speak of Kalidasa as having “a greater breath of native power informing and vivifying his execution” than Virgil.<sup>11</sup> If this is lost in translation, there is the risk of giving an impression of merely decorative elegance as the essence of the *Meghadīta*, missing the manner in which this gem of Sanskrit poetry encapsulates the vibrant vitality of the classical age of Indian culture whose supreme spokesman Kalidasa was.

I have tried to show how the very rhythms of Sri Aurobindo’s English rendering of Kalidasa’s line seem to well from the same fount of poetic vision as inspired the Sanskrit. Thus this fortuitously preserved fragment of his lost *Cloud Messenger* not only illustrates the method explained in “On Translating Kalidasa”, but provides a striking instance of Sri Aurobindo’s ability to capture the spirit of a poem in translation.

(Concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

*Notes and References*

1. The unfortunate fate of Sri Aurobindo's rendering of this classic of Sanskrit literature is described in the "Note on the Texts" at the end of the current edition of his *Translations*. The note mentions that Sri Aurobindo translated the entire poem sometime around 1900, then continues: "A decade later, while living in Pondicherry under the surveillance of the British police, he entrusted the translation to a friend, who (according to the received story) put it in a bamboo cylinder and buried it. When the cylinder was unearthed, it was discovered that the translation had been devoured by white ants." (CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 618) The few lines from this translation that Sri Aurobindo happens to have quoted in "On Translating Kalidasa" and two or three other writings from the same period have now been brought together and reproduced in *Translations* (pp. 309-10). They are also available in a recently published book containing Sri Aurobindo's writings on and translations of Kalidasa, *Kalidasa: Essays and Translations* (pp. 323-24).
2. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 255.
3. Verse 60 of the "Purvamegha" in M. R. Kale's edition of the Sanskrit text.
4. *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 309.
5. *Early Cultural Writings*, p. 254.
6. The second syllable is long, although its vowel is short, because it is followed by two consonants.
7. *Early Cultural Writings*, p. 254.
8. The last short *a* becomes long by *sandhi* with the beginning of the next word, *iva* ("like")
9. The metrical substitutions for the normal iambs are a pyrrhic (two short syllables) in the second foot and a spondee (two long syllables) in the fourth foot. A similar quantitative rhythmic technique can be discerned in lines in which, many years later, Sri Aurobindo incorporated the image of the Vamana Avatar in *Savitri* (CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 43):

The divine Dwarf towered to unconquered worlds,  
Earth grew too narrow for his victory.

Here the expansive long syllables evoking by their sound the towering up of the divine Dwarf are enhanced by contrast with rapid sequences of short syllables, as if in a reminiscence of Kalidasa's line. It may be remembered that Sri Aurobindo spoke of trying "to catch something of the Upanishadic and Kalidasian movement" in the rhythm of *Savitri*. (*Letters on "Savitri"* [2000], p. 1)

10. *Early Cultural Writings*, p. 255.
11. *The Renaissance in India with A Defence of Indian Culture*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 358.

***The Great Incurable***

***For all ill things there is a cure; the fire's  
Red spleen cool water shall at once appease,  
And noontide's urgent rays the sunshade tires,  
And there are spells for poison, and disease  
Finds in the leech's careful drugs its ease.  
The raging elephant yet feels the goad,  
And the dull ass and obstinate bullock rule  
Cudgel and stick and force upon their road.  
For one sole plague no cure is found—the fool.***

(Translation by Sri Aurobindo of a piece from Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka*.  
*The Translations*, SABCL, Vol. 8, p. 166)

## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of June 2004)

WE shall now go over the next three chapters of *The Human Cycle*—they are called “Reason and Religion”, “The Suprarational Beauty”, and “The Suprarational Good”.

Reason, we have seen, is an insufficient guide for humanity, in its great endeavour. What that endeavour is has been summarised in the last line of the passage quoted at the end of the previous instalment of this series: “make the soul of man one in fact and nature with this Divine”. Man is an animal like innumerable other animals in so far as his primary preoccupation is to seek for food and seek out a mate. But in addition to this purely animal activity he uses his thinking mind for the better ordering of his individual and group life. The result of this better ordering of life is visible all round us. We have discussed man’s civilisation and culture already and know about his achievements in the intellectual field—in philosophy, science, art, politics and in so many other directions. We shall have to go over his realisation of Truth, Beauty and Good in some detail here. But let us put down again the summit of man’s endeavour in life; it is to arrive at a harmony of his inner and outer perfection and ultimately to discover the divine truth behind earthly existence, to know the divine Person within us and then to shape our life in that image. In the three chapters under consideration Sri Aurobindo discusses how far man’s reason can aid him in his search for Truth, Beauty and Good. It is obvious that the intellect cannot help man to realise what is beyond its reach. It is only the supreme guide who can help him in this search.

If the aim of human endeavour be what we have just stated, then neither the Greek ideal of a harmonious culture governed by the intellect nor the modern ideal of an efficient culture and an economic civilisation controlled by the collective reason of man can be the highest goal of social development. Both these ideals are based on human reason. But the most advanced tendencies of a subjective age bring to us “the greater ideal of a deeply conscious, self-illuminated, self-possessing, self-mastering soul in a pure and perfect mind and body”. Thus a very ancient religious and spiritual ideal opens before us. Now, if the Spirit is our true guide, then there must be a higher range of being with its own superior powers by which alone can man achieve self-fulfilment. The aim of this fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine in him. Otherwise he is bound to slip back into the Typal Stage of society with its four-fold order—the spiritual Brahmin, the dynamic Kshatriya, the economic Vaishya and the faithful Shudra, each standing for a divine quality—and the whole society an entire image of the Godhead. Society can be divided in other ways, but an ideal human society can never be based on the typical principle. The type is never the whole man, it is merely the feature prominent in his nature. Even according to the Indian theory,



typal division does not belong to the age of Truth or Satya; nor does it pertain to Kaliyuga, man's iron age when he is slipping down into instinctive life—it belongs to the two intervening ages, Treta and Dwapara, when he maintains the principle of order as best he can—keeps up a limited perfection, suppressing some elements to perfect others. There is thus the instinctive infra-rational at one end, and the spiritual supra-rational at the other, with the life of intelligent-will in between.

These three powers of being are at play with varying prominence in all our activities. Reason, on the one hand, takes up and enlightens the life of the instinct, and, on the other, looks up towards the life of the spirit. It looks up, but is unable to grasp that life. Its limitations become very apparent when it has to face religious thought. It does not even understand the language in which religion expresses itself. When, therefore, it seeks to interpret religious sentiment the usual result is gross distortion. The intellect adopts one of two attitudes when it confronts religious thought. Either it looks down on the whole thing as superstitious nonsense and barbarous survival, or it seeks gently to explain religion away, admits its value as a moralising force as far as the ignorant masses are concerned, or invents “that strange chimera, a rational religion”. Of the first attitude Sri Aurobindo says that it has played an important part in the history of human thought, but its intolerant negations are an arrogant falsity. Its mistake is like that of a foreigner who thinks everything in an alien land absurd and inferior because these things are not his own or do not conform to his standard. This kind of presumptuous foreigner also judges the civilisation of a country by the dress and superficial manners of its people. Our reason in following this kind of method with regard to the work of religion in human society has generally discredited itself. But its more moderate attitude towards religion has had no greater success. All attempts at setting up impossible things like “scientific religion” and “rational religion” have failed egregiously. The inmost core of religion stripped of all its outer trappings is the search for God. Its aim is to realise the Divine and to lead a divine life on earth. This is clearly outside the domain of reason. There are, however, parts of Yogic discipline which look like scientific experimenting, and these may appear to fall within the scope of rationalism. But even these are outside the realm of mental logic. The knowledge of God is not dependent on rational judgment but on revelation, intuition and inspiration. The love of God is an infinite feeling that does not know any rational limitations. The part that the intellect has to play in the religious field is secondary: that is, to explain as best it can to man's intelligence in the language of the intellect the truth of the Spirit. This work has got to be done and is being done, but it is always unreliable and open to misunderstanding. Reason must be able to say honestly, “I have said what I could say. If you are attracted, you can now seek real knowledge by other means that are outside my province.”

There is no lack of arguing in books on Theology, but that is their weakest part. Intelligence can only classify experiences and give them form. Another thing reason can do with great advantage. There is in religion much that is mere dross coming

from instincts, impulses and crude emotions. It consists of impurity, ignorance, superstition and many doubtful elements. Burning these out would be legitimate work for the intellect. But this also is not our supreme task. Until we get on to a plane higher than the rational we cannot realise the truth of the Spirit. Again and again when true religion has got choked by the ill-weed of blind convention, the intellect has come to its rescue. But man's intellect is a very peculiar faculty. Its zeal is so great and its insight is so defective, that in removing the weeds it pulls out great handfuls of valuable corn. Because of this, rational reform has seldom done religion any good. On the contrary it has often brought in a new set of superstitions in place of the old. Anyhow, it is clear that Reason cannot give man God-realisation, however vigorously it plies the broom against custom and convention. The intellect of man, however, does not stand still; as the Truth descends, it gets more and more light from above.

Religion is a seeking after the spiritual, the supra-rational, and in that sphere, reason may well be an insufficient aid. But in the ordinary field of work, in the ordinary movements of life, in the pursuit of worldly knowledge, one would think that the intellect would be the supreme guide. It is, however, not so. For the intellect always holds a middle place between the animal instincts and vital impulses at the lower end and the suprarational light at the upper end. This is perfectly clear in man's search for Beauty and his search for Good. His aesthetic being finds its most intense expression in creative arts such as poetry, painting, sculpture etc., but if we take beauty in its widest sense it is the object of man's seeking in all his pursuits. In fact, the aim of the perfect being is to make the whole life beautiful. The expression or appreciation of beauty certainly did not begin with the dawning of the intellect. The animal world by its instinct created such beautiful things as have not been equalled by man. The cave-men with a reason only half-developed have left behind such splendid specimens of drawing and carving as astonish us today. But we should know the limitations of reason. Sri Aurobindo says, "Where the greatest and most powerful creation of beauty is accomplished and its appreciation and enjoyment rise to the highest pitch, the rational is always surpassed and left behind." If we realise the precise difference between talent and genius we shall easily see that genius which creates is always supra-rational in its nature, while talent which is skill is always a gift of the intelligence. It is genius alone which can appraise or express the truth of Beauty, and genius does not appear in any age or any country in shoals. So when we hear or speak of an artistic age we mean an age in which artistic talent guided by the intellect has reached a high level. In the work of appraisal reason plays an important part, but even then it is not supreme, because it can analyse and appreciate only the outward aspect of a poem or painting or sculpture, it has not a deep enough insight to look below the surface for the truth of beauty. Both creator and appraiser have to discover in form or colour or sound the expression of the eternal beauty of the supreme Beautiful, otherwise aesthetic seeking will degenerate into a soul-less

mechanical occupation.

We realise now that our search for Truth and our search for Beauty are not two different things and that the highest Truth is the same principle as the highest Beauty. We shall see presently that these two principles, again, are the same as the highest Good. In fact, all active being is a search for the hidden Divinity who is *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*. This fact comes easily home to us in Religion and in Art, because in these two quests, away from the persistent clamour of material demands, free from the sordid necessities of the moment, we have leisure to look for the Real behind the apparent, the Eternal behind the temporal. Hence the immense value of Religion and Music and Poetry and Painting to man. In our practical life, however, we do not so readily discern the universal truth. This is because our attention is wholly absorbed in the passing utilities of our daily existence. But all life, as Sri Aurobindo says, "is only a lavish and manifold opportunity given us to discover, realise, express the Divine". This true truth of our worldly life is most apparent to us in our ethical life. Man's reason has, however, sought to smother ethical life in masses of apparently logical talk—the Master calls them "mere conventions of logic and vamped up syntheses". Luckily, this futile effort has failed for good. It brought forward for a little while a queer system of utilitarian ethics, which has now been fully discredited. There have been other attempts too, like the hedonistic and the sociological systems, which the ethical being has shaken off successfully. We know now that it is a law unto itself and finds its justification in its own nature, which is "a reflection in man of the Divine".

Now all these errors have, each behind its false construction, a side or part of the truth. We cannot therefore declare off-hand that the good can never be utility. According to Sri Aurobindo utility is a fundamental principle of life and therefore the highest Good is also the highest utility; still, we have to remember that Good, not utility, must be the standard of Good. The standard of utility is not fixed, it varies from age to age, country to country, even from individual to individual. Therefore there is only one safe rule for the ethical man—to stick to his principle of good and shape his conduct accordingly. Regarding the hedonistic theory of ethics we can say, likewise, that the Highest Good is the Highest Bliss. It is no use proclaiming aloud that the Good cannot be that which gives pleasure; it is beyond pleasure and pain and independent of both. "The action of the ethical man is not motivated by even an inner pleasure, but by a call of his being, the necessity of an ideal, the figure of an absolute standard, a law of the Divine."

It is urged sometimes that man's social evolution has determined his ethical evolution, that ethics began only in obedience to the demand of his group. This is not true at all, because the standard of morality does not always tally with the social standard. The ethical man is often called upon to reject and resist the social mandate. It is the demand of God within a man which decides the Right, the Good for him. It is not difficult to understand that at the start Nature in man is infra-ethical, as it is at

its summit supra-ethical. It is only when human nature is in between the two that it has a sense of Right and Wrong. The ethical urge arises in the infra-rational stage as in instinct of right, instinct of self-giving in labour, instinct of obedience to an understood law. Man in his earliest stage obeys the law instinctively. It is only when reason has awakened in his mind that he refers questions to it. Reason, intervening, corrects the “crude and often erring misprisions of the ethical instinct”. But this is only a stage in man’s ethical growth. At the summit, his carefully nursed ideas of right and wrong escape his control and rise above his reach. As has been mentioned already, his goal is the absolute, the divine on the supra-rational heights. In fact, ethics is not a calculation of right and wrong, it is an attempt to grow into the divine nature. Transfiguration is its high fulfilment. The quest of Good, the quest of Beauty and the quest of Truth are even in their first instinctive stage an obscure seeking after God. Rising through the intervening dependence on reason to a supra-rational consummation the three quests become one in the Eternal.

*(To be continued)*

C. C. DUTT

*A purely rational human life would be a life baulked and deprived of its most powerful dynamic sources; it would be a substitution of the minister for the sovereign. A purely rational society could not come into being and, if it could be born, either could not live or would sterilise and petrify human existence. The root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational. But this is true that by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of passive, yet sympathetic reflection of the Light that surpasses it. Its limit is reached, its function is finished when it can say to man, “There is a Soul, a Self, a God in the world and in man who works concealed and all is his self-concealing and gradual self-unfolding. His minister I have been, slowly to unseal your eyes, remove the thick integuments of your vision until there is only my own luminous veil between you and him. Remove that and make the soul of man one in fact and nature with this Divine; then you will know yourself, discover the highest and widest law of your being, become the possessors or at least the receivers and instruments of a higher will and knowledge than mine and lay hold at last on the true secret and the whole sense of a human and yet divine living.”*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 123)*

## ON A LIVING CENTENARY

WHEN I went to see him and offer  
This morning my namaskar,  
He asked me: “When are you going to celebrate?”  
I bowed low to give effect  
To an expression of inexpressible joy  
And held the right hand of Nirod-da  
To enjoy his love showering on me  
With a faint smile glowing on the face  
Of a Living Centenary!  
And my heart repeating in the silence  
Of an oyster guarding the pearl  
Of the centenary-celebrations of a crystal  
That received the Love and Touch  
Of the Lord, and thrilled with rasa so much.

Each morning when I see you, smilingly seated,  
Your “living centenary” I celebrate  
Not only at that moment of time  
But throughout the day the hours chime  
The sweetness of that sight  
Of a “lover of cricket” scoring  
A century plus in his own right,  
The scribe of *Savitri*, rare delight!  
Who dared the snowy peaks of Shiva’s abode  
Making a stupendous inroad  
Into that Silence ecstatic  
Calling down a stream romantic  
Of the divine’s playful laughter—  
A game between disciple and Master.

8.4.2004

SATADAL

## MOKSHA

MOKSHA signifies in ordinary parlance the renunciation of the separative ego-consciousness and a dissolution of our being into the highest Brahman. It is an affair of the whole active consciousness leading to a release in the Brahman. Indian culture raised the crude animal life and its self-interest to a noble self-realising human ideal. Its ultimate aim is spiritual liberation and perfection, *mukti*, *moksha*. It is for this purpose that the soul is here and by directing it to a greater nature of divinity and transcendence, one attains *moksha*. Sri Aurobindo, however, asserts that the real object before us is a spiritual release to start with but leading to the divinisation of the whole nature ultimately.

About the experience of *moksha*, Sri Aurobindo writes: “The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin’s Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi.” (SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 62)

In this state there is an inner gladness and happiness, something peaceful and happy at once—it is not an excited movement like the vital outward pleasures, though it can be more ardent and intense. All that the aspirant requires is an earnestness and an “eagerhood” of feelings, psychic impulses as wavebeams on the seabanks, white and wide-ranging on the foam-pathway.

He is bewildered myriadly by oversight and surface tone, enveloping the soul in a fragmentary mood. There is an immensity, a certain *otherness*, an unspeakable solitude of Truth’s abidingness Self-Blissful and Alone.

He marches from day to evening with the glory of his hence-going, entering the portals of God through a golden wave-way to the highest Brahman who is All-Beauty and All-Bliss.

Arjava’s poem *Moksha* is full of these fine images induced by the creative imagination. The poem is given here for the reader’s use.

## MOKSHA

As one who saunters on the seabanks in a wilderness of day  
Is dazzled by the sunshot marge and rippling counterchange  
Of wavebeams and an eagerhood of quivering wings that range—  
Grey on the sky’s rim,—white on the foam-pathway,—

Each man is wildered myriadly by oversight and surface tone  
Engirdling soul with clamour, by this fragmentary mood,  
This patter of Time’s marring steps across the solitude  
Of Truth’s abidingness, Self-Blissful and Alone.

But when eastward-streaming shadows bring the hush of eventide  
 The wave-lapped sun can wield again his glory of hence-going  
 And furnish by his lowlihead vast dreams of heaven-knowing—  
 A golden wave-way to the One where Beauty's archetypes abide.

August 25, 1933

Sri Aurobindo's comment on lines 7 and 8 from a letter dated 2.3.34:

"Illumined mind with an intuitive element and strong overmind touch."

C. SUBBIAN

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## NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

*(Continued from the issue of April 2004)*

### SWORD

STEALTHILY you left a sharp-edged sword  
 In a garden-wind-moistened bird's hoarse clang.  
 Sun's evening Queen, the white-robed Moon  
 Gave it colour in Delight's celestial abode.

Golden drop of fire shed from the star  
 Sky's eye-glance lightning-thirst  
 Poured over that sword's body, its every atom—  
 Time-slaying Bhairava's all-destroying mantra.

Faint from loss of blood, the pale moon  
 In Night's couch spends the hour of her death  
 Smouldering in Destruction's moment that transgressor—  
 That trident-keen sharp knife plunged itself in her breast

Then gradually  
 The knife passed fading into the cremation-temple.

*(To be continued)*

DEBASHISH BANERJI

## PURANA PRAVESHYA

[*Note: Dr. Girindrashekhar Bose (1886-1953) was the pioneer of psychoanalysis in India, founding the Indian Psychoanalytic Society on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1931. Many know of him only as the younger brother of the great Bengali humorist and scholar, Rajashekhar “Parashuram” Basu.*

*Dr. Bose was not just a great psychiatrist who established Lumbini Mental Hospital (it was wound up in 2004 by the government). He was deeply interested in our ancient heritage, particularly the Puranas, and made a thorough study of them. Dr. Bose was convinced that it is possible to construct history from the data given in these ancient texts and wrote several essays on the subject, culminating in an important work, Purana Pravesha (Introduction to the Puranas) that has not received from Indologists the attention it richly deserves.*

*The immediate reason for this translation is Dr. Prema Nandakumar’s superb series on the Puranas serialised in Mother India. If readers find Dr. Bose’s introduction interesting, I may be encouraged to translate the entire Purana Pravesha.*

*It will be inappropriate to end this without referring to a personal link with Dr. Bose. My mother, Smt. Suprobat Bhattacharya (née Chatterjee), educated in Delhi and Lahore, was fascinated by psychology as a subject. Not having a science degree, she could not join the M.Sc. course at Calcutta University. Noticing her eagerness, Dr. Bose started a Certificate course at Applied Psychology in 1944 which she was permitted to join. Having heard much about Dr. Bose’s remarkable qualities from her, I was motivated to hunt out his writings, and managed to get a copy of his fascinating study of our Puranas.*

—Pradip Bhattacharya]

### Introduction to *Purana Pravesha*:

BESIDES the eighteen major Puranas many Upa-Puranas have been written. All Puranas do not belong to the same time. Some are ancient, some are quite recent. In the same Purana there are ancient and recent parts. Among the Puranas in circulation now, *Vishnu* and *Vayu* are the most authentic and ancient according to scholars. The matters dealt with in the Puranas have been enumerated in *Vayu Purana* 4.10 as: description of creation and destruction, accounts of different Manvantaras, and narratives of various royal dynasties and their members. Besides this, accounts of particular incidents, the caste system and stories conducive to spiritual salvation are also found in the Puranas. A particular community of persons called *Suta* were reciters of the Puranas. *Vayu Purana* states, “Ancient pandits had directed that the Suta’s duty is to be acquainted with the generational accounts of Devas, Rishis, Kings of limitless prowess and other noble souls.” (3.31-32) At many places the Suta has been described



as *satyavrata parayana*, “devoted to the vow of truth”.

In olden times Bharatavarsha was divided into different kingdoms. Every king’s court had one Maagadha who was conversant with his royal master’s dynastic account and deeds. Maagadhas were what we know as “chroniclers” today. The Sutas mentioned above used to gather from these Maagadhas the local *itivritta* or ‘history’. Should any Maagadha exaggerate anything about his master or hide some fault of his, the Suta would rectify that. It is because of this that the Sutas were known as *satyavrata parayana*. The Sutas knew the dynastic accounts of all kings. In ancient times kings and sages used to perform rituals of sacrifice. In these *yajnas* notable persons and wise men from many lands used to be invited. The Sutas would arrive at the *yajnas* and each would recite what he had collected. Writing down these stories told by Sutas was the task of the sages. The traditionally collected stories narrated by Sutas and written down by sages in the form of a book came to be known as “Purana”. Puranas have been known from very old times. The sages writing the Puranas have added to them at different times and specified Manvantaras for special events. What constitutes a Manvantara has been discussed in the book. According to the Purana-composing sages, the world’s creation, growth and destruction has occurred repeatedly. Each such revolution has occurred over a very long period of time.

If the five marks of a Purana are examined, there will be no hesitation about considering it as *itivritta*. The Purana writer’s intention is that, filled with chronological accounts of important events, his work should persist till universal dissolution. In order to protect the work from the ravages of time, the Purana writer adopted a novel method. For preserving the *itivritta* he did not take recourse to rock-carvings, copper-plate inscriptions, iron safes, the imperial records department etc. because he knew that political changes and natural disasters demolish all of these. The ancient Purana writer sought out an indestructible shelter for preserving the Purana. He found that man’s religious temperament is permanent. So long as man exists on earth, he will adopt some religion or other. The religious propensity of the general public is founded on logic while the source of religion is spiritual. The sage writing the Purana, instead of putting forward the Puranic accounts plainly, gave his stories a form that the religious bent of mind would accept. Consequently, exaggerated and miraculous elements entered the Purana and it came to be counted as a religious text. Even today, listening to a Purana, reading it, writing it, printing it and gifting it to a Brahmin is considered highly meritorious among the public. Only a specialist historian will take pains to preserve a history written in straightforward fashion. Such historians are rare in society. On the other hand, among the general public there are thousands of persons who are eager to preserve Puranic style *itivritta* or ‘history’ as religious texts. Puranas are still in wide circulation, while many ancient astronomical and other scientific texts have disappeared. The exaggerations of the sage writing the Puranas are indicated by special hints and their actual meaning can be made out easily. To the discriminating person knowing the meaning of the Puranas they are genuine history and he considers

them completely believable accounts of the past. The authenticity of the Puranas has been discussed in the book.

It is not that modern *itivratta* or 'history' contains only accounts of kings and important persons and their families. The description of all types of major natural events is also found in history. The Purana writer, too, in similar fashion has noted many natural events in the Puranas. The Puranas mention that when the Chakshusa Manvantara ended there was a terrible deluge. Reference to this deluge is found in the legends of many nations. In the past, the occurrence of devastating earthquakes was also recorded in the Puranas. In the Puranas many genuine accounts of the past have been captured. If the Puranas are studied with attention, the ancient *itivratta* or 'history' of Bharata will be recovered.

The criticism that the ancient Hindu did not know how to write *itivratta* is completely mistaken and stems from ignorance. The Puranas are a dazzling proof of the excellence of the Hindu's historical sense. New historians in so many cases explain events relying on their own thinking and imagination, whereby there is the possibility of the *itivratta* becoming tainted with prejudice. Moreover, their accounts remain inaccessible to the ordinary man. On the other hand, the Hindu Puranic writer merely records events narrated by Sutas. He does not make any attempt to explain them. Often the Purana writer has recorded contradictory accounts of the same event, but he has not tried to discover the truth by using his own intelligence and imagination. Determining the truth is not the Purana-writer's duty; that is the task of the Purana-explicator. Their duties being distinct, the data of the *itivratta* has always remained accessible to the ordinary people. In this matter the method of the Puranic writer is superior to the modern historian's, as is his way of preserving the Puranas. By depending on the religious inclination of the general public he has evinced extremely penetrating insight. The proof of the success of the method he chose is that the Puranas are prevalent even now whereas no other race in the world has a written history that is so ancient and covers so extended a period of time chronologically. Inferring history from stone inscriptions, graves, stupas etc. is one thing and to preserve written accounts of the past is quite another. Among the ancient races only the Hindu was alert regarding *itivratta*. He had focused on an extremely refined and excellent ideal and achieved success in that ascesis too. His written, extremely ancient *itivratta*, added to over time, is extant even now and attracts respect from the general public. The historical achievement of the Hindu is incomparable in the world.

The proofs of whatever has been stated in the introduction have been discussed in the book. Without examining these proofs none need accept or reject the writer's views. Belief or disbelief without grounds both militate equally against determining the truth.

The subject being new, many new words have had to be used in the book. Most of the words have been taken from the Puranas; the rest are created by the writer. In Sanskrit the word 'purana' has been used to mean 'history'. In Sanskrit the meaning

of 'itihasa' is different. In Bengali 'itihasa' connotes 'history' as used today. In Sanskrit and in Bengali since the word 'itihasa' has different meanings and can confuse the discussion on the Puranas, therefore so long as the true sense of the word 'purana' is not established in Bengali literature, till then a new word is required to connote 'history'. In this book the word 'itivrta' has been used to mean 'history'. 'Iti' means 'that which is past' and 'vrta' means 'description'. The meaning of 'itivrta' being similar to 'itihasa' the latter cannot be used to mean 'history'. 'Itivrta' is a new word and therefore there is no possibility of error in its use to define something.

Repetitions have occurred at places in recounting matters dealt with in this book. For example, the authenticity of the Puranas has been discussed in more than one place. Authenticity can be examined in many ways, therefore the issue of the Puranas' authenticity has come up in different contexts. Further, in the interest of explaining things, repetition has also occurred. It will be clear from the contents where the same topic has been discussed in different places.

GIRINDRASHEKHAR BOSE

(Translated from the Bengali by Pradip Bhattacharya)

*The real source of knowledge is the Lord in the heart; "I am seated in the heart of every man and from me is knowledge," says the Gita; the Scripture is only a verbal form of that inner Veda, of that self-luminous Reality, it is śabdabrahma: the mantra, says the Veda, has risen from the heart, from the secret place where is the seat of the truth, sadanād ṛtasya, guhāyām. That origin is its sanction; but still the infinite Truth is greater than its word. Nor shall you say of any Scripture that it alone is all-sufficient and no other truth can be admitted, as the Vedavadins said of the Veda, nānyad astīti vādinah. This is a saving and liberating word which must be applied to all the Scriptures of the world. Take all the Scriptures that are or have been, Bible and Koran and the books of the Chinese, Veda and Upanishads and Purana and Tantra and Shastra and the Gita itself and the sayings of thinkers and sages, prophets and Avatars, still you shall not say that there is nothing else or that the truth your intellect cannot find there is not true because you cannot find it there. That is the limited thought of the sectarian or the composite thought of the eclectic religionist, not the untrammelled truth-seeking of the free and illumined mind and God-experienced soul. Heard or unheard before, that always is the truth which is seen by the heart of man in its illumined depths or heard within from the Master of all knowledge, the knower of the eternal Veda.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 92-93)

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of June 2004)

## 9. Parikshita

WE owe the *Bhagavata* as we have it now, to King Parikshita. Though much of the matter had come down to Sage Shuka from his father, and a portion of it is to be found in the *Vishnu Purana* where Sage Parashara conveys the Puranic story to Maitreya, the “onlie begetter” of the *Bhagavata* sequence as we know of it today happens to be Parikshita. There was, of course, a Parikshita of the Ikshwaku dynasty who married Sushobhana, the daughter of Aayu, the King of frogs after a strange adventure. This tale is briefly referred to in the *Mahabharata*.

But the *Mahabharata* itself concludes with the advent of King Parikshita of the Kuru dynasty. As detailed early in the *Bhagavata*, Parikshita was revived by Krishna in the womb of Uttara and became the only surviving descendant of the Pandavas. He was originally named Vishnuratha (One saved by Vishnu). It is said that when he was in the womb, the babe saw a thumb-sized divine being clad in yellow silk and glowing ornaments going around him attacking with his mace the missile of Ashvatthama. After his birth, Parikshita retained the memory and kept staring intently at people trying to recognise the glorious personality that had guarded him in the womb.

As Yudhishtira ruled the land, Parikshita grew up under the tutelage of Kripacharya. A time came when Yudhishtira could rule no more as he was repeatedly overcome with self-pity for having been a party to the war that had resulted in a wholesale destruction of innocent people. The passing away of Vidura, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti on one hand and the end of Krishna and his Vrishni clan on the other created much anguish in his heart. Finding Parikshita to be a worthy successor in every way, Yudhishtira crowned him king and led his four brothers and Draupadi on their final journey.

Parikshita was a benevolent ruler. He married Irawati, daughter of his uncle Uttara Kumara, the King of Virata. He was blessed with four sons, the eldest being Janamejaya. Parikshita performed three Ashwamedha sacrifices and was hailed by his subjects as a just king. It pleased him no end to hear of the exploits of the Pandavas and the wonderful life of Krishna. The *Bhagavata* notes here of the many ways the Lord looks after his devotees, paralleling the nine types of devotion to the Lord enumerated by the great Prahlada.

“Parikshita was overcome with devotion to Krishna when he heard of the Lord’s loving solicitude for his devotees, the Pandavas—of how He worked for them as charioteer, secretary, servant, friend, messenger, protector, glorifier and subordinate, and also of how the whole world honoured Him.”

Thus passed the king's days when he happened to come across a one-legged bull (symbolising Dharma) and a weeping cow (Mother Earth) conversing. The cow told the bull that because Krishna had withdrawn from the world, Kali Purusha was taking over fast the areas of Mother Earth. The glory and the good of life were gone with the withdrawal of the Krishna incarnation. Their words awoke Parikshita to the state of creation and he addressed them thus:

“Austerity, purity, fellow-feeling and truth are the four qualities of Dharma, represented by the four feet of your bull-form. Three of your feet have been cut off, O Dharma, by the three forces of Adharma,—austerity by egotism, purity by attachments, and fellow-feeling by blinding passions. O Dharma! Now there remains only one of your feet, namely truth to sustain you. The evil spirit of Kali, flourishing on untruth, is now out to cut off that foot also.”

Parikshita now proceeded to destroy Kali Purusha who had swathed himself in royal garbs. However, he did not kill Kali as the latter surrendered to him. As Kali begged the king for some place to reside, he allowed the spirit to stay in places where people indulged in gambling, drinking intoxicants, debauchery and slaughter. Kali was also allowed gold as his seat, the metal which is the source of all adharma, “of deceit, pride, sexuality, cruelty, and of an additional fifth one, enmity” (*tatonṛtam madam kāmam rajo vairam ca pañcamam*). Peace and prosperity marked Parikshita's reign henceforth.

Parikshita had been a king for twenty years and was probably in his late fifties when he went on a hunt. Finding himself alone and feeling thirsty, he went to the ashram of Sage Shamika and asked for some water. The sage was in meditation and did not respond. As fate would have it, Parikshita mistook the silence for indifference. His eyes fell on a dead snake nearby which he threw around the neck of the sage and went away. When Shamika's son Shringi came to the hermitage and found the desecration, he cursed the perpetrator to die on the seventh day by the snake Takshaka. When Shamika came to know of the curse, he was deeply pained as Parikshita was famous as a just ruler. He sent his disciples immediately to the king to tell him about what had happened.

On returning to his palace, Parikshita was full of remorse. Meanwhile Shamika's disciples conveyed to him the curse of Shringi. Recognising the fury of Shringi's curse, Parikshita readied himself to the inevitable with equanimity. Many famous sages including Parashurama, Medhatithi and Bharadwaja came to him and were received with solemnity and joy. Parikshita saluted them, thanked them for coming and said:

“I am indeed the most fortunate among kings, because I have become the object of the blessings of all of you great men. Men of the royal caste, who have to do many reprehensible acts, are like objects cast off even farther away than the water flowing from the feet of Brahmanas at their ablutions. To me, a sinful man of that type intensely attached to home and its affairs, the great Lord of all has now come in the form of a

Brahmana's curse only to generate renunciation in me; for, when death is near at hand, even a man with great wordly attachments will be filled with fear and become prone to accept an attitude of devotion and renunciation."

The king then assured them that now his mind and heart had turned towards the Lord fully, and his one desire was that it may be so in his future births as well. It so happened that Sage Shuka was wandering in a place nearby as an Avadhuta. Handsome, always smiling, one could see the spiritual glow on his face. Parikshita saluted the sage and spoke to him of how Krishna had helped his ancestors. Now the time had come for him to bow to incorrigible fate.

"Therefore I ask you, O enlightened one, O teacher of teachers, what constitutes the most important duty of a man faced with imminent death? O great one! Tell me what such a person should hear about, repeat, do, remember and worship. Also tell me what he should not do in these respects."

Swami Tapasyananda considers the second Skandha which begins the telling of the *Bhagavata* by Shuka to be very significant and says that it could have been the nucleus of the *Bhagavata* as we have it today. Certainly Shuka's very first words establish the thrust of the entire literature of devotion in our sacred canon. He says that though he was himself established in advaitic bliss, he was transported with joy when he heard his father speak of Krishna's playful doings (*uttamaśloka leelayā*). Parikshita has now seven full days to listen to the same. Shuka calls upon Parikshita to meditate upon the cosmic form of the Lord and seek the company of the devout. In a trice Parikshita detaches himself from all worldly cares and requests Shuka to explain to him the mystery of the One Supreme that manifests as so many incarnations and the entire creation itself. The sage begins with a moving hymn and proceeds to speak about creation and the veiled mystery of avatars and how Vishnu himself instructed Brahma on the subject. The Lord alone was there before creation; after the cycles of creation come to an end, the Lord alone continues to exist.

"What the seeker after Truth has to grasp is that Substance which persists always through all its transformations into its various effects or forms, but suffers no diminution in the process as also when all these effects or forms are eliminated in the causal condition. The Supreme Spirit is that ultimate Substance."

One must remain focussed on this Supreme Being to be detached all the time. The *Bhagavata* has rich descriptions of the Supreme as a cosmic manifestation leading to this wonderful creation which remains an impenetrable mystery. It is astonishing that our ancients have sought to get at the very core of the mystery by analysing and tabulating the various categories which spring to action by the entry of the Lord into them. Sri Aurobindo has subsumed the long descriptions on the subject found in India's ancient teaching and written significant poems that have explained the process of creation and the nature of existence. "The Indwelling Universal" is a sonnet which could be read as a condensation of what Shuka says about creation through several cantos in the second and third Skandhas. There is a directness and simplicity about

the message which illumines the nature of the Atman within us:

I contain the whole world in my soul's embrace:  
 In me Arcturus and Belphegor burn.  
 To whatsoever living form I turn  
 I see my own body with another face.

All eyes that look on me are my sole eyes;  
 The one heart that beats within all breasts is mine.  
 The world's happiness flows through me like wine,  
 Its million sorrows are my agonies.

Yet all its acts are only waves that pass  
 Upon my surface; inly for ever still,  
 Unborn I sit, timeless, intangible:  
 All things are shadows in my tranquil glass.

My vast transcendence holds the cosmic whirl;  
 I am hid in it as in the sea a pearl.<sup>1</sup>

When reading the *Gita*, it is necessary to remember the context in which the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna takes place. It is a battle ground with the Pandava and Kaurava forces arrayed against each other. During this tense moment in time, death stares at one with a steady gaze. No, not a single death either. It could be that thousands would die in the days to come. The teachings of the *Gita* are best understood if we remember the Kurukshetra, the battle ground. The outer Kurukshetra also signifies the Kurukshetra within us, as we constantly battle against evil to gain the victory of truth.

In the same manner, when reading the *Bhagavata* the scene that should remain with us as in a diorama is King Parikshita for whom the clock is ticking away, listening to Sage Shuka. How are we different from Parikshita? Takshaka's bite is perhaps just a second away! Thus, we too become Parikshitas in need of the soul-elevating message that would teach us of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. These again, are the Lord. That remains the final truth. Such is the lesson of the Purana. For the nonce, it is mesmerising, as when we hear Brahma hymning the glory of the Lord:

“This form of Thine, an expression of Consciousness-Bliss devoid of every trace of the darkness of ignorance, has been assumed by Thee for the blessing of Thy devotees. This, Thy original Descent (Avatara), is the source of several others, of which I, sprung from Thy navel-lotus, am one. O Supreme Being! I find nothing higher than this form of Thine, which is constituted of pure Bliss, which is changeless, and which is of unobstructed brilliance. Thou art the one existence and the creator of

all—its instrumental cause and its material cause constituted of elements, senses, and other cosmic categories. And yet Thou art the Pure Spirit in whom the world-manifestation makes no change.”

Fascinating, yes. But we are in the twenty-first century, still dizzy after one hundred years of terrifying, terrific scientific and technological advances and regressions, and growing dizzier still in a world speeding to chaos because of global terrorism. The mind wanders in search of a meaning amid all this meaningless killing and mangling of precious life. Neither the helpless reaction of Arjuna faced with a wholesale killer-war nor the heroic spirit of Parikshita waiting calmly for death adequately represent our condition, though both the contexts do yield answers to many of our questions regarding existence. Probably that is why Sri Aurobindo chose to give us yet another image to add to our Puranic lore. We have Queen Malawi asking Sage Narada about the meaning of existence in Sri Aurobindo’s epic, *Savitri*. Narada instructing the Queen reveals to us that there is a place for the Puranas in our century. Yes, they do have a very important task, yielding images, commentaries.

Parikshita asks the sage Shuka what one should do when faced with death. The Queen’s query, however, seeks a meaning for the presence of death. Sage Shuka speaks to Parikshita of the incarnations the Supreme takes to guard the good and destroy the evil. Sage Narada speaks to the Queen of how the avatars are hindered in their job of destroying evil by the humans whom they come to save. The Puranic images have thus a very important place in the adhyatmic discourse of this century. In a way Sri Aurobindo’s approach could be a kind of democratising of what had been essentially an elitist discourse. Though like Parikshita and Shuka we have the royal Malawi and Narada, Sri Aurobindo suggests the change in a subtle manner:

Awhile she fell to the level of human mind,  
A field of mortal grief and Nature’s law  
She shared, she bore the common lot of men  
And felt what common hearts endure in Time.  
Voicing earth’s question to the inscrutable power  
The queen now turned to the still immobile seer;  
Assailed by the discontent in Nature’s depths,  
Partner in the agony of dumb driven things  
And all the misery, all the ignorant cry,  
Passionate like sorrow questioning heaven she spoke.<sup>2</sup>

Her questions directed to Rishi Narada are not there in the original upakhyaana by Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*. Much of the matter in “The Book of Fate” is Sri Aurobindo’s insertion to give a new turn to the millennia-old discourse on the mystery of grief, pain and death. Must we accept what happens as the logical web of a fate incorrigible? Parikshita accepts his fate even as Arjuna had accepted Krishna’s advice.



They do so because they are told to do so. Sri Aurobindo seeks a meaning behind the anguish of Arjuna, the resignation of Parikshita, the sorrow of a mother's heart. Narada's answer is a welcome help to understand what appears inscrutable. All this creation is that of the Supreme, and the creation includes darkness, pain and death too, so how can we deny the Supreme's presence anywhere?

O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,  
 Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.  
 It illumines a world born from the Inconscience,  
 But hides the Immortal's meaning in the world.  
 Thy mind's light hides from thee the Eternal's thought,  
 Thy heart's hopes hide from thee the Eternal's will,  
 Earth's joys shut from thee the Immortal's bliss.<sup>3</sup>

Pain is used by the Supreme to turn man towards God and make him aspire for a higher life. The Parikshita image helps us draw close to this evocation of the Supreme as a sculptor through the various incarnational happenings in the *Bhagavata*. The tales in the Purana are not in vain. Each one has a lesson and everywhere the Immortal's bliss immerses us in the life divine. And all the time we also watch the expressive and bliss-laden face of King Parikshita listening to the devotional discourse by Shuka. How can we be caught again in the net of ignorance if we give our heart and soul to these significant occurrences in time and out of time?

The keen questionings of Parikshita throughout the Purana are meant to represent the reactions of a perfect, gentle, realised soul. He is literally the questing soul caught in the limitations of a brief human life, the enworlded spirit who would like to gain as much knowledge of existence as he can within the allotted time-span. The seven days given to Parikshita symbolise the brief span of human life in the vast stretch of Time that has neither beginning nor end. In the second Skandha, in particular, we have Parikshita unleashing a string of twenty questions to his mentor. The main thrust of his questions is the assertion by the ancients that there is no difference between the creator and the created.

“He, the Supreme Being, who is the Lord of Maya and the indweller within all beings as also the source from which all creation, sustentation and dissolution take place—in what form does He remain when He dissociates Himself from His Atma-maya (inherent creative power)? We have heard it stated in two contradictory ways—that the worlds and their protectors are formed of His limbs and also that the worlds and their protectors constitute His limbs. How are these contradictions reconciled?”

Parikshita's thirst for knowledge is unquenchable, as indeed is that of man, though his days are numbered from the day of his birth. Parikshita is now fasting and he says that he feels quite fine and would like to know all about creation and the many avatars taken by the Lord to sustain this creation and set it on the proper

course. Above all, he would love to hear of Krishna's manifestation and ministry.

"I am an aspirant after Truth. O great one! Tell me about the doings of Hari of wonderful prowess, about His world-sanctifying saga, so that I may have my mind absorbed in Krishna the soul of all beings. Absolutely detached from all other objects and concentrated on Him and Him alone, may I pass away in that state of mind... Through the portal of the ears He enters the heart-lotus of His devotee who hears about His excellences, and when He so enters, He purifies all the impurities of the heart, as the autumn season clarifies the turbid waters of the rivers."

This Krishna is the Anandamaya Purusha and it is to Krishna that the soul turns in its final movement, wearied by philosophy and disquisition. We have plenty of all that in the *Bhagavata* but it is devotion tuned to Ananda that holds us in thrall in the Purana. Is this nothing more than mere emotionalism? Not quite, says Sri Aurobindo who has given a very high place for devotion in his integral yoga. The type of bhakti exemplified by Parikshita is all calm, a steady drinking in of the honeyed tales of the Divine to sustain Parikshita even as he is fasting in the physical. There is nothing desecratory or cacophonous in this emotion which works silently deep within one's heart and achieves a transformation. Sri Aurobindo even says: "I have no objection at all to the worship of Krishna or the Vaishnava form of devotion, nor is there any incompatibility between Vaishnava Bhakti and my supramental yoga."<sup>4</sup> *The Synthesis of Yoga* deals with 'the yoga of divine love' in detail and one constantly relates to the image of Parikshita when reading the relevant chapters. With very few days left, why must he waste them on "the saw-dust dryness of mere knowledge"? He is the *jijñāsu* of the *Gita* underlined by Sri Aurobindo:

"The Gita distinguishes between three initial kinds of Bhakti, that which seeks refuge in the Divine from the sorrows of the world, *ārta*, that which, desiring, approaches the Divine as the giver of its good, *arthārthī*, and that which attracted by what it already loves, but does not yet know, yearns to know this divine Unknown, *jijñāsu*; but it gives the palm to the Bhakti that knows."<sup>5</sup>

For, this path assures us that the path of devotion brings to us a Personality who inter-relates with human beings easily. Perialwar could see the Divine as a babe in the cradle, a butter-thief, a flute-player, a prankster. Adoration offered by the human to the Divine is the very basis of this yoga. Parikshita's adoration through "hearing" (*śravaṇa*) is a role model for those who choose this yoga. He has withdrawn from all worldly attachments, he has consecrated his thoughts to the Divine, his heart and soul have turned "from earthly objects to the spiritual source of all beauty and delight". This Delight of the Divine is for the sake of the Divine and not for any gain of Parikshita. Tremblingly poised on the brink and waiting for Takshaka's bite, Parikshita loves to hear of Krishna only because such hearing would assure him that Krishna is everything for him.

So it transpires that reading the *Bhagavata* is partaking in the Delight of Existence. The Anandamaya consciousness becomes second nature to us, a mystery

unsolvable. Parikshita had been searching for the Divine Being that had guarded him in the womb. His search ends when Shuka concludes his recital with references to the immortality of the Atman. He assures Shuka that he had attained the Brahmic state of Bliss beyond all fear (*brahma nirvāṇam abhayam*) through the sage's teaching. The reign of ignorance has gone along with the fear of Takshaka's bite and other terrors of death. As he sat facing the northern direction on the banks of the Ganga, he was bitten by Takshaka. The poison reduced the Rajarishi to ashes.

Parikshita's is a holy story. To him we owe the *Bhagavata*. With him as a fellow-pilgrim we shall continue to hear the tales of the Lord caught by the luminous net of the *Bhagavata*:

We will tell the whole world of His ways and his cunning;  
 He has rapture of torture and passion and pain;  
 He delights in our sorrow and drives us to weeping,  
 Then lures with His joy and His beauty again.<sup>6</sup>

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

#### References

1. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 131.
2. *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 437.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 442-43.
4. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 794.
5. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 21, p. 526.
6. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 40.

*...human life was in ancient Indian thought no vile and unworthy existence; it is the greatest thing known to us, it is desired, the Purana boldly says, even by the gods in heaven. The deepening and raising of the richest or the most potent energies of our minds, our hearts, our life-power, our bodies are all means by which the spirit can proceed to self-discovery and the return to its own infinite freedom and power. For when mind and heart and reason heighten to their greatest lights and powers, they bring embodied life to the point where it can open to a still greater light and power beyond them; the individual mind widens into a vast universal consciousness and lifts towards a high spiritual transcendence. These are at least no sterilising and depressing ideas; they exalt the life of man and make something like godhead its logical outcome.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 156)

## IS RELIGION UNDER THREAT?

THE world is in a serious state of turmoil. Conflicts manifest themselves at all levels and in all the domains. They have engulfed everyone.

First there is the political conflict. There is not a single country that is not plagued by insurmountable problems. Then there are conflicts of interests between the countries on the economic level: the growing power of China and India in the economic sphere which is forcing America to place hurdles in the way of free trade; the battle between South Korea and Japan for the Asian market; the coming together of the European countries to check the increasing power of the United States. And then there are the armed conflicts: take India and Pakistan—a conflict which has spanned almost 57 years; consider Israel and Palestine—a fight in the holy land; look at the military action in the Arab world; the confrontation between North and South Korea; the list could go on.

And indeed, there are problems and conflicts in people's lives. Over the years, countries and people have begun to reconcile themselves to the fact that there may not be any solution to their problems. And hence, the level of anxiety is constantly on the increase.

Recently, I was in New York, paying a visit to my niece at her school. While waiting for her to come from her class, I struck up a conversation with a young student in the corridor. I think he was about 15 years old.

A certain observation that he made came to me like a shock and it set me thinking. In a certain context of our discussion, he remarked, "Yes, I do believe in principles, but I do not have any!"

I think I understand young George; in a way he is right: he does not know where to get his principles. As young children, our parents and teachers are our role models. As we grow up, it could be the pujari in the temple or the priest in the church or the head of the mosque. As we enter our working life, our heroes are the corporate CEO, the successful bureaucrat or the politician. At another level, for some of the young minds, it could be a sportsperson, a media star, or an entertainer who become the idol or icon.

Today, people from all walks of life are facing disappointments. I have just been halfway round the globe,—Japan, the U.S., Europe, the Carribean. All the icons are falling apart. Priests have been charged with misbehaviour; senior officials of successful companies have been put behind bars for financial manipulations and scams; as for politics, it has become the domain of lowest credibility; and even sportspersons have been accused of various irregularities. The culmination of the prevalent state of affairs in the world was, of course, the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. This has shaken the people of the U.S. beyond imagination.

A strange phenomenon, a fall-out of this calamity, was that it brought families together. They are beginning to question the current value system of their society,

and becoming more aware of the uncertainty in their lives. It is a fact of history that when a great calamity strikes, there is always a change that follows, a seeking for something more stable, more meaningful. One can see the beginning of powerful signs of change.

One such trend is the practice of meditation. Awareness is spreading very rapidly around the world.

In Tokyo, it was a wonderful sight to watch men in grey suits, seated in a park at lunchtime—in meditation. At six in the morning, when I drew the curtains of my room in Ghanzong, a city in southern China, and looked out I saw many people walking towards a small hill in the distance. I called the telephone operator requesting her to explain what was happening. “Oh!” she said, “They are going to the hill to meditate.” “Is there some festival today?” I asked her. “No, they just do it every day.” Classes are held teaching people how to meditate. What is surprising is that persons of all ages and all professions are meditating. Even corporate offices are creating spaces for people to meditate and be with themselves. I think that people are beginning to realise that they need to depend more deeply on themselves, that they need to seek silence and peace. The outward religious rituals and symbols still persist—though more out of habit than anything else. These, however, are being questioned: terrorism in the name of religion, the disruption of a country on the basis of historical contentions, the killing of innocent people over the years, the clashes over the ownership of a holy city,—here again the list seems endless. Yet it is beginning to dawn on most people that that they should be looking within, that they have to become independent of religious bodies and seek God in their own way. They realise that they do not need to be preached to anymore, that they can read and seek in their own way. This has already led to hundreds of religious and self-fulfilment books being published in every language of the world.

The growing tendency to seek God within themselves will help them to set right their own standards of ethics and morality, it will give clarity to the blurred differentiation between right and wrong. I think we can begin to see the glow of light at the end of the tunnel. It is obvious that spirituality is beginning to replace religion. This will liberate man from the old dogmas and beliefs, and reduce the unwarranted clashes and lead to a life of greater peace and general harmony.

However, as is obvious also, this effort is not enough. Just meditating for a few minutes or even a few hours is not going to solve problems. The problems will not only continue to be with us, but with time they are likely to grow bigger and more formidable. At the core of it all is man’s unwillingness to change himself. He refuses to live in harmony with his fellow-beings and with Nature. He is unable to see the path of light in spite of the fact that avatars have descended pointing out the various routes that lead to the goal—that of reaching divinity. Thousands are Buddhists, millions are Christians, and millions are Hindus,—and yet neither the teachings nor the inner seekings have had an impact on external behaviour.

Sri Aurobindo has come to reveal an entirely new path, one which takes into account every single teaching and wisdom-lore of the past, but which leads to a firmer, more definite and more universal solution to all possible problems: the transformation of man into a superior being, what he called, "the supramental being".

Sri Aurobindo has beautifully articulated the movement of this change, its direction and its steps in several of his books and through hundreds of letters he wrote to his disciples on this subject. The future that he had foreseen many years ago is beginning to unfold now. It may take time to fully manifest itself, but the movement has begun. I believe it will get more and more powerful as men become surrounded by and marooned in frustrations and a growing sense of helplessness, and from the depth of their being cry out for divine intervention.

RAM SEHGAL

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## A SPARK OF ETERNITY

UNDER the welkin vast I sat  
 Silence pervaded all around  
 Calm and quiet was the mind  
 Engulfed in peace... tranquillity...

In the depths of the heart, in rhythmic beat  
 Throbbled and danced eternity...  
 At Nature's beauteous art I gazed  
 And rippling thoughts in gaiety leaped.

A fragrant flower-garland did I weave  
 Dewdrop-drenched my soul in delight  
 Felt fathomless silence in showers pour  
 Engulfing me in love divine.

A spark of eternity in a momentous hour  
 Changed my body and mind and heart  
 Drenched was I in that nectarous shower  
 Divine Love clasped me, never to part...

SUNITI

## INDIA AND AMERICA

[*Note: the following essay was first published in Triveni, a literary and cultural quarterly edited by Prof. Chalapati Rao.*]

I AM an American doctor, a psychiatrist by profession, and have long been an admirer of India and of things Indian. I was recently discussing the relevance of Indian spiritual thought to Western psychology with some doctors at Harvard, where I work, and was not surprised to find that there are still a one or two who believe there could be nothing more irrelevant to our field than a “bunch of superstitions”. A century ago such comments might have been cause for a diatribe, but today all I could do was chuckle. Alas, the poor chap who said that has no idea that the tide of history flows against him, and that sooner or later—and probably sooner rather than later—he will be inundated in a flood of Indian thought and culture that will change the entire landscape of Western culture.

The portents of the coming rapprochement between East and West are all around us. In America, Indian spirituality has been permeating the popular culture ever since Henry David Thoreau read the first translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* and shared them with his friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson. That seminal event led to the genesis of Transcendentalism, the first genuinely American philosophical movement, and ever since then America has been slowly, and now rapidly, imbibing the spirit of India. She opened first to India’s great ideas via Vivekananda and the string of gurus high and low who have followed him to these shores, and then in the 1960s to India’s music via the influence of the Beatles and George Harrison’s association with Ravi Shankar. Today, America is importing India’s mathematical and engineering talent via the information technology industry, and tomorrow she may open to India’s film industry. And of course America is fascinated with Indian cuisine and is absorbing an ever-swelling number of Indian immigrants into her cultural melting pot. Call their children ABCDs if you will, but they shall wield their transfiguring influence on America just as every wave of immigrants has before them, though perhaps with greater power and depth than have others because of the other side of the equation: India.

Today, when one looks from the West towards India, one sees a tremendous nation on the rise. Put aside for now the Pakistan-India conflict and Bush’s designs on Iraq; these are conflicts of the moment (alas, perhaps a very long moment) that must with time right themselves. The big picture is that India is the oldest and most complex continuous culture on earth, and she is but a scant 55 years into her current reincarnation as a modern democratic state, and that after nearly a millennium of foreign invasion, exploitation, and domination. Naturally India will have a sea of internal and external problems to surmount in order to gain the position of influence and power in the world she rightly deserves, and shall have. If we take the example

of America as a rough model, it may well take a century or more for modern India to find her way. Certainly the evolution could happen more quickly, and one hopes it does, but as we say in the medical business, experience teaches us to hope for the best but prepare for the worst. By the very virtue of her largeness and complexity, India has a deeper task to accomplish than other nations, and so the forces of darkness that dog human progress at every step may well put up their stiffest resistance in India, precisely because she has such a wealth of spiritual and cultural power to share with humanity.

Sri Aurobindo, one of India's great modern rishis, says that every nation is not just a physical mass of people with certain political and socio-cultural bonds, but is more importantly a soul, a living being, a force of the Divine that has come to advance the evolution of consciousness by bringing its gifts to earth. Every culture has a purpose and mission, be it explicit or as yet veiled, and in the case of India and America these are clear. Each of our countries has a well-articulated mantra, a summary statement that captures the essence of our people's aspiration and sets a purpose for our tenure on earth. The American mantra is stated in the rhapsodic opening lines of her Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This is, admittedly, a high task and Americans, being human, have often gone about this mission quite poorly. We had a civil war—one of the bloodiest and most vicious conflicts in the entire cruel history of warfare—to establish that “men” means men of *any* race or colour. It then took us another full century after the abolition of slavery to create legislation to ensure equal rights to all Americans, and to begin to acknowledge that “men” means really “human beings”, including women. We are still not a society of equal opportunity, though perhaps we are doing a little better in this regard than prior civilisations, and we have yet to clarify for ourselves what exactly “liberty” and the “pursuit of happiness” mean. So far, we have tried to achieve these freedoms of the individual in a rather simplistic, external, and materialistic fashion; the widespread sense of alienation in American culture today is proof that this experiment is failing, and eventually the pain will become acute enough to make us try another route.

My hope is that we shall try next a more spiritual path to liberty and happiness, shift our considerable energies from expressing the mental and vital ego, to freely expressing the soul, which is the true basis of individuality. If America does this, she will renew her mission on earth and again offer something new and beautiful to humanity; if not, she will go the way of Rome and sink under the weight of her own decadence. This is, I believe, the secret meaning for America behind the terrorist



attacks of last September 11, and the ongoing scandals in the Catholic church and the business sector (Enron, Worldcom). America speaks of leadership in the world, but if all she has to offer is an amoral capitalism and liberty to indulge the lower impulses, she will fade and fail, because she will have betrayed her own mantra by ignoring the rights of the poor and the weak.

India also has a mantra; indeed, she has many. Yet of all her many illumined statements, perhaps none voices the essence of her aspiration more succinctly than the famous lines from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (I. 3. 28):

From the non-being [lead us] to true being,  
From the darkness to the Light,  
From death to Immortality.

This ancient dictum of the rishis is an even higher goal than that voiced in the American mantra. Indeed, it is the highest goal that human beings have ever conceived—to know and be one with the Divine in all worlds and on all planes of existence. Accordingly, therefore, the great soul of India has been patiently labouring away at her cosmic task since the dawn of history, and still but a few recognise the true and vast aim of the ancient mother. Her obstacles are plethora, her setbacks endless, her fruits seemingly the very opposite of that to which she aspires. It is only too easy for the foreigner to set foot in India today and be impressed—or rather overwhelmed—by a spectacle of poverty, overpopulation, squalor, disorder, religious conflict, and epidemic political corruption, the magnitude and lethargy of which are stunning.

However, to mistake this mass of outer problems for the inner soul of India would be akin to reducing America to slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, smog, handguns, pornography, Yankee imperialism, colossal bad taste in art and thought—and then package all that in a McDonald's value meal and, oh yes, supersize it with a gallon of Coke and drive it home in an SUV. America is no more her failings than is India hers. Rather, each nation-soul has set before her a labour to do in the world, and the problems of each are simultaneously resistances against the transformation of consciousness proposed, and challenges necessary to point out defects in the work and lead eventually to a perfect perfection. To the degree that America has succeeded in resolving some of her most egregious problems internally, she has been able to radiate the gains of her sadhana externally and offered, at least in moments and to some, a ray of hope and the promise of a better life. Likewise, in the proportion and measure to which India looks inward and puts her own mantra into daily practice in all her affairs, she will be able to radiate that wisdom, grace, beauty and power in the world around her.

In the last century, Sri Aurobindo came to tell India and the world that this monumental spiritual work can be done, and that the key to accomplishing it lies in

the ancient method of Indian yoga. Only, this yoga must not be taken up along the old lines and outer methods, but cast along new lines and new methods suited to the evolving spirit in humanity. Like all yogas, it must be based upon a turning inward and an aspiration to know, feel, and be one with the Divine, but it must proceed from there to embrace all life. It must pour the splendours of the Spirit into the world, or as Sri Aurobindo says so handsomely, “to make of earthly life the life Divine”. This is the extraordinary goal that the soul of India sets for herself and, by example, for the world. It is a goal of which most Indians are likely not conscious, no more than the average American grasps inwardly what is the purpose of the United States’ existence, but that is the goal nevertheless.

When I was in Calcutta last year, I was looking at a map of India and it struck me that the general shape of India resembles that of a giant cardiac silhouette, as one sees when looking at a chest X-ray. This is a rather unpoetic image, I know—and here my training as a doctor betrays itself—but to me it seemed apt and suggestive. For India is indeed the spiritual heart of the world, the great bellows of God that tirelessly pumps the lifeblood of the human aspiration. I suppose, to extend the metaphor, one would have to say that India has had a few myocardial infarctions in her long life, and has suffered centuries of heart failure, but let us also recall that the wonders of science are great, and the wonders of God even greater. India can be reborn. If the last two centuries have been, in a general sense, the story of America’s rise to world-prominence as a leader of freedom and democracy, the next few centuries can be the story of India’s renaissance. I shall not be a hypocrite and begrudge India her claims to material wealth and military power—she has as much right to those as America or anyone else—but I do pray that she remember her mantra and her mission. For the soul of India alone can give these supreme spiritual boons to humanity, and we shall all be the lesser if she does not.

In closing, I wish India a very happy birthday at the dawn of this new millennium. I think that if India is true to her mantra, she will show America how to be truer to hers, and India will then find in America a faithful companion, a younger sister full of enthusiasm, hope, creative dreams, and enormous vitality. If we collaborate, we may be able not just to pursue happiness, but actually to catch it.

Boston, Massachusetts  
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MICHAEL MIOVIC

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## BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

*(Continued from the issue of June 2004)*

THE Alipore Bomb Case came to an end. I was still waiting for the call to serve the Motherland. But now there did not seem to be much hope. Meanwhile, I had completed my studies and taken up a job as a schoolmaster in Jadupur Board School. After working there for some seven months I resigned due to a difference of opinion with the school secretary.

A significant event of this time was the appearance of Halley's Comet in 1910. On or around May 5, I saw the comet for the first time, although it had already been spotted by the Kodaikanal observatory on April 26. It was about 4 o'clock in the morning when, in the eastern sky close to the planet Venus I saw this amazing spectacle. It was very bright and long like the tail of a white horse. There was a bright glow at one end. The next night I saw that it had grown bigger and was farther up from the horizon. After that, night after night, it grew in size till, within a month its huge and awe-inspiring body covered half the sky. There was a general belief that a comet was an ill omen. Perhaps this belief was not altogether baseless. On May 6, 1910, King Edward VII died and on September 13 of the same year we lost our beloved poet, Rajani Kanto Sen. On the other hand, the astronomers who had calculated that the tail of the comet would brush against the earth causing much destruction had to eat their words.

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July, 1914, saw the beginning of World War I. The Indian revolutionaries were quick to take advantage of the preoccupation of the British with the War. The secret societies of Punjab, North India and Bengal became very active and began to harass the Indian government by carrying out assassinations and looting the government revenue offices.

Around this time, an intimate friend of ours, Gopesh Chandra Roy, paid me a surprise visit. While talking of this and that, suddenly he said, "I hear that you had played an active role during the Swadeshi movement."

I laughed. "Who told you? I had merely formed groups and roamed about the streets singing patriotic songs. And, oh yes, during the devastating flood in the river Damodar in 1913, a friend and I had gone around singing and begging for food, clothes and money to send to the people affected by the flood. We did collect quite a bit of money, by the way, because of my God-given gift of a strong and tuneful voice. If you want to call it working for the Swadeshi movement, you are welcome."

"Was that all?" said Gopesh Chandra. "You didn't do anything else? But I heard that when Khudiram, Kanai Dutta and Satyen Bose were hanged, you'd mourned their death by fasting."

“That I’d done. But it was only a gesture. How can that be called working for the Motherland?”

“But that gesture meant that you were ready to work for the country. I am curious to know who prepared you. If you don’t mind, tell me who did it.”

Had I not known Gopesh Chandra, I would have thought him to be a police spy. But he was a close friend. I knew him well. But strangely, so far we had never had this kind of discussion. I told him everything. Beginning with my interest in the *Yugantar* and the *Dharma* to my talk with Anukulbabu and the vows that he had made me take. He had said that when the call came I would have to obey it wholeheartedly. But alas! the call never came.

Gopesh Chandra smiled and said, “If the call comes now, will you answer it?”

I studied his face. “From where will it come? Who will call? You?”

Smilingly he answered, “How much do you know of me? But, by and by, you will learn everything. For the moment I shall only ask you to join our Anushilan Samiti (Preparatory Group). We would like you to do some work for us.”

I saw him in a new light. I asked him, “What do you want me to do?”

“You live all alone. From time to time some of our boys will come to you. You will have to give them shelter for a few days. Also, be on the lookout for some capable boys. Tap the local school. Later, introduce them to me.”

I promised to work for their group. Gopeshbabu went away, leaving me in a state of high expectation.

After that day, at intervals, one or two young men came to me. According to my instructions I did not ask them who they were but accepted whatever name they gave themselves. I introduced them to my widowed aunt as my classmates from Jangipore. They were all very pleasant, well-behaved, friendly boys who stayed for a day or two then went their way.

One day, a young man came. He was about my age or may be a little younger. He was of small build, with a very intelligent face. He said that he would have to stay in our village for some time but not with me, for that would rouse the curiosity of the local people. This posed a problem. How to make the long stay of a stranger in a small village look legitimate? A little racking of the brain produced the solution.

One of the young students whom I had cultivated was Nonigopal Sarkar, about fourteen years of age, who lived in Bajitpur, a couple of miles from our village. I met Nonigopal, explained the situation to him, and told him to convince his father that he was not doing quite well in his studies and so needed some coaching from a private tutor. “Tell your father that a young man has come here looking for a job. He is very well-educated and is ready to teach all the children in your house in return for food and a place to stay—of course until he finds a suitable situation.”

The plan worked. Nonigopal’s father was a well-to-do trader in brass utensils and Noni was the apple of his eye. The new tutor was given a room in their house and had his meals with the family.

Soon there was another assignment. The revolutionary group used to publish and distribute clandestinely two broadsheets—the *Swadhin Bharat* (Free India) in Bengali and the *Liberty* in English. One day Gopeshbabu gave me a bundle of the *Liberty* and told me to distribute the papers in a suitable area. What was meant by distribute was to paste them on the walls in some public place. I contacted another student, Sukumar Mukherjee, even younger than Nonigopal but very clever and courageous. I explained to him what had to be done. He jumped at it.

Sukumar's house was in the village of Murarai in Birbhum district. Here he lived, while his uncle lived in the village of Daharpur. One day on the pretext of going to Murarai, he took a bundle of the *Liberty* and a tin of paste and brush and set out for the district town of Siuri. Early next morning the inhabitants of Siuri read the broadsheets of the *Liberty* pasted on the walls all over the town. There was much hullabaloo. The magistrate ordered the police to find the culprits. But while the police were frantically looking for them in Siuri, Sukumar was sitting with me in far away Nimita, recounting the story of how he had pasted all the copies of the *Liberty* without anybody's knowledge.

Some of the other boys whom I had roped in might not have been academically bright, but they had other wonderful qualities such as courage, selflessness and abundant practical and common sense. One such boy was Chandi who, God alone knows from where and how, got me a revolver. Another boy, Shashibhusan Maiti, brought an old pistol. Shashi lived in the house of the zamindar of Jangipore. I still do not know if the weapon had been purloined from that house. It goes without saying that these weapons were of utmost value to the revolutionaries.

For the moment I kept these guns in my house because I knew that I was above suspicion. The local sub-inspector, Mr. Prabhat Chandra Dutta was my friend and at his request, I had sung quite a few times in the festivities organised by the police department. Why only the policemen, I had even entertained the district magistrate with my songs, both comic and serious, when on a tour he had come to Nimita. How could they even dream that I belonged to the revolutionary group?

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My cousin Bhagabaticharan passed his matriculation and went for further studies to Behrampore. My widowed aunt, now being all alone, came to live with me. She was determined to put an end to my bachelorhood. Among her many arguments was a somewhat rational one, that she was getting too old to look after me. But always I managed to fend her off. That evening too, while she was assailing me with some new reasons why I ought to get married, we were interrupted by the unexpected arrival of a stranger carrying a steel trunk. He smiled from ear to ear and greeted me with the words, "Look, brother, I've come," as though we had been corresponding for some time and he could not deny me the pleasure of his company. I too welcomed

him and embraced him as on cue. In the privacy of my bedroom, I questioned him and learnt the reason for his visit. He said, "This steel trunk has to be taken to Rampurhat Station. It is of utmost importance and so you'll have to do the job yourself. There, a young man, whom you don't know but who knows you, will take it from you." He stowed the trunk under the bed.

Early next morning my aunt entered the room and started sweeping. Suddenly she exclaimed, "What have you got in this trunk, my child? It's so heavy. I can't move it." The newcomer jumped out of the bed exclaiming something to himself. Then he smiled sweetly and said, "I'm a mechanic, Aunty. I repair machines. All my tools are in that box. That's why it is so heavy."

That evening we boarded the train to Howrah. While he went on to Calcutta, I got down on the way at the Azimgunj Station. It was ten o'clock on a bitterly cold winter night. The train to my destination would leave only at five o'clock the next morning. I had no bedding, only a woollen shawl which was fighting a losing battle to keep me warm. If I wanted to stay alive I had to find a shelter immediately. The Second Class Waiting Room was open. I peeped in and found it empty. Although I had only a Third Class ticket, I mustered courage and went in. There was a long bench. I lay down on it, keeping the trunk near my head and covering myself as well as the trunk fully with my shawl. I must have fallen asleep. Suddenly I felt as though my head was being lifted up together with the bench. Then the bench came crashing down. I jumped up and saw an Englishman in a black uniform—a railway official. As our eyes met he demanded to see my ticket. Very diffidently I produced my Third Class ticket. On seeing that lowly number, he started screaming, "Get out! Get out!" and accompanied each exclamation with a booted kick. He kept it up until he had rid the sacred precinct of my foul presence.

Sitting in the open with my precious steel trunk, I started thinking about my next step. Although I did not know what that trunk contained, I could make a good guess that there would be some tools for putting an end to a few British lives. I had the key. Should I open the trunk? I checked my curiosity. I was not supposed to open it. Moreover, whatever weapons it contained were certainly not meant to kill a measly railway guard or driver. I passed the night with these thoughts. At last my long-awaited train came. I reached Rampurhat and handing over my charge to the waiting gentleman, breathed a sigh of relief.

I could not bask for long in the glory of my accomplishment. Misfortune struck in the shape of a police raid in the local boarding school and the arrest of two of our boys. The very next night, Gopesh Chandra came unexpectedly and announced that Nonigopal's 'private tutor' must at once be removed to a place of safety. The two of us decided that a safe house in either Jangipore or Raghunathganj was the need of the hour. Sri Shyamaprasad Sinha, a member of our group, lived in Jangipore. With his help a house was rented there. He also got for Nonigopal's 'tutor' a teaching job there in another gentleman's house. To be near them and keep an eye on things, I

myself had to give up the comfort of my home and shift to Jangipore where my friend, philosopher and guide, Sri Sarat Chandra Pandit, better known as Dada Thakur and highly respected by all who knew him for his integrity, uprightness, simplicity and wit, gave me a place to stay in his Pandit Press.

For a while all went well. But then two revolutionaries on the run informed us that they had been followed from Calcutta up to the Jangipore Station. Obviously our safe house was no longer safe. That night all the resident revolutionaries were moved from that house together with every trace of their existence. Next morning when the police came in full strength and searched the place, emptiness greeted them. Shyamaprasad and the 'private tutor' too had melted into thin air. But Gopesh Chandra himself was not so lucky. He was arrested in Calcutta and interned in Patharpratima in the Sundarbans.

\*

This phase of my work was over. I came home but learnt from my friends that some local big shot was after my blood and that the only safety lay in flight.

In a disturbed state of mind I went to Calcutta. A friend helped me to get a job in Puri as manager of a prestigious hotel, The Victoria Club. There I made friends with a young man who later in life gained much fame and respect. He was the brilliant anthropologist and also the companion and secretary of Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Nirmal Kumar Basu. But again my luck did not hold out. A very contagious type of influenza broke out in Puri. I resigned my job and came back to Calcutta.

A friend of mine, Santoshkumar Ghosh Hazra, with whom I had worked during the Damodar flood relief, invited me to stay with him in the house of his brother-in-law, the zamindar, Tridibesh Sinha, father of the famous film director, Tapan Sinha. During my stay there, I used to go regularly to Kankurgachi Yogodyan. I spent hours sitting quietly in Sri Ramakrishna Samadhi Mandir. Soon I became a familiar figure in the Yogodyan and the Swamijis often asked me to sing. Choosing an auspicious day, I requested Swami Yogavinod Maharaj, the director of Yogodyan, to give me *diksha* (initiation). Swamiji agreed and gave me the *dikshamantra*, then told me to go upstairs and make my pranams to Ma Saradamani, wife of Sri Ramakrishna. Unable to believe my good fortune, I went up and bowed to her. She was exactly as I had seen her in the pictures—clad in a white sari, with her long, black hair coming down to her lap, the very image of motherly compassion. I felt myself thrice blessed.

A new life began for me. The revolutionary groups had been disbanded. All my friends had just disappeared. I myself was floating about aimlessly. At last I found a haven. Peace returned to my restless life. I was now living in the Yogodyan. The sannyasins accepted me as a lay brother and told me to take the vow of brahmacharya and live with them permanently. I was willing but before joining them for good, I had to go back at least once to my native place and dispose of my property. I would

have to convince my aunt and cousin Bhagabati to accept the gift of my house and lands. Thinking of all these things, I returned home.

*(To be continued)*

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane*)

---

## I WAS MADE

I WAS made to leap  
Over the vault of stars,  
Across the sunlit bars,  
But not to fall asleep.

I was made to sing  
Not sorrow's dirge-like songs  
Bemoaning human wrongs,  
Of a diviner thing.

I was made to know  
Transcending mortal mind  
Knowledge of soul-kind  
Towards which I must grow.

I was made to toil  
Not for self alone,  
For all and yet for One  
On this eternal soil.

I was made to see  
Not with this failing sight

Enamoured of the night,  
The hid divinity.

I was made to live  
Not these few human years  
So fraught with pain and tears,  
My life, my joy to give.

I was made to love,  
Not this human lust  
That fades and falls to dust,  
But One who dwells above.

Growing from birth to birth  
Escape not by the sword  
Or heavenly reward  
My destiny on earth.

I was made to fly  
To worlds of light within,  
Embrace all souls as kin,  
I was not made to die.

Dec. 17, 2003

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)



## ON THE OVERMENTAL CREATION

THE MOTHER has said: "...I am quite convinced that if we go back some thousands of years, when men spoke of the Divine—if ever they did speak of the Divine, as I believe—they spoke perhaps of a state like that of the godheads of the Overmind; and now this mode of being of the Overmind godheads who, obviously, have governed the earth and formed many things on earth for a very long time, seems to us far inferior to what we conceive the Supermind to be."<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine*: "If we regard the Powers of the Reality as so many Godheads, we can say that the Overmind releases a million Godheads into action, each empowered to create its own world, each world capable of relation, communication and interplay with the others. There are in the Veda different formulations of the nature of the Gods: it is said they are all one Existence to which the sages give different names; yet each God is worshipped as if he by himself is that Existence, one who is all the other Gods together or contains them in his being; and yet again each is a separate Deity acting sometimes in unison with companion deities, sometimes separately, sometimes even in apparent opposition to other Godheads of the same Existence."<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter: "The Gods... are in origin and essence permanent Emanations of the Divine put forth from the Supreme by the Transcendent Mother...,"<sup>3</sup> and in his correspondence with Nirodbaran he clarifies this: "...men can build forms [of the Gods] which they will accept; but these forms too are inspired into men's mind from the planes to which the God belongs. All creation has the two sides, the formed and the formless,—the Gods too are formless and yet have forms, but a Godhead can take many forms, here Maheshwari, there Pallas Athene. Maheshwari herself has many forms in her lesser manifestations, Durga, Uma, Parvati, Chandi etc. The Gods are not limited to human forms—man also has not always seen them in human forms only."<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes: "Everyone's inner being is born in the *ansha* [portion] of some Devata."<sup>5</sup> This enables us to understand Nolini's words about what happened after that momentous 24 November, 1926. He says: "The Mother's endeavour at that time was for a new creation... she had placed each of us in touch with his inner godhead. Every individual has what may be described as his line of spiritual descent and also ascent; for into each individual consciousness has come down from the supreme Maha Shakti an individual divine being, a particular godhead following a particular line of manifestation of divine power, *vibhūti*. To bear inwardly the touch of this divinity and found it securely within oneself, to concentrate on it and become one with it, to go on manifesting it in one's outer life, this was the aim of the *sādhanā* at the time."<sup>6</sup>

(Compiled by Nilima Das)

## References

1. *Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM, Vol. 8, p. 33.
2. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 280-81.
3. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 383-84.
4. Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 299.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
6. *Glimpses of The Mother's Life* by Nilima Das, Vol. 2, p. 17.

*The overmind is a sort of delegation from the supermind (this is a metaphor only) which supports the present evolutionary universe in which we live here in Matter. If supermind were to start here from the beginning as the direct creative Power, a world of the kind we see now would be impossible; it would have been full of the divine Light from the beginning, there would be no involution in the inconscience of Matter, consequently no gradual striving evolution of consciousness in Matter. A line is therefore drawn between the higher half of the universe of consciousness, parārdha, and the lower half, aparārdha. The higher half is constituted of Sat, Chit, Ananda, Mahas (the supramental)—the lower half of mind, life, Matter. This line is the intermediary overmind which, though luminous itself, keeps from us the full indivisible supramental Light, depends on it indeed, but in receiving it, divides, distributes, breaks it up into separated aspects, powers, multiplicities of all kinds, each of which it is possible by a further diminution of consciousness, such as we reach in Mind, to regard as the sole or the chief Truth and all the rest as subordinate or contradictory to it. To this action of the overmind may be applied the words of the Upanishad, "The face of the Truth is covered by a golden Lid", or those of the Vedic, ṛtena, ṛtam apihitam. Here there is the working of a sort of vidyā-avidyāmayī māyā which makes possible the predominance of avidyā. It is by this primitive divisional principle that the Mind is enabled to regard, for example, the Impersonal as the Truth, the Personal as only a mask or the personal Divine as the greatest Truth and impersonality as only an aspect; it is so too that all the conflicting philosophies and religions arise, each exalting one aspect or potentiality of Truth presented to Mind as the whole sufficient explanation of things or exalting one of the Divine's Godheads above all others as the true God than whom there can be no other or none so high or higher. This divisional principle pursues man's mental knowledge everywhere and even when he thinks he has arrived at the final unity, it is only a constructed unity, based on an Aspect. It is so that the scientist seeks to found the unity of knowledge on some original physical aspect of things, Energy or Matter, Electricity or Ether, or the Mayavadin thinks he has arrived at the absolute Advaita by cutting existence into two, calling the upper side Brahman and the lower side Maya. It is the reason why mental knowledge can never arrive at a final solution of anything, for the aspects of Existence as distributed by overmind are numberless and one can go on multiplying philosophies and religions for ever.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 243-44)

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

HUMAN history is interspersed with sharp turning points, sudden changes in the ‘soul-drift’, when new horizons beckon and we leave behind old ideas as otiose and devoid of any value, discard earlier aims and objectives and fix our gaze on new lights. And the poets are the first to be thrilled by them. Poet after poet celebrates the glory of the past and feels nostalgic about it.

Sri Aurobindo in *Ahana* makes us see that

Luminous beckoning hands in the distance invite and implore us.<sup>1</sup>

Even more vivid are the lines:

Play-routes of wisdom and vision and struggle and rapture and sorrow,  
Sailing in Time through the straits of today to the sea of tomorrow.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo treats the subject of the fall of Troy as a contemporary poet and adds Christian humanism to the “glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome”<sup>3</sup> when he points out:

That was Greece and its shining, that now is France and its keenness,  
That still is Europe though by the Christ-touch troubled and tortured...<sup>4</sup>

In *Thoughts and Aphorisms* Sri Aurobindo writes: “There are four very great events in history, the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion, (for before there was only meditation and worship), Christ from his cross humanised Europe, the colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.”<sup>5</sup>

And we can look forward in this new millennium with a certitude that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will usher in an era of Spiritual Humanism—The Life Divine. The siege of Troy gave us Hellas that is Greece.

*Ilion* is a new creation by Sri Aurobindo for the continuation of the story after the burning of Hector’s body. So it can be said that the end of the *Iliad* sees the beginning of *Ilion* which deals with the siege of Troy.

K. D. Sethna writes:

“The poem develops, in a new way, part of the story of Troy as continued by ancient poets from the point where Homer ends—particularly Quintus of Smyrna

(4th century A.D.) who wrote an epic in Greek beginning with the arrival of the Amazon queen Penthesilea to Priam's aid after the death of Hector at the hands of Achilles. Some authorities even claim that the continuation is directly warranted by Homer himself: they take the last line of the *Iliad* to read: 'Such were the funeral rites of Hector. And now there came an Amazon...' *Ilion* presupposes Penthesilea's arrival and deals with the events on the last day of the siege of Troy."<sup>6</sup>

*Ilion* draws upon the book of history and we can test the deep truths revealed in our pulses as well as their validity in the pages of history. But the poem, all through, affects us on the human plane. Though Talthybius as the herald of Achilles has thundered and bellowed in his retort to the verbal pyrotechnics of Penthesilea, his spirit is

Vexed with the endless pomps of Laomedon. Far from those glories  
Memory winged it back to a sward half-forgotten, a village  
Nestling in leaves and low hills watching it crowned with the sunset.  
So for his hour he abode in earth's palace of lordliest beauty,  
But in its caverns his heart was weary and, hurt by the splendours,  
Longed for Greece and the smoke-darkened roof of a cottage in Argos,  
Eyes of a woman faded and children crowding the hearthside.  
Joyless he rose and eastward expected the sunrise on Ida.<sup>7</sup>

K. D. Sethna says about the last day of the events: "The nature of these events and the many-sided play they involve of physical circumstance, human character, psychological motive, individual action, hidden world-forces, divine beings and inscrutable destiny may be inferred from the names of the several sections of the poem: we have Books successively of the Herald, the Statesman, the Assembly, Partings, Achilles, the Chieftains, the Woman, the Gods—and a final unnamed Book presumably of Battle and Doom."<sup>8</sup>

The timeless eternity will not abrogate the flow of historic time. This interest in the otherwise world of man's collective march and concern about what is happening and what is to come is fully amplified in Sri Aurobindo's two epics *Savitri* and *Ilion*.

In *Savitri* we are wafted to the planes of eternal Light and Bliss. In *Ilion* though the characters are heroic, their passions and problems, loves and hatreds, hopes and despairs are human and universal. If *Savitri* is the culmination and final acme of the spiritual life, *Ilion* is its precursor of the life of human living. The beautiful Penthesilea will be considered as the Woman Divine in *Ilion*.

K. D. Sethna says: "...of course, it is not merely the deft play of technique that marks out *Ilion*. The sustained creative afflatus is what makes its eight complete Books and its unfinished ninth a success, Homer infused with Sri Aurobindo, a blend of the soul of Greek myth and epic with the soul of Indian Yoga, embodying a vision packed with the light of the Occult Orient yet tempering and naturalising itself to the

atmosphere of heroic Hellas. And it is difficult to resist the conviction that the classical hexameter has once for all been turned authentically English by an Indian poet.”<sup>9</sup>

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

### References

1. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 534.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 526.
3. “To Helen”, *The Poems and Miscellanies of Edgar Allan Poe*, p. 38.
4. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 485.
5. *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 83.
6. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, pp. 37-38.
7. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 408-09.
8. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece*, p. 38.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

*Lift your eyes towards the Sun; He is there in that wonderful heart of life and light and splendour. Watch at night the innumerable constellations glittering like so many solemn watchfires of the Eternal in the limitless silence which is no void but throbs with the presence of a single calm and tremendous existence; see there Orion with his sword and belt shining as he shone to the Aryan fathers ten thousand years ago at the beginning of the Aryan era; Sirius in his splendour, Lyra sailing billions of miles away in the ocean of space. Remember that these innumerable worlds, most of them mightier than our own, are whirling with indescribable speed at the beck of that Ancient of Days whither none but He knoweth, and yet that they are a million times more ancient than your Himalaya, more steady than the roots of your hills and shall so remain until He at his will shakes them off like withered leaves from the eternal tree of the Universe. Imagine the endlessness of Time, realise the boundlessness of Space; and then remember that when these worlds were not, He was, the Same as now, and when these are not, He shall be, still the Same; perceive that beyond Lyra He is and far away in Space where the stars of the Southern Cross cannot be seen, still He is there. And then come back to the Earth and realise who this He is. He is quite near to you. See yonder old man who passes near you crouching and bent, with his stick. Do you realise that it is God who is passing? There a child runs laughing in the sunlight. Can you hear Him in that laughter? Nay, He is nearer still to you. He is in you, He is you. It is yourself that burns yonder millions of miles away in the infinite reaches of Space, that walks with confident steps on the tumbling billows of the ethereal sea; it is you who have set the stars in their places and woven the necklace of the suns not with hands but by that Yoga, that silent actionless impersonal Will which has set you here today listening to yourself in me. Look up, O child of the ancient Yoga, and be no longer a trembler and a doubter; fear not, doubt not, grieve not; for in your apparent body is One who can create and destroy worlds with a breath.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol. 12, pp. 475-76)

# MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

*(Continued from the issue of June 2004)*

## III

### 1687—AN EVENTFUL YEAR

By the end of the year 1686, one difficulty seemed to follow another and there were rows of ships waiting to be despatched with the right cargo. Famine, a rise in prices of commodities and rumours of Aurangzeb's attack on Golconda, came to them in quick succession; over and above that, by December that year, Shivaji's son, Ram Rajah, who ruled over the kingdom of Gingee, was murdered. The condition in the regions north of Pondicherry was worse than in the south, for Tanjore could cultivate and produce its rice as usual, thanks to the three rivers and its system of catchments.

\*

One morning, a Dutch vessel was seen sailing southwards. What a big surprise it was the next day when a French sailor was seen standing at the door of the governor's house. He had quarrelled with an officer on board, he said, and the Dutch captain had put him in chains. Some of his friends among the crew had released him and quietly thrown him into the sea with a barrel to help him keep afloat—that's how he had managed to cover the distance, and reach the shore. The Dutch would otherwise have left him without food or help on the shores of Ceylon, and that would have been that. At this, the Governor and his wife were moved. They looked after him as best they could. Within weeks of his unprecedented arrival, they sent him away to France on a ship that set sail from Pondicherry.

\*

Later on, in January 1687, two ships came from Siam (Thailand); one was from the king of Siam, carrying gifts to the king of France, and the other, owned by a French businessman, was on its way back to France. We guess that real Siamese cats entered Pondicherry at that time! The gifts from the Far East were received at Versailles, by Louis XIV and his entourage with more enthusiasm than the equally precious ones from Persia. We know that 17<sup>th</sup> century France was quite as intrigued by the ornate language of the Middle East as the formalities of the Mogul courts in India—as seen in the play by Molière, much to the delight of audiences then and even today.

Elsewhere, everything was deteriorating. By February, the news from Golconda

came like a thunderbolt. The Mogul army under the able generalship of the Emperor himself had laid siege to the Golconda fort! An epidemic was rampant in Hyderabad. Martin writes in his memoirs, "It would seem that all the scourges from heaven, the earth and the waters are bent on depriving Golconda of all its inhabitants! Famine and a type of plague are spreading everywhere." Within months Golconda and Bijapur were annexed and Aurangzeb went back with a booty worth crores of rupees, in the form of gold, silver and diamonds.

\*

The earlier director, M. Deltor, had returned from his visit to the French settlements in Bengal and stopped over at Pondicherry for a few days before setting sail for France. There was much to gain from his firsthand information about the work done in this place. The political situation was the main concern. But the Martins made his stay as pleasant as possible with sumptuous dinners and hunting expeditions.

\*

These were times when the Dutch and the English vied with each other for supremacy at sea along the coast from Cape Comorin to Madras.

Some time in April 1687, the French residents and a few others enjoyed a rare spectacle. An English vessel was chasing a Siamese boat. They went round and round each other in the bay, and the chase lasted all day long! Everyone was quite pleased to hear the next morning that the smaller boat had escaped under cover of night without getting caught!

\*

In May that year the Reverend Father Zenon de Bauges who had lived in Madras for over fifty years, passed away. Martin, who knew him personally and had a deep respect for him, wrote in his dairy, "The very fact that Catholics, Protestants and Muslims alike, along with other gentry mourned his death, showed how much he was held in esteem...." What better recognition could there be, for it is the real saintliness of the person that counts and not the religion to which he belongs.

\*

A few years earlier, the famine in France had been bad, but now what they saw here in India was beyond all imagination. To provide for his workers Martin had to buy barges full of rice from Tanjore and have them sold at a lower rate. He increased the pay of the weavers, the dhobis and the thrashers. In spite of all this care, the cloth

merchants came to him in a group refusing to supply the normal cargo of bales because of the lack of food all around. Martin managed to deal with the situation patiently and firmly enough to get ready in time the required material for Surat and France and the work went on as usual.

\*

For the first time a theft was discovered at the factory. Someone had broken into the factory godown in October 1687. A sense of shock reigned everywhere. At last, late in the morning, someone found two packets of coral in the usual cotton cover with the seal of the Company on them. Many more such packets—samples which were to be sent for selection before the actual purchase was made—were discovered in a nearby pond. With that clue the thieves were caught—two men who had earlier stolen many things from the factory.

But Martin was unwilling to pass any judgement or inflict any punishment. He did not want any trouble for the French residents here. True, the two were culprits, but natives of this place. And the area was within the jurisdiction of the kingdom of Gingee. When this theft was referred there, the verdict was simple: capital punishment. It seems that the two thieves were converted to the Christian faith and not only did they receive some consolation but, so the story goes, before the execution, one of them spoke of having had a vision of the Virgin Mary for four or five days consecutively.

Had Madame Martin known of this miraculous vision in time, she might have been tempted to intervene. But as things happened she could only pray for their souls.

\*

This backward glance would remain incomplete if we did not try to look at the inhabitants of Pondicherry through the eyes of the foreign residents.

It was easy to recognise the downtrodden who went about naked except for a bare minimum round their waist. But among those who came to the factory for consultation, for business or any type of help, there was a marked difference in the nobility of their rank and demeanour. One could distinguish them easily by their attire.

Among them were those who wore on their forehead horizontal lines, vertical lines or a point between the eyebrows. These signs were easily recognisable and indicated the temples where they worshipped. Over their long toga-like attire they wore a pleated shawl in white cotton or cream silk with a decorative gold-thread border—usually this hung over their left shoulder but that could vary according to the occasion.

The rich merchants often wore a turban with jewels or at least with one precious stone in it. If they had a sword hanging from their waistband, all bedecked with



jewels, the hilt was intricately designed; they wore necklaces and even on their footwear one could see a bright gem near the big toe.

The women wore anklets that tinkled as they walked and bracelets and earrings, necklaces of gold always intricately worked upon, often with precious stones. The fisherwomen who moved around the market place carrying loads of fish or pots of clay on their heads drew the attention of Madame Martin for their strong and healthy figures. They wore jewellery of the same type, usually made of multicoloured beads or shells.

It was easy to recognise those who had become Christians, for they always wore a medallion or a cross as ornament.

Coming to know the people also meant seeing snake charmers, magicians, astrologers, fakirs and sadhus, and understanding their influence on the people. The craftsmen here—masons, carpenters, jewellers, and so on, were readily appreciated and rewarded as their work was part of the needs of the settlers' life.... Every artisan was part of a guild and a religious brotherhood. Their trade was passed on from father to son. This protected their trade secrets and ensured their position in the greater collectivity. The French traveller, Bernier, writes in this context that always "...a goldsmith's son becomes a goldsmith, and a physician of the city educates his son to become a physician".

It is among these people that Monsieur and Madame Martin tried to create a sense of belonging. At all levels their decisions had to consider the place of the individual according to the quality of the person's work. Any business dealing or job appointments had to be clearly based on justice and human wisdom. And there should be no interference in matters of faith or religion. Yet there was much that Martin could not understand—for instance, the piercing of the cheeks, the ceremony of walking on burning coals and other such customs. But it was not difficult to see the loyalty and the service of the immediate dependents. A mutual trust grew between them, and the Martins tried to be full of rectitude and consideration in their dealings with others.

Although Martin was against any kind of slavery, a mitigated form of it was evident with those who were part of the maintenance of their household—maids, cooks, stable boys, supervisors and the like.

After observing the sense of insecurity among the people in all parts of the Southern region of the country where Martin had travelled widely by land, the practice of recruiting soldiers from the local community was ruled out by him for a long time—unlike the administrators of the English and the Dutch Companies in India.

*(To be continued)*

AMITA SEN

## MONA

THE birthday card that the Mother gave Mona on 11.11.60 says:

11-11.60

20 Mona, my dear and faithful collaborator

Bonne Fête!

with love and blessings  
for ever



Mona Pinto, née Ethel Anne Lovegrove, passed away in the Ashram Nursing Home on May 21, 2004 at 10.37 a.m. at the age of ninety-two. Amal Kiran, who had known Mona for more than sixty-seven years, was at first very sorry to hear the news. But when he was told that Mona wanted to leave, he said, "Whatever happens under the Divine's eyes is always for the best."

Ethel, also known as Mona to her friends, was born on November 11, 1911 in

London, the eldest of six siblings. She fell in love with Udar (then Laurence M. Pinto) who was studying aeronautical engineering in London. At the age of twenty-five she boarded a ship and all alone came to India where she knew absolutely nobody except Udar who had returned to India three years earlier to get a job and make enough money to support his bride-to-be. Her photographs of that period show what a stunning beauty she was. They were married in Pondicherry in the big church in Dumas Street on February 6, 1937. Soon the newly married, handsome couple became very friendly with many young disciples then living in the Ashram, namely, Amal Kiran, Dilip Kumar Roy, Purani and Ambu, all of whom marvelled at the deep love and courage of this young lady who had actually done what Robert Burns had said in his poem:

“And I will come again, my Luve  
Tho’ it were ten thousand mile.”

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother too came to know about this newly married couple and took interest in them. A few months before Gauri was born, the Mother advised Mona to go to Bangalore for the delivery because in those days Pondicherry did not have proper medical facilities.

Udar and Mona had their first Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in August 1937. At once a change came over Udar and he decided to dedicate himself to the service of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as soon as it was feasible. He gradually wound up his business and became more and more involved in the Ashram activities. Like any dutiful Indian wife, Mona followed him and joined the Ashram with their baby daughter. When Sri Aurobindo gave Laurence his new name, Udar, the Master was asked for a name also for Mona. Sri Aurobindo said that he liked that name, as it reminded him of Mona Lisa. Since then she has always been known only as Mona in the Ashram.

Meanwhile the Golconde Dormitory was being built. With the Mother’s blessings Udar started the Harpagon Workshop in order to prepare all the furniture and the fittings. On her side, the Mother asked Mona and some other ladies of the Ashram to start making all the bed linen which would be required once the Dormitory started functioning. Everything had to be hand-stitched!

As soon as the highly renowned Golconde Dormitory was ready, unique as an architectural marvel of its kind, the Mother appointed Mona as the overall in-charge of Golconde. The utmost diligence, dedication and courage with which she carried out her onerous duties till almost the last days of her life, have become legendary. Where the proper maintenance, reputation and well-being of Golconde was concerned Mona would admit no compromise. A single anecdote will suffice to illustrate this point.

Once, a very well-known doctor, a friend of D. who was a very close disciple of

Sri Aurobindo, was permitted to stay in Golconde. Due to the doctor's carelessness a beautiful piece of furniture was scratched. When Mona took him to task for not abiding by the Golconde regulations, the doctor was annoyed and reported the matter to his friend D. who, in his turn, wrote to Sri Aurobindo, complaining about some of "the meaningless rules" of Golconde. Sri Aurobindo's reply dated February 25, 1945 is not only a wonderful piece of literature, it is pregnant with a seer's vision of a Truth at the high-est level and an object lesson in the care and handling of material things. A portion of this letter is quoted below:

"As regards Golconde and its rules—they are not imposed elsewhere—there is a reason for them and they are not imposed for nothing. In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First, Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things; and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon and lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time last with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned the Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded—architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen, with no equal in all Europe or America; and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise; but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fitting, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This, too, was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have its own use, for each thing there was a place, and there should be no mixing up, or confused or wrong use. But all this had to be kept up and carried out in practice; for it was easy for people living there to create a complete confusion and misuse and to bring everything to disorder and ruination in a short time. That was why the rules were made and for no other purpose. The Mother hoped that if right people were accommodated there or others trained to a less rough and ready living than is common, her idea could be preserved and the wasting of all the labour and expense avoided.

"Unfortunately, the crisis of accommodation came and we were forced to house people in Golconde who could not be accommodated elsewhere and a careful choice could not be made. So, often there was damage and misuse and the Mother had to spend 200/300 Rupees after Darshan to repair things and restore what had been realised. Mona has taken the responsibility of the house and of keeping things right as much as possible. That was why she interfered in the hand-bag affair—it was as much a tragedy for the table as for the doctor, for it got scratched and spoiled by the

hand-bag—and tried to keep both the bag and shaving utensils in the places that had been assigned for them. If I had been in the doctor’s place, I would have been grateful to her for her care and solicitude instead of being upset by what ought to have been for him trifles, although, because of her responsibility, they had for her their importance. Anyhow, this is the rationale for the rules and they do not seem to me to be meaningless regulation and discipline.”

From the above incident lest the readers should get a wrong image of Mona as nothing but the “Stern Daughter of the Voice of God”, let me hasten to add that she had a “benignant grace” too. She regarded everybody who ever lived in the Golconde as a member of her own family. She was full of solicitude for their health and comfort and gave every guest her personal attention and loving care. Naturally enough, the guests too reciprocated by showering their love and affection on her.

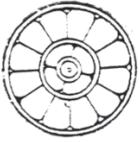
Mona always had a soft corner in her heart for the domestic servants. She was like a mother to them, always coming to their aid in their hour of need—from giving them free medicine to substantial monetary help.

Mona had trained a group of young girls, namely, Maniben of the present Marbling Department, Kusumben of Senteur, Kusumben of the Press Bindery and some others, in the art of doing things meticulously. Not only did they keep the Golconde always spick and span, but whenever the Mother needed any special cleaning work done, she invariably entrusted the job to Mona and her team. After Sri Aurobindo left his body, the Mother told Mona to give his room a thorough spring cleaning. The mattress on Sri Aurobindo’s bed, where much of Sri Aurobindo’s body liquid had soaked in, was sent to the Golconde for a special washing. When Mona went to clean the mattress, she could smell an ethereal perfume. Without disturbing the mattress, she immediately informed the Mother that a fragrance of fresh lotuses was emanating from it. The Mother told her to bring the mattress back exactly as it was and place it on Sri Aurobindo’s bed.

From 1944 when the Mother decided to celebrate Christmas as the Festival of Light, She gave Mona the responsibility of arranging the Christmas Tree and conducting the gift distribution every year. So long as the Mother went to the Theatre, She used to take the beautifully packed gifts from Mona’s hands and herself distribute them to everybody. In the Ashram, just as one could not think of the Golconde without Mona, so too had Christmas and Mona become synonymous.

About the significance of Mona’s birthday the Mother once said, “Mona’s birthday is on the eleventh. She was born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1911. Eleven—that is the number of progress... She is someone who truly loves to do things well, and wants to do them well and whatever she does, she does lovingly and very well.”

What the Mother thought of Mona's dedicated service is reflected in one of the many birthday cards that the Mother had written to her:



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Bonne Fête!

To Mona

Here is one more occasion to tell you physically what I tell you so often when we meet in the night. How much I appreciate the quality of your work and how much I rely on your faithful steadiness. We are very close inside although we meet rarely outside, but my love and blessings are always with you.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

## **EDUCATION FOR THE GLOBAL CITIZEN: AGENDA FOR CHANGE**

It seems obvious to most discerning observers that there is an urgent need today for thinking through a new system of national education, commensurate with a globalised world. In most quarters, this need is seen in terms of the newly available job markets and rising economic opportunities for a mobile work force. It has logically meant the devaluation of traditional systems of knowledge such as the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences in favour of disciplines seen to drive the newer engines of techno-economic change.

Such a course, attractive but short sighted, will be a colossal error. There is a gross inadequacy of thinking today regarding the current trend in globalisation. A proper understanding of the present challenges would require a critique of development models geared to the promotion of an oligarchy, clearly a prospect that has disturbing life-style consequences for large masses in post-colonial societies.

The right education for the global citizen, I argue, could come by eschewing the so-called “global” models, uniform in approach. Rather we need pedagogic methods and tools that are pluralistic, sensitive to the needs of regions, societies and cultures. Finally I suggest that one way this could be accomplished is by the use of some of the key tenets of spiritual thinkers like Sri Aurobindo based on his philosophy of learning in the context of the emerging international order.

### I

The traditional systems of education in the East or the West had generally seen merit in creating a context for learning that was free from the pressures of immediate social or political exigencies. Although largely class bound, catering to the elite of different kinds, the best systems always prided themselves in being idealistic. The Athenian Model of Lyceum or the Gurukul system in ancient India, although rooted in radically different principles and philosophies of education, gave allegiance to this idealistic drive. The Socratic method promoted the dictum “know thyself”, just as the Upanishadic parables of a Bhrigu, Nachiketa, Satyakam, Gargi or Maitreyi affirmed the supreme importance of the quest for knowledge by the individual seeker.

In contrast, military societies such as Sparta or those (of the Amazons) that saw virtue in discipline and austerity for the sake of conquest and subjugation consciously downplayed or disregarded the idealistic aims of education. There was no place in such schemes for the weaklings, the infirm, the physically and mentally handicapped. However, despite such professed pragmatic and utilitarian goals anchored to the promotion of collective glory, most such societies perished early, often due to internal contradictions, but more vitally, due to the neglect of the very idealistic base of the system of education.

In contrast to the pragmatic, the so-called idealistic systems also embraced a measure of the practical. The children of Dhritarashtra and Pandu spent time in the idyllic hermitage, as a necessary prelude or preparatory stage for facing the battles and ordeals of life. The anonymity and ordinariness of the experience of the princes in the forest was meant to offset royal arrogance and absolutism in later life.

This idealistic-pragmatic balance that I have referred to so far worked fairly well till the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and on the continent. The invention of the steam engine, the development of railroads and mercantile activity aided by an overseas colonial empire, led to the rise of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the concept of social Darwinism, the kind of which no Spartan militarist could ever imagine. The new development was the radically new way intellectual legitimacy was sought to be provided based on the quasi-scientific ground of assumed inequality among men. Aided by a fortuitous set of circumstances including the right to produce and inherit private property, the upper class European male fashioned out a system of education guaranteed to promote inequity at home and abroad.

In the light of this development, it is quite amazing that some of the leading Victorian intellectuals propounded a system of education avowedly universal and democratic, a rhetoric of progress, exemplified in the writings of James and John Stuart Mill, Cardinal Newman, Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle as well as Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham and others. The idea was to spread the enlightenment principle at home and abroad so that masses of the ordinary people everywhere could be brought under the benign influence of what Matthew Arnold called “sweetness and light”, a throwback to the earlier Hellenic principle. Newman in his *Idea of the University*, originally delivered in 1852 as a discourse for the establishment of a Catholic University in Ireland, spelt out a system of liberal education. “The process of training by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called liberal education.” (p.127) However, his vision of the University training as “the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end, it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the natural taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration” remained ultimately a Victorian ideal.

I have gone through the trajectory of the Western approach to education at some length in order to underline that the pragmatic-idealistic balance of learning was irrevocably lost after the Industrial Revolution in England. While F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot and other humanists decried the techno-Benthamite civilisation, there was precious little in the West that offered a radical challenge to the dominant paradigm.



## II

What then are our options in an era of late capitalism which has exacerbated the idealistic-pragmatic divide and effectively witnessed the dethronement of all socialistic experiments? What system shall we in India fashion out that could effectively challenge the neo-colonial and hegemonic West? The optimists believe that today Indian intellectuals straddle the globe in influential departments of study, that the Indian IT industry has outpaced the Chinese. The sooner the Indian education gears itself to match the international expectations, it is said, the better it is for our children!

But is this true? Aren't we at the risk of being part of the service industry of the advanced West which has begun to block outsourcing from the Third World even while singing the free market tune as a manna from heaven? I believe it is here that some of the tenets of thinkers like Sri Aurobindo could help us face the crisis. Merely opposing the West in all fields including education, is clearly not going to take us far. We need to work out an effective philosophy of education, that is dynamic, forward-looking, matching the needs of technology with the cultivation of the heart.

Paradoxically enough, today, even as we hear the rising refrain of India as a Super Power, it is worth recalling what Sri Aurobindo had said in his message to the Andhra University in 1948 as a word of caution:

There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us.... It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. (*On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 412)

As Sri Aurobindo explains, spirituality is a principle that integrates all parts of our being and leads us to a holistic experience. The first approach to the national system of education therefore is to create a radical alternative to the corporatisation of schools, based on a crass commercial drive. The goal should be to promote all-round excellence among the meritorious, across class, caste, creed, gender and ethnicity. Simultaneously, we must pursue the goal of universal literacy as a pressing national imperative.

A massive overhaul of the system is not possible without a corresponding rise

in budgetary resources for education. This can be achieved by vigorously pursuing peace-making with our hostile neighbours. We could consequently cut our defence spending and man-power, reorient the defence to suit the newer requirements of our security environment and threat perception.

Secondly, we must involve the corporate sector for public philanthropy and welfare. Today such philanthropy is largely religious. Indian business and industry, through the CII or FICCI must be made aware of their social responsibilities. Ultimately this could come through political pressure generated through citizen groups. Today organisations campaigning for better governance like the Lok Satta are in their infancy. What we need are more such groups and their ability to influence the political and business class for national education.

The new policy of National Education should steer clear of all doctrinaire approaches, especially the religious. It should affirm freedom, flexibility and creativity in embracing the totality of the human self as the pivot of the new system of education. It should eschew all artificial binaries like the sacred-secular and seek to prevent the politicisation of religion by promoting the spiritual view of life that is non-divisive, non-sectarian and transcends the barriers of human ego.

In practical pedagogic terms, what would be the contours of such a system? Here are some:

- In all spheres, the new system should attempt to bridge the gap between the elite and common schools, the State supported institutes vis-à-vis the elite private universities. The idea is not to pull down everything to a common level of mediocrity but to prepare vision documents, prioritise institutional goals within a reasonable time frame, fix rewards and disincentives and link the entire educational system to a national grid, while making adequate provision for regional/local variations. This means, for instance, that while the syllabus could be local; national level tests in various disciplines, commonly administered, could determine students' skill and aptitude for higher studies.
- Secondly, the new system should focus on the local, the regional, the national and the international/global in that order. Currently the process unfortunately is the reverse to the detriment of all.
- At the school level, both in the State and private sector, the new policy should suggest the strict use of the three-language formula for all children from the primary section onwards so that the elite are rooted to the ground realities—constantly.
- In the same manner, the school curriculum should attempt a balance between the arts, aesthetics, music and the sciences.
- At the College and University level for all the science, technology and business schools, it will be mandatory for students to register for courses in the humanities and social sciences.

- Value education should occupy an important part in the new system. This would avoid instructions through sermons or doctrines both secular and religious. Instead, through imaginative modules, taught in a creative manner through student participation, children should be exposed to the nobility of human action, the virtue of selfless work, the development of a national spirit free from jingoism or fanaticism, the importance of a decolonised mind, the growth of a national temper free from insularity and revivalism. They would also learn the value of dialogue and the significance of cooperative action. They would learn the importance of competitive spirit for the sake of all round excellence. But they would relate this spirit to cooperative endeavours through the performance of many group tasks and social campaigns such as the spread of literary programmes in the neighbourhoods and districts. This would free the present dominant mindset from greed for individual success anchored to self-centered parasitical behaviour. The children would, in this sense, learn of India's rich pluralistic traditions, the Indic, the Islamic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Sufi and the many orthodox and heterodox approaches, the Deshi and the Marga so that the achievement of the meritorious young is tempered by their sense of privilege, their responsibility towards the dispossessed many and their participation in the exciting nation-building activity in India.
- And finally the new system should actively promote physical culture as a co-curricular activity in the school and college education. The government and the corporate sector should be called upon to participate in the promotion of sports. Currently sports seems to be confined to the TV screen. This has to change if India is to have a trained man-power backed by all-round physical fitness. In this sense, Swami Vivekananda's message to the Indian youth has not lost its relevance even in today's context.

In the foregoing discussion, I have tried to outline the main contours of a new policy of national education. This policy, as I have argued, is based on some of the principles Sri Aurobindo spelt out as part of his philosophy of education and his views on culture in much of his writing. The policy suggested is also in accordance with the new world order envisioned by Sri Aurobindo in his social and political writings such as the chapter "Civilisation and Barbarism" in *The Human Cycle*.

Quality education has always been perceived as the preserve of the few. We can ill afford this approach any longer. Promotion of islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity and ignorance will surely be an invitation to disaster. Only an education truly national in spirit and wider in reach, a spiritualised education, can avert this. It is time we put this into action for building a resurgent India.

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## THY PRESENCE

EARTH rarely exudes  
 A fragrance that rises  
 Up and up, touching  
 The solar region  
 It reaches the Beyond;  
 Passing through the Ether  
 It returns to the earth  
 Intensifying itself.

That fragrance at times  
 Permeates the earth  
 Suffusing and kindling  
 Some beings.

Inebriate of that perfume, I  
 Seek its origin, look for its source—

Now am I propelled  
 To that fountain divine:  
 Thy presence, Mother,  
 Thy presence, so divinely divine  
 Yet humanly soft and sweet.

A single remembrance of Thee  
 Bestows that fragrance on me;  
 It bathes me, envelops me,  
 Making my earth-ridden being  
 All-fragrant.

ASHALATA DASH

## RETURN OF THE HERO

AT first the sound was faint but it was growing rapidly, a sound resembling that of a large swarm of migrating bees.

The absent-minded boy, strolling almost aimlessly along the road, became instantly alert. He put his hand to his forehead to cut out the glare and peered intently towards the distant horizon. Soon he could locate what he was looking for, tiny black dots hanging in the sky, stationary but rapidly growing in size; then their motion could be detected. The dots changed into a form and the sound increased to a continuous roar. These were fighter planes in a formation flight. Soon they were overhead, twinkling like tiny silver stars. The face of the boy brightened and a proud, silent smile appeared. The smile lingered long after the planes vanished on the opposite horizon. Yes, he could identify the planes—Spitfires. He could always identify the planes, Hurricanes, Mustangs, Dakotas and others.

This lean, dark boy, somewhat short, had a dream: when he grew up he would fly one of those small planes. He would join the air force like his brother, his hero.

It was during the Second World War. The place was a district town in the eastern part of Bengal. It was full of men in uniform moving about in jeeps and other military vehicles. The friends of the small boy were generally shy and wary about the soldiers. But the boy felt a strange attraction towards these aliens in uniform. His brother too wore a uniform and rode in jeeps. He vividly remembered the day his brother came home on a visit with his fellow officers in a jeep. Though he was shy and unsure of himself, he propelled himself forward and caught his brother's hand. The other officers showered love and affection on him. To him everything happened too fast, as in a dream. Only when his brother and his friends were gone leaving the plates empty of delicacies and the empty bright gift packets mutely proclaiming the presence of a group of young boisterous persons who were there not long ago, did he realise that the whole thing was not a dream. While his parents and neighbours continued talking about the visit, the boy quietly slipped outside where his starry-eyed friends were huddled. There he began to boast and show off, glowing in the reflected charisma of his hero.

The boy and his brother, some ten years older than him, were examples of contrast in every sense of the word. While the boy was of a docile and dreamy temperament, his hero was outgoing and smart. The boy did not enjoy competition on the playing fields, while his brother excelled in sports and games and was a natural leader. It was not surprising that the boy was known more as "Debu's brother" than by his own name. But he did not resent it; rather, he enjoyed the status. After all, it was Debu who took his little brother to his own school to introduce him to the American missionary "Father", the principal. After a few days he started going to that school.

He will never forget the day when an official letter arrived addressed to his brother. On reading it, Debu leaped up with joy. It was a letter from the Air Force

informing him that he had been selected as a cadet pilot. But his parents grew pale, they were anxious and scared. But finally, they gave their consent. After all, none in their family had ever handled a gun, and now their son was going to fly a fighter plane!

From that day a dream began to form in the boy's mind. Like his hero, he too would be a pilot when he grew up. Thus was born his interest in planes and uniforms. The inspiration transformed the boy. He became a Boy Scout, joined the games and to his surprise, he found that he was not a failure. This gave him confidence and his academic reports too improved.

Then thunder struck! One afternoon at school, when he was busy being a Boy Scout, he noticed a familiar boy from his neighbourhood coming in and quietly talking to the instructor. After a few moments the instructor came over and spoke softly to the Boy Scout. Something serious had happened and he was to go home immediately. With a pounding heart he hurried home. His young companion would not divulge to him any detail, but on his grim face hung the shadow of doom. He found his house full of people, known and unknown. All his playmates were there with their parents. He could hardly breathe. For the first time in his life, he saw his parents weep. As the initial confusion cleared, he could vaguely understand what had happened. A telegram had arrived carrying the chilling news of an air crash and the death of Debu, his brother, his hero. Even without looking up, he felt that all eyes were on him. He was the latest participant in the "festival of grief". He joined the others in wailing, uncomprehending. He felt the hugs and caresses of the elders. They were consoling Debu's little brother. His hero was dead but had left behind the rays of glory for his younger brother! A few days later a letter arrived addressed to his mother. As she went through the letter she began to weep. It was from one of Debu's unknown batch-mates, consoling her. The writer addressed her as "Ma"—mother! After the first one there were many more letters from him.

Time never stands still. There was no time to grieve. There was the "Partition" of the country. Their little town became part of Pakistan, a land of Muslims. The family felt insecure and decided to move to India, even as refugees if required. Confusion and chaos reigned. The boy was sent to a boarding school in Calcutta, an unfamiliar place for him.

In the new school the boy again retreated into his shell. He was bullied for his strange accent, his rustic manners. In Calcutta, no one knew his hero, Debu. Nobody knew that this shy boy's brother used to fly aeroplanes. With time the boy gradually began to adjust to the new world without his hero.

One afternoon, while playing in the school compound, he noticed a military jeep coming into the school. It stopped near the principal's office. An officer in uniform got down and went inside. For a moment the boy stopped and thought, had his brother been alive, he too would have come in such a jeep to meet his little brother.

Minutes passed. He started playing again. Then he became vaguely aware that

someone was calling him by name. Yes, he was indeed being called by the school peon. The principal had summoned him. His heart missed a beat. Someone must have reported against him, this had happened before. Now he would be punished. Ashen-faced, he proceeded with the peon. He noticed that the shining jeep was still there. On entering the principal's chamber, the boy found the principal talking to the officer. As he entered, the officer rose instantly from his chair and turned towards him. Oh, how tall and handsome he was, even more than his brother, Debu. The officer walked towards the boy and embraced him. He was Debu's batch-mate. He had come to the school specially to see the boy and be his elder brother. The officer talked to the principal for a few moments and took his leave. The boy left the office; with one hand he grasped the officer's hand, while in his other hand he held the gifts. The two proceeded towards the playground—the boy was going to introduce to his friends,—his elder brother, his hero!

S. B. MITRA

### *The War*

*I have visited trains, each one bringing between five and six hundred wounded from the front. It is a moving sight, not so much because of all that these unfortunate men are suffering, but above all because of the noble manner in which most of them bear their sufferings. Their soul shines through their eyes, the slightest contact with the deeper forces awakens it. And from the intensity, the fullness of the powers of true love which could, in their presence, be manifested in perfect silence, it was easy to realise the value of their receptivity.*

\*

*All those who go into the war zone—a clearly defined zone from the point of view of the active influences and atmosphere—are seized, carried away, impersonalised in a formidable current, as impetuous as a raging ocean. They are disindividualised, as it were, reduced to an elemental state, to the state of natural forces which, like the wind, the storm or the waters, accomplish their earthly work, moved by a Will of which they are unconscious. They are no longer men but masses that move and act; and even the innumerable instances which seem to spring from courage, from individual heroism, are yet akin to the heroism of bees or ants—almost mechanical gestures, instinctive gestures—induced in an isolated element by the collective consciousness of the genius of the race.*

*Discarding all mental constructions, sensing them to be poor and strengthless compared to the realising, destructive power at their command, they will be invincible instruments of the transforming Will; and until they have gone to the very end of their task nothing can possibly be attempted for future reconstructions.*

*The Mother*

(Words of Long Ago, CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 137-39, Bak edition)

## THE LORD SPEAKS FRANKLY

I WAS fast asleep on a dark wintry night,  
    Away from the madding crowd,  
In a cosy room of a forest bungalow;  
    My blissful state of florid dreams  
Prevented ready response to the radiance  
    And sweet fragrance, emanating  
From the gracious and benign Lord,  
    As He stood with perfect elegance  
Near my head, with His Divine glow.

“People call me Ganesh,” said He  
    While touching softly my forehead;  
Awestruck, I rose to offer Pranams;  
    When I tried to mutter something,  
He silenced me and spoke gracefully:  
    “Great seer-poets loved to describe  
Me as *Lambodaram Sundaram*,  
    Meaning a beautiful celestial being  
With longish belly, rare with other gods.

“Countless artists, sculptors and devotees  
    Worship me, yet very few care  
To fathom my true persona and visage;  
    Most adorers expect me to act  
As a magician to ward off all evils,  
    Remove obstacles, and shower boons  
Of success, wealth and fame;  
    Don’t you see how clever guys  
Adorn me as watchman on entry-gates?

“Despite all distortions and perversions  
    To project me as a diminutive,  
Stodgy and pot-bellied god, with a broken  
    Tusk, dispensing powerful *Laddus*,  
I remain faithful to the teeming devotees  
    And pray to the Supreme Mother  
For their well-being and spiritual progress;  
    The *Kalki Avatar* of the modern age  
Loves me as God of Spiritual Knowledge.”

SURESH DEY



## TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of June 2004)

### *The Viziers of Bassora: Sri Aurobindo's Shakespeariana*

WHILE the resistance against Sri Aurobindo's poetry has weakened during the last ten years, funny remarks about his dramatic experiments continue to appear in the critical studies on Indo-Anglian literature. Citations would take a lot of space. Hence my gist: "Sri Aurobindo's plays are imitative and they are not meant for the stage." Guide books meant for the Post Graduate classes carry that "wise" judgement to our students. Their makers do not care—in most cases—to know what Prof. Iyengar and Dr. Prema Nandakumar have to say on those plays. I would like to draw the attention of the reader to one of the early plays, entitled *The Viziers of Bassora: A Dramatic Romance*, just to indicate what kind of artistic seriousness had worked behind that happy comedy. Unlike Tagore, Sri Aurobindo follows the classical and Shakespearean principles of drama.

In *The Viziers of Bassora*, he seems to remember Aristophanes, Terence, Kalidasa and Shakespeare from time to time, even though he was enjoying a walk through the middle-east corridors, the filthy and fragrant zones of Bassora and Bagdad. The source lies in *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, which Sri Aurobindo won as a school prize in England. K. R. S. Iyengar observes:

*The Viziers* is principally based on 'The Tale of the Beautiful Sweet-Friend', a delightful yarn that Shahrazad spins out over nearly six nights. Sri Aurobindo, however, introduced a few changes in the story and added some new characters as well, partly to purify the story of some of its prurience and partly to underline the principle of contrast in the characterisation.<sup>1</sup>

But then, some of the lower vital stuff remains in Sri Aurobindo's play reminding us of the European comic playwrights and a coarse comic imagination, which was prevalent in the nineteenth century Bengali literature of the pre-Bankim era.

The story may be summed up as a play of Morality, but that will hide three original elements: the poetry, the humour and the invented speech for every individual which marks the consciousness of a character. Two viziers of Bassora, Alfazzal (good) and Almuene (bad), and their sons Nuruddene (good but unrestrained) and Fareed (deformed and vulgar and cruel like his father) fight over a slave girl (Anice), who is a paragon of beauty. Alfazzal buys her for the king and his son Nuruddene falls for her. Anice reciprocates and the lenient father unites them and leaves Bassora for a time, dividing his property between his son and his wife, afraid that Nuruddene will squander away his money. Which he does. He is trapped by Almuene and when he is

about to lose Anice, he decides to leave for Bagdad. Haroun-al-Rasheed, Caliph of Bagdad, sends Nuruddene back to Bassora with a letter to the king (his cousin) to help him and shelters Anice in his palace. Nuruddene is taken captive and just when he is going to be executed, Haroun appears to rescue him. Nuruddene replaces the bad king. The Caliph, the Providence of “Allah’s Vicegerent” speaks the last sweet words of wisdom.

Like Shakespeare, young Aurobindo is an elusive playwright. The budding rishi veils himself behind the vital creatures of Bassora and Bagdad. The play was written between his late twenties and early thirties. One suspects he was creating Shakespeariana for a post-modern audience. I use the word post-modern intentionally, because some of the speeches used in the play anticipate the perverted idiom of the twenty-first century, when we have lost all our ability to hide the animal in us. Did Aurobindo Ghose really hear people speak like that in the late 1890s and in the early years of the twentieth century or did he know the real speech-style used in those fantastic cities?

All perversions of speech flare up with a new colour under the masterful touch of the playwright’s comic imagination. While Tagore is a master of symbolic drama, he is un-Shakespearean in his inability to discover proper speech-styles for most of his characters. Poetry and action seldom come together in the great Bengali poet who does not know how to write multi-dimensional poetry. Young Aurobindo could do that masterfully in *The Viziers of Bassora* by imaging the characters properly with the help of different speech-styles. Every character is individualised.

Each character projects his/her consciousness through the speeches. Hatred, lust, jealousy, sadism, hypocrisy, frivolity mixed with perversion of the vital and the mental, flattery and boldness, kindness, the female revolting against the male and the female appreciating the refined virtues in the male, kingship and ethics, the common chords of life leading to a better state of enlightenment—all are there in a social drama of engaging conflict. And there is love: a blend of the Kalidasian, the Shakespearean and the Aurobindonian tastes.

Young Aurobindo remembers the Shakespearean ambience and recreates it without copying the bard. Doonya, Nuruddene’s cousin, forms a romantic pair with Anice, like Celia and Rosalind. Her words to Anice in Act II, Scene I, have a distinct Shakespearean ring in a new setting:

You living sweet romance, you come from Persia.  
'Tis there, I think, they fall in love at sight?<sup>2</sup>

The Duke of *Measure for Measure* comes back as Haroun, the disguised Caliph of Bagdad. This masked Providence comes much later in Sri Aurobindo’s play, in Act IV, Scene III and therefore he does not give us the impression of Shakespeare’s string-pulling supremos, the Duke and Prospero. In *The Viziers of Bassora*, there are many

unassorted attitudes, a thing usual in Shakespeare's best plays. The voice of the playwright in the last speech of Haroun is in harmony with the Caliph's earlier speech-style. It is natural in the context and does not break the spell of negative capability.

Anice-Aljalice, the slave-girl-turned-heroine, has something of the mellow frankness and wit of Rosalind, but in her despair she does not speak like Rosalind or Isabella. She is Aurobindo Ghose's own creation. Isabella's bitter gesture "Oh, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!"<sup>3</sup> is not the stance of young Aurobindo's Anice-Aljalice:

Caliph, high sovereign, Haroun al Rasheed,  
 Men call thee Just, Great Abbasside! I am  
 A poor and helpless slave-girl, but my grief  
 Is greater than a King. Lord, I demand  
 My soul's dear husband at thy hand, who sent him  
 Alone, unfollowed, without guard or friend  
 To a tyrant Sultan and more tyrant Vizier,  
 His potent enemies. Oh, they have killed him!  
 Give back my husband to my arms unhurt  
 Or I will rise upon the judgment day  
 Against thee, Caliph Haroun al Rasheed,  
 Demanding him at that eternal throne  
 Where names are not received, nor earthly pomps  
 Considered. Then my frail and woman's voice  
 Shall ring more dreadful in thy mighty hearing  
 Than doom's own trumpet. Answer my demand. (Act V, Sc. V)<sup>4</sup>

This is the real woman, a theme we see fully developed in *Savitri*. Anice knows at the back of her mind that this Caliph is pious; she knows his foolishness in sending her husband back to Bassora with just a letter to the king; she knows the need for an immediate action from the Caliph; she knows her speech is action. A superior intelligence is at work behind this sincere rhetoric. Although afraid, she wishes to act positively by threatening the Caliph with the power of a woman's love. Later, before the close of the play, when the tension is released, the Caliph reminds Anice of her threatening words. Once again, there is a hint which may not seem quite fashionable in this age:

I never was so scared in all my life  
 As when you rose against me. (Act V, Sc. VII)<sup>5</sup>

This mingling of the opposites,—like realism and romance, the tragic and the comic, crudity and refinement, the vulgar and the sublime,—is the basis of Shakespeariana. A Lord in *All's Well That Ends Well* (IV:III) sums up the integral view simply:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn,  
Good and ill together.

Sri Aurobindo seems to have known this early in his literary career. Negative capability does not mean that the reader will never know the author's voice in any part of the play. It means the game of the dramatic artist, who invites, as if playfully, the reader or the spectator to find him out in the midst of various unassorted attitudes. The audience is allowed to feel from the start that Bassora was once a seat of culture and that there was a lot of good in the early Moslem polity. People violated culture and yet there were people who knew honestly that "in Islam all men are equal underneath the King" (I:I). Women were not free and yet there were among the populace, those who held in high esteem the pattern of an educated woman, the image of a Muslim Rosalind. Muazzim, the slave trader, introduces the slave girl to Alfazzal, who has not seen her yet:

You shall not see her equal in a century.  
She has the Koran and the law by heart;  
Song, motion, music and calligraphy  
Are natural to her, and she contains  
All science in one corner of her mind;  
Yet learning less than wit; and either lost  
In the mere sweetness of her speech and beauty.  
You'll hardly have her within fifteen thousand;  
She is a nonpareil. (Act I, Sc. III)<sup>6</sup>

The same woman has appeared in another shape before another gaze. That shows how masterfully the characters are differentiated through their speeches. Fareed, Almuene's son, who wishes his father to buy Anice for him, sees her according to his nature:

Such hands! such eyes! such hips! such legs! I am  
Impatient till my elbows meet around her. (Act I, Sc. II)<sup>7</sup>

Alfazzal sees her as a disguised Peri, who has descended from heaven. Nuruddene's initial response is very vital, but his speeches change gradually, with his attachment becoming finer in the later scenes. His cousin, Doonya, speaks of her romantically almost in the idiom of Tagore. The English language and the Bengali sensibility have been happily fused in the following speech:

There is a sea of laughter in your body;  
I find it billowing there beneath the calm  
And rippling sweetly out in smiles... (Act I, Sc. IV)<sup>8</sup>

Aurobindo Ghose was also under the spell of that leisurely romantic imagination in his twenties and early thirties. Although not quite frequent in the younger Tagore, in his mid-life poetry and plays this refined loquacity appears again and again. We find the Voice in *Red Oleanders* distinctly affected by this romantic fever:

On your face, there is the play of life, in your eyes and lips; at the back of you flows your black hair, the silent fall of death. The other day when my hands sank into it they felt the soft calm of dying. I long to sleep with my face hidden inside those thick black clusters. You don't know how tired I am!<sup>9</sup>

This is a characteristic efflux of Tagore, which is in harmony with the symbolic texture of his plays. Sri Aurobindo, who is using the Shakespearean model in a new age, uses it occasionally to indicate the consciousness of certain characters. When he puts this rhetoric in Doonya's mouth, he is certainly thinking of a jovial and good-natured girl with plenty of emotion hidden beneath. Dr. Prema Nandakumar draws our attention to the cluster of "likeable" and "good women" in the play (*Sri Aurobindo Circle*: 1969): Doonya, Anice, Ameena, Khatoon and the slaves Balkis and Mymoona. Sri Aurobindo, at that stage of his life, might have been fond of the legend of good women in a male dominated world. However, the artist in him made them all individual women with the help of the speeches reflecting their different life-motives. Sri Aurobindo believed that this unbalanced world would have gone to flames much earlier and that it was only humour which saved it from catastrophe. Perhaps, as an indication of his belief in humour (and sweet nonsense) as a cultural force, his image of the good vizier's house is full of fun and kind nonsense. There is no trace of that in Almuene and Fareed. The women, except for the kind Khatoon, from both the houses—the leading ladies and the slave girls—laugh and mock in their respective styles. It is natural for Khatoon to be grave. She lives constantly under the evil spell of Almuene. The farcical hypocrisies of Shaikh Ibrahim, the old superintendent of the Caliph's gardens, in Act IV, Scenes I, II and IV, contribute to the comic spirit of the play and foreshadow the happy ending. Inspired by Bagdadi wine and the presence of Anice before him, he drops the garb of hypocrisy and sings out the saga of his life:

When I was a young man,  
I'd a very good plan;  
Every maid that I met,  
In my lap I would set,  
What mattered her age or her colour?  
But now I am old  
And the girls they grow cold  
And my heartstrings, they ache  
At the faces they make,  
And my dancing is turned into dolour.<sup>10</sup>

Very deliberately, the playwright suspends his proverbial language skill and finer sense of humour and uses a coarse style, which is ideally suited to the consciousness of the perverted old man. Perhaps, Sri Aurobindo left a clue for the new playwrights that the Shakespearean form and style could still be used in the new age and that drama might move further ahead along the same lines. *The Viziers of Bassora* solves, in its own way, the problem of contemporary speech-rhythm in a Shakespearean framework.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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*I can understand that the unregenerate vital attached to its own petty sufferings and pleasures, to the brief ignorant drama of life, should shrink from what will change it. But why should a God-lover, a God-seeker, a sadhak fear the divinisation of the consciousness? Why should he object to become one in nature with what he seeks, why should he recoil from sādṛśya-mukti? Behind this fear there are usually two causes: first, there is the feeling of the vital that it will have to cease to be obscure, crude, muddy, egoistic, unrefined (spiritually), full of stimulating desires and small pleasures and interesting sufferings (for it shrinks even from the Ananda which will replace this); next there is some vague ignorant idea of the mind, due, I suppose, to the ascetic tradition, that the divine nature is something cold, bare, empty, austere, aloof, without the glorious riches of the egoistic human vital life. As if there were not a divine vital and as if that divine vital is not itself and, when it gets the means to manifest, will not make the life on earth also infinitely more full of beauty, love, radiance, warmth, fire, intensity and divine passion and capacity for bliss than the present impotent, suffering, pettily and transiently excited and soon tired vitality of the still so imperfect human creation.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 89-90)

## THE SECRET HONEY

SOMETIMES just when we should be giving  
We batten down the hatches of our heart  
And so lose out on the honey of living  
Its silent music, its hidden sweetness,  
Its most essential part.

When we are attacked  
We fail to see that often the aggressor  
Is far more frightened than ourself.  
Instead of handing him his courage which is ours  
We either shake and shiver and try to save our self,  
Or give him as good as we got, we'll say.  
Ah! but where is the goodness in that?

It's merely marketplace-pricing of tit for tat.  
An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth  
And we're like to end up bloody and battered  
In a sort of vital undertaker's booth.

If we're a little open to that splendour only dreamed of here  
The drop of Light will slip into our crown  
And shine a moment on the brow  
Before transmuting from the ever after  
Into the ever waiting now.  
We'll know exactly what to say and when,  
And what to do and how.  
Word and thought and gesture then  
In their most splendid vesture  
Will send forth a perfumed trace,  
And shine out from us in grace.

There's a secret to be garnered  
From the dark encounters with our kin  
If we would cover ourselves with glory  
And avoid a psychological version of Cain's sin

We are all warriors of the unexpected.  
Neither you nor he nor we can ever win  
For we are all One in the Field  
From which no one of us can be deleted.

How to release the sealed-up words?  
 How give them voice?  
 How to unlock the limbs for the gracious gesture?  
 There is a way. Rejoice.

The hard shells that guard the secret honey  
 Require a moment simple and humble:  
 In our surrender to Her instantly they crumble.

MAGGI

*Art, poetry, music are not yoga, not in themselves things spiritual any more than philosophy is a thing spiritual or Science. There lurks here another curious incapacity of the modern intellect—its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth that the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flashes, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light. It is not less true that, looked at from the peaks, there is not much difference between the high mental eminences and the lower climbings of this external existence. All the energies of the Lila are equal in the sight from above, all are disguises of the Divine. But one has to add that all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine. A philosophic statement about the Atman is a mental formula, not knowledge, not experience; yet sometimes the Divine takes it as a channel of touch; strangely, a barrier in the mind breaks down, something is seen, a profound change operated in some inner part, there enters into the ground of the nature something calm, equal, ineffable. One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite. Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what?—a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother. Similar touches can come through art, music, poetry to their creator or to one who feels the shock of the word, the hidden significance of a form, a message in the sound that carries more perhaps than was consciously meant by the composer. All things in the Lila can turn into windows that open on the hidden Reality. Still so long as one is satisfied with looking through windows, the gain is only initial; one day one will have to take up the pilgrim's staff and start out to journey there where the Reality is for ever manifest and present. Still less can it be spiritually satisfying to remain with shadowy reflections, a search imposes itself for the Light which they strive to figure. But since this Reality and this Light are in ourselves no less than in some high region above the mortal plane, we can in the seeking for it use many of the figures and activities of life; as one offers a flower, a prayer, an act to the Divine, one can offer too a created form of beauty, a song, a poem, an image, a strain of music, and gain through it a contact, a response or an experience.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 198-200)



## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Chasing the Rainbow—Growing Up in an Indian Village** by Manoj Das. Published by Oxford University Press, 2004.

THE village in question is Sankhari in Orissa, on the borders of Bengal. It was a village by the sea, (it may be noted that the Oriya version of this book was called just that, *Samudra Kulara Eka Grama*), 25 miles from the nearest railway station and 7 miles from the bus terminus. Yet for the boy of four (that is his earliest recollection in this book) during his years of growing up into a youth of 14 (that is where the main recollections end) it was filled with joys and new experiences in the protected circle of family affection and understanding companions.

And yet, “the village in my world was not a fairy tale world, as would be evident from the accounts of human misery and collective tension described in a few chapters,” says the writer. The terrible cyclone that hit the coast of Bengal in 1942 and wreaked unprecedented havoc over the whole region is shown by the ruined houses, the dead cattle, an old woman found dead under a collapsed wall, the sea’s fury, and the whole village huddling for shelter,—images that leave a deep impression on the little boy. The story of young lovers drowning after setting out in a leaky boat, the experience of seeing his own home ransacked by a gang of armed dacoits, the sudden meeting with a madwoman, the insane fury of communal riots are some of the incidents that the little boy lived through. This is not the world of fairy tales—it is life at its starkest. But in the telling, there is no lingering on the dramatic or an elaboration of the pathetic. There is always the child’s perspective, the immediate impact and a moving on to the next scene, perhaps merely a sentence to suggest the meaning, and a hint of dawning understanding, just that. Life does not stop, not even for calamities and tragedies.

“But it was still a world where a child could run across a green meadow studded with palm trees or along the ridges of lakes teeming with red and white lotuses, aspiring to catch the end of a massive rainbow spanning the sky....”

And it is this rainbow, this sensed but ungraspable beauty in life and in people that the author has tried to capture.

“The sun was setting. Outlined on the opposite horizon was a range of hills. Over it flashed a rainbow. A year ago, another rainbow spanning the eastern horizon of my own village had tempted me to try to catch its end hidden behind a row of trees though it eluded me rather treacherously. But who knew if the rainbows in this region were not more friendly....”

And then, there is the description of the scene when the boy enters a thatched hut that housed a deity, and lights some incense sticks: “The fragrance elated me, so much so that I felt like I had succeeded in catching the rainbow and flying through it from one end to the other, landing in a world of still more resplendent rainbows...”

Even the inevitable necessity of having to learn to read and write is met with the child's question, "Would the rainbow or the hills look more charming if I could write?"

There is in the lives of the people whom we meet a sense of sympathy for creatures, a kind of innate understanding of the needs of another person. There are in the book instances of the charm of chance meetings, sudden encounters with the supernatural, a description of the preparations for a wedding in the family, the sight of a whole village going up in flames, the excitement caused by a British war-plane crashing during the War, the discovery that the butcher turns out to be not so terrible a person after all, and so much else.

In contrast, there is the phase of moving away from the village, the acquaintance with the town, and the shock of seeing firsthand the snobbery and duplicity of city life. But even there, the writer is careful to show the redeeming trait, for although there may be some persons who may exploit others, there are still people who reaffirm our faith in man.

In his introduction, the author spells out: "Mine is not a sociological study; in fact it is not a study at all in any academic sense. It is yet another pasture I have explored outside, but adjoining the frontiers of my regular territory—short stories and novels."

There is here stuff enough for several novels. But one wonders whether that larger canvas and the requirements of a sustained narrative and elaboration would so effectively bring to life the joys and the pathos of the characters who make their appearance here, even if fleetingly, and leave their mark on the reader's mind. A number of the pieces in this collection start off as reminiscences and end up almost like well-turned short stories, with their distinctive and often suggestive endings.

In his introduction, the writer says, "India of the twentieth century experienced momentous transitions: from colonial rule to freedom, from feudalism to democracy... these naturally wrought radical changes in the philosophy of life of the people, in their attitude to the vital socio-political issues as well as their lifestyles. But the most conspicuous in this sweeping process of transitions and changes has been the rapid metamorphosis of village India..." And he admits, "Nostalgia has certainly been a driving force behind my recreating these lost moments, situations, characters. But the real inspiration behind the exercise has been the fear that they will be lost to a future that is bound to be different from them."

It may seem to the reader that the depiction here is too particular, that it does not paint the larger and typical reality of village life in India. The writer has anticipated this response, and this is his answer, "I may appear to be romanticising reality, but that is because I have been faithful to the vision I had as a child and a young boy—a vision that was by all means subjective, but vibrantly true so far as the observer was concerned."

Evoking the leisurely pace, the simple charms, the innocence, the drama of the

unusual, the pieces in this book speak essentially about human nature, its foibles and its inherent goodness.

S. G. MESUR

*And I have seen just the contrary. I have seen in this country, here, village people who had only such water as was no longer water to drink, it was mere mud, I have seen it with my own eyes. It was yellowish mud in which cows had bathed and done all the rest and people had waded through it after walking on the roads. They threw their rubbish and everything was in it. And then I saw these people. They entered it, it was, as I said, yellowish mud and there at the end there was a little bit of water—it was not water, it was yellowish, you know—they bent over, collected this water in their palms and drank it. And there were some who did not even allow it to settle. Some knew what to put in it, the herbs needed to make it settle, and if one leaves it sufficiently long it becomes a little clearer. But there were some who knew nothing at all and drank it as it was. And I came to learn that there was just then an epidemic of cholera all round and I said: “There are still people living in that village with that kind of water?” I was told: “We do not have a single case of cholera....” They had become immune, they were habituated. But if there had been a single person who had caught it by chance, probably all would have been dead; for then fear would enter and with fear in them there would be no more resistance, for they were poor miserable things. But it is the moral conditions of these people that are terrible, more than the physical conditions—the moral conditions.*

*There are sadhus, you know, who accept the conditions of a dirty life through saintliness. They never wash themselves, they have nothing about them that hygiene demands. They live in a truly dirty condition—and they are free from all illness. Probably because they have faith and they do so purposely. Their morale is magnificent.... I am speaking of sincere people and not those who pretend. They have faith. They do not think of their body, they think of the life of their soul. They have no illness. There are some who come to a state in which an arm or a leg or any part of the body has become completely stiff due to their ascetic posture. They cannot move any more; anybody else would die under such conditions; they continue to live because they have faith and they do it purposely, because it is a thing they have imposed on themselves.*

*Therefore, the moral condition is much more important than the physical.*

*The Mother*

(Questions and Answers, CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 171-72)