

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## DISCOVERIES OF SCIENCE II

How shall ascending nature near her goal?<sup>1</sup>  
Not through man's stumbling tardy intellect  
Patient all forms and powers<sup>2</sup> to dissect  
But by the surer vision of his soul.

An algebra of mind, a scheme of sense,  
A symbol language without depth or wings,  
A power to handle deftly outward things  
Are our scant earnings<sup>3</sup> of intelligence.

The Truth<sup>4</sup> is greater and asks<sup>5</sup> deeper ways.  
A sense that gathers all in its own being,<sup>6</sup>  
A close and luminous touch,<sup>7</sup> an intimate seeing,  
A Thought flung free from the words' daedal maze,<sup>8</sup>

A tranquil heart in sympathy with all,  
A will one-pointed, wide, imperial.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 167)*

1. How shall earth's evolution find its goal?
2. Godheads
3. Is our poor booty
4. Our Spirit/The Soul
5. has
6. into our being,
7. A luminous touch direct,
8. A Thought that is a god's all-seeing gaze,

### DISCOVERIES OF SCIENCE III

Our science is an abstract cold and brief  
That cuts in formulas the living whole.  
It has a brain and head but not a soul:  
It sees all things in outward carved relief.

But how without its depths can the world be known?  
The visible has its roots in the unseen  
And each invisible hides what it can mean  
In a yet deeper invisible, unshown.

The objects that you probe are not their form.  
Each is a mass of forces thrown in shape.  
The forces caught, their inner lines escape  
In a fathomless consciousness beyond mind's norm.

Probe it and you shall meet a Being<sup>1</sup> still  
Infinite, nameless, mute, unknowable.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 168)*

## ‘EINSTEIN, JEANS, VEDANTA’

THE Isha Upanishad passage<sup>1</sup> is of course a much larger statement of the nature of universal existence than the Einstein theory which is confined to the physical universe. You can deduce too a much larger law of relativity from the statement in the verse. What it means from this point of view—for it contains much more in it—is that the absolute Reality exists, but it is immovable and always the same, the universal movement is a motion of consciousness in this Reality of which only the Transcendent itself can seize the truth, which is self-evident to It, while the apprehension of it by the Gods (the mind, senses, etc.) must necessarily be imperfect and relative, since they can try to follow but none can really overtake (apprehend or seize) that Truth, each being limited by its own viewpoint,<sup>2</sup> lesser instrumentality or capacity of consciousness, etc. This is the familiar attitude of the Indian or at least the Vedantic mind which held that our knowledge, perception and experience of things in the world and of the world itself must be *vyāvahārika*, relative, practical or pragmatic only,—so declared Shankara,—it is in fact an illusory knowledge, the real Truth of things lying beyond our mental and sensory consciousness. Einstein’s relativity is a scientific, not a metaphysical statement. The form and field of it are different—but, I suppose, if one goes back from it and beyond it to its essential significance, the real reason for its being so, one can connect it with the Vedantic conclusion. But to justify that to the intellect, you would have to go through a whole process to show how the connection comes—it does not self-evidently follow.

As for Jeans, many would say that his conclusions are not at all legitimate. Einstein’s law is a scientific generalisation based upon certain relations proper to the domain of physics and, if valid, valid there in the limits of that domain, or, if you like, in the general domain of scientific observation and measurement of physical processes and motions; but how can you transform that at once into a metaphysical generalisation? It is a jump over a considerable gulf—or a forceful transformation of one thing into another, of a limited physical result into an unlimited all-embracing formula. I don’t quite know what Einstein’s law really amounts to, but does it amount to more than this that our scientific measurements of time and other things are, in the conditions under which they have to be made, relative because subject to the unavoidable drawback of these conditions? What metaphysically follows from that—if anything at all does follow—it is for the metaphysicians, not the scientists to determine. The Vedantic position was that the Mind itself (as well as the senses) is a limited power making its own representations, constructions, formations and imposing

1. “One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run.” *Isha Upanishad*, Verse 4. Sri Aurobindo’s translation. See Sri Aurobindo, *Eight Upanishads* (1965 Edition), p. 5.

2. The Gods besides are in and subject to Space and Time, part of the motion in Space and Time, not superior to it.

them on the Reality. That is a much bigger and more intricate affair shooting down into the very roots of our existence. I think myself there are many positions taken by modern Science which tend to be helpful to that view—though in the nature of things they cannot be sufficient to prove it.

I state the objections only; I myself see certain fundamental truths underlying all the domains and the one Reality everywhere. But there is also a great difference in the instruments used and the ways of research followed by the seekers in these different ways (the physical, the occult and the spiritual) and for the intellect at least the bridge between them has still to be built. One can point out analogies, but it can be maintained very well that Science cannot be used for yielding or buttressing results of spiritual knowledge. The other side can be maintained also and it is best that both should be stated—so this is not meant to discourage your thesis.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 210-11)

***‘The Principle of The Isha Upanishad’***

*The principle it follows throughout is the uncompromising reconciliation of uncompromising extremes. Later thought took one series of terms,—the World, Enjoyment, Action, the Many, Birth, the Ignorance,—and gave them a more and more secondary position, exalting the opposite series, God, Renunciation, Quietism, the One, Cessation of Birth, the Knowledge until this trend of thought culminated in Illusionism and the idea of existence in the world as a snare and a meaningless burden imposed inexplicably on the soul by itself, which must be cast aside as soon as possible. It ended in a violent cutting of the knot of the great enigma. This Upanishad tries instead to get hold of the extreme ends of the knots, disengage and place them alongside of each other in a release that will be at the same time a right placing and relation. It will not qualify or subordinate unduly any of the extremes, although it recognises a dependence of one on the other. Renunciation is to go to the extreme, but also enjoyment is to be equally integral; Action has to be complete and ungrudging, but also freedom of the soul from its works must be absolute; Unity utter and absolute is the goal, but this absoluteness has to be brought to its highest term by including in it the whole infinite multiplicity of things.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*The Upanishads*, part one, 1981, pp. 90-91)

## **SHE LEADS US TO HIM SHE BRINGS HIM CLOSER TO US**

[A compilation of passages from the Mother's *Questions and Answers*  
where she speaks of Sri Aurobindo]

*(Continued from the issue of November 2005)*

### **113. Looking Life in the Face**

*What does this sentence mean: "Look life in the face from the soul's inner strength and become master of circumstances"?*

That is precisely the opposite of the method which consists in rejecting the whole of the physical consciousness and all physical events. "Look life in the face", this means: don't turn your back on it! It means: face life as it is instead of running away from it and call to your aid the inner psychic force—this is what Sri Aurobindo says: "the soul's inner strength", the inner psychic force—and with the help of this psychic consciousness rise above circumstances and master them. That is to say, instead of submitting to all that comes and suffering all its consequences, one rises above circumstances and lets them pass like things that do not touch you and do not impair your consciousness. That is what it means.

(M 8: 300)

### **114. The Promise and the Conditions**

Some days ago, during the Translation Class<sup>1</sup> I found a passage in *The Life Divine* which, I thought, might interest you this evening. Sri Aurobindo is speaking of the movement of Nature and he explains how from matter which seems inert came life, then how from life mind emerged and also how from mind will emerge the supermind or the spiritual life; and he gives a kind of brief survey of the time it takes. I am going to read this passage to you and shall tell you later what connection it has with our present situation:

*"The first obscure material movement of the evolutionary Force is marked by an aeonic graduality; the movement of life-progress proceeds slowly but still with a quicker step, it is concentrated into the figure of millenniums; mind can still further compress the tardy leisureliness of Time and make long paces of the centuries; but when the conscious spirit intervenes, a supremely concentrated pace of evolutionary swiftness becomes possible."*

*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 932

I am reading this to you because I have been asked about the action of the Supermind, and I had compared this manifestation of the Supermind to that of the mind which, according to all modern scientific discoveries, took nearly a million years to evolve from the animal brain, the ape-brain, to the first human brain. And I told you that, consequently, one should not expect this to take place in a few months or a few years, that it would obviously take much longer. Some people, it seems, thought that I was announcing that the superman would not come before another million years! I want to correct this impression.

Sri Aurobindo has said that as the development rises in the scale of consciousness, the movement becomes more and more rapid, and that when the Spirit or the Supermind intervenes, it can go much faster. Therefore we may hope that in a few centuries, the first supramental race will appear.

But even that is rather disconcerting for some people, for they think it contradicts what Sri Aurobindo has always promised: that the time has come for the supramental transformation to be possible.... But we must not confuse a supramental transformation with the appearing of a new race.

What Sri Aurobindo promised and what naturally interests us, we who are here now, is that the time has come when some beings among the *élite* of humanity, who fulfil the conditions necessary for spiritualisation, will be able to transform their bodies with the help of the supramental Force, Consciousness and Light, so as no longer to be animal-men but become supermen.

This promise Sri Aurobindo has made and he based it on the knowledge he had that the supramental Force was on the point of manifesting on the earth. In fact it had descended in him long ago, he knew it and knew what its effects were.

And now that it has manifested universally, I could say, generally, the certainty of the possibility of transformation is of course still greater. There is no longer any doubt that those who will fulfil or who now fulfil the conditions are on the way to this transformation.

The conditions Sri Aurobindo gives in detail in *The Synthesis of Yoga* and in still greater detail in his last articles on the Supramental Manifestation.<sup>2</sup> So now it is only a question of realisation.

\* \* \*

1. Until 1958, three times a week, in another class, Mother used to translate into French certain books of Sri Aurobindo: *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, the last six chapters of *The Life Divine* and the first part of *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

2. See *The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 1-74.



## 115. Nothing is Done until Everything is Done

I believe Sri Aurobindo has said this: things are such that it may be said that nothing is done until everything is done. One step ahead is not enough, a total conversion is necessary.

How many times have I heard people who were making an effort say, “I try, but what’s the use of my trying? Every time I think I have gained something, I find that I must begin all over again.” This happens because they are trying to go forward while standing still, they are trying to progress without changing their consciousness. It is the entire point of view which must be shifted, the whole consciousness must get out of the rut in which it lies so as to rise up and see things from above. It is only thus that victories will not be changed into defeats.

(M 8: 402)

## 116. Contempt for the Material World

...Naturally, there is the same idea in India, this idea of the complete renunciation of all physical reality, the profound contempt for the material world which is considered an illusion and a falsehood, that leaves, as Sri Aurobindo used to say, the field free to the sovereign sway of the adverse forces. If you escape from the concrete reality to seek a distant and abstract one, you leave the whole field of concrete realisation at the full disposal of the adverse forces—which have taken hold of it and more or less govern it now—in order to go away yourself to realise what Sri Aurobindo calls here a zero or a void unit—to become the sovereign of a nought. It is the return into Nirvana. This idea is everywhere in the world but expresses itself in different forms.

(M 9: 4)

## 117. Mental Silence

*Sweet Mother, what does “artistry” mean?*

What most men call “artistry” is just contrast. Artists say and feel that it is the shadows which make the light, that if there were no contrasts, they would not be able to make a picture. It is the same thing with music: the contrast between “forte” and “piano” is one of the greatest charms of music.

I knew some poets who used to say, “It is my enemies’ hatred which makes me value the affection of my friends....” And it is the almost inevitable likelihood of misfortune which gives all its savour to happiness, and so on. And they value repose

only in contrast with the daily agitation, silence only because of the usual noise, and some of them even tell you, "Oh! it is because there are illnesses that good health is cherished". It goes so far that a thing is valued only when it is lost. And as Sri Aurobindo says here<sup>1</sup>: When this fever of action, of movement, this agitation of creative thought is not there, one feels one is falling into inertia. Most people fear silence, calm, quietude. They no longer feel alive when they are not agitated.

I have seen many cases in which Sri Aurobindo had given silence to somebody, had made his mind silent, and that person came back to him in a kind of despair, saying: "But I have become stupid!" For his thought was no longer excited.

What he says here is terribly true. Men want freedom but they are in love with their chains, and when one wants to take them away, when one wants to show them the path of true liberation, they are afraid, and often they even protest.

(M 9: 28)

\* \* \*

[1. *Thoughts and Glimpses*, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 385]

## 118. Indispensable First Step

To be a true leader one must be completely disinterested and efface from oneself as much as possible all self-regard and all selfish movements. To be a leader one must master one's ego, and to master one's ego is the first indispensable step for doing yoga. And this is what can make sports a powerful aid for the realisation of the Divine.

Very few people understand this, and generally those who are against this outer discipline of sports, this concentration on the material realisation, are people who *completely* lack control over their physical being. And to realise the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo the control of one's body is a first *indispensable* step. Those who despise physical activities are people who won't be able to take a single step on the true path of integral yoga, unless they first get rid of their contempt. Control of the body in all its forms is an indispensable basis. A body which dominates you is an enemy, it is a disorder you cannot accept. It is the enlightened will in the mind which should govern the body, and not the body which should impose its law on the mind. When one knows that a thing is bad, one must be capable of not doing it. When one wants something to be realised, one must be able to do it and not be stopped at every step by the body's inability or ill-will or lack of collaboration; and for that one must follow a physical discipline and become master in one's own home.

It is very fine to escape into meditation and from the height of one's so-called grandeur look down on material things, but one who is not master in his own home is a slave.

(M 9: 82-83)

## 119. Working from Both Ends

And this is precisely the key to the effort Sri Aurobindo wanted us to make.

And your body, if you draw from it all the possibilities it holds, if you educate it by the normal, well-known, scientific methods, if you make this instrument into something as perfect as possible, then, when the supramental truth manifests in that body, it will become *immediately*—without centuries of preparation—a marvellous instrument for the expression of the Spirit.

That is why Sri Aurobindo used to repeat and has always said: You must work from both ends, not let go of one for the other. And certainly, if you want to have a divine consciousness, you must not give up spiritual aspiration; but if you want to become an integral divine being on earth, take good care not to let go of the other end, and make your body the best possible instrument.

It is a disease of the ordinary human intellect—which comes, moreover, from separation, division—to make a thing always *either* this *or* that. If you choose this, you turn your back on that; if you choose that, you turn your back on this.

It is an impoverishment. One must know how to take up everything, combine everything, synthesise everything. And then one has an integral realisation.

(M 9: 95)

## 120. The Answer to Every Question

In fact, if one reads attentively what Sri Aurobindo has written, all that he has written, one would have the answer to every question. But there are certain moments and certain ways of presenting ideas which have a dynamic effect on the consciousness and help you to make a spiritual progress. The presentation, to be effective, must necessarily be the spontaneous expression of an immediate experience. If things which have already been said are repeated in the same manner, things which belong to past experiences, it becomes a sort of teaching, what could be called didactic talk, and it sets off some cells in the brain, but in fact is not very useful.

(M 9: 113-14)

## 121. His Own Experience

*“It is indeed possible even while fasting for very long periods to maintain the full energies and activities of the soul and mind and life, even those of the body, to remain wakeful but concentrated in Yoga all the time, or to think deeply and write day and night, to dispense with sleep, to walk eight hours a day, maintaining*

*all these activities separately or together and not feel any loss of strength, any fatigue, any kind of failure or decadence. At the end of the fast one can even resume at once taking the normal or even a greater than the normal amount of nourishment without any transition or precaution such as medical science enjoins, as if both the complete fasting and the feasting were natural conditions, alternating by an immediate and easy passage from one to the other, of a body already trained by a sort of initial transformation to be an instrument of the powers and activities of Yoga. But one thing one does not escape and that is the wasting of the material tissues of the body, its flesh and substance. Conceivably, if a practicable way and means could only be found, this last invincible obstacle too might be overcome and the body maintained by an interchange of its forces with the forces of material Nature, giving to her her need from the individual and taking from her directly the sustaining energies of her universal existence. Conceivably, one might rediscover and re-establish at the summit of the evolution of life the phenomenon we see at its base, the power to draw from all around it the means of sustenance and self-renewal. Or else the evolved being might acquire the greater power to draw down those means from above rather than draw them up or pull them in from the environment around, all about it and below it.”*

*The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 28-29*

The description Sri Aurobindo gives here of the possibility of a prolonged fast while maintaining all activities, is a description of his own experience.

He is not speaking of a possibility but of something he has done. But it would be a great mistake to believe that it is an experience that can be imitated in its outer appearance; and even if one managed to do it by an effort of will, it would be perfectly useless from the spiritual point of view, if the experience has not been preceded by a change of consciousness which would be a preliminary liberation.

(M 9: 117-18)

## **122. Invitation to the Great Adventure**

Then I truly understood—for I understood not with the head, the intelligence but with the body, you understand what I mean—I understood in the cells of the body—that a new world *is born* and is beginning to grow.

And so, when I saw all this, I remembered something that had happened.... I think I remember rightly, in 1926.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had given me charge of the outer work because he wanted to withdraw into concentration in order to hasten the manifestation of the supramental consciousness and he had announced to the few people who were there that he was

entrusting to me the work of helping and guiding them, that I would remain in contact with him, naturally, and that through me he would do the work. Suddenly, immediately, things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and... I must say, in an extremely interesting way.

One day, I went as usual to relate to Sri Aurobindo what had been happening—we had come to something really very interesting, and perhaps I showed a little enthusiasm in my account of what had taken place—then Sri Aurobindo looked at me... and said: “Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed,...” and then he smiled and said: “It will be a *great* success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.”

With my inner consciousness I understood immediately: a few hours later the creation was gone... and from that moment we started anew on other bases.

Well, I announced to you all that this new world was born. But it has been so engulfed, as it were, in the old world that so far the difference has not been very perceptible to many people. Still, the action of the new forces has continued very regularly, very persistently, very steadily, and to a certain extent, very effectively. And one of the manifestations of this action was my experience—truly so very new—of yesterday evening. And the result of all this I have noted step by step in almost daily experiences. It could be expressed succinctly, in a rather linear way:

First, it is not only a “new conception” of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This conception was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself many a time, and it could be formulated somewhat like this: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world just where it was, as it was; whereas our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, indeed it is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation with an improvement, a widening of the old world as it was—and so long as this is a conception up there in the field of thought, in fact it is hardly more than that—but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed—unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn’t disturb anything very much, for the time being,

and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly.

In any case, to simplify things, it could be said that characteristically the old world, the creation of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind, was an age of the gods, and consequently the age of religions. As I said, the flower of human effort towards what is above it gave rise to innumerable religious forms, to a religious relationship between the best souls and the invisible world. And at the very summit of all that, as an effort towards a higher realisation there has arisen the idea of the unity of religions, of this “one single thing” which is behind all these manifestations; and this idea has truly been, so to speak, the extreme limit of human aspiration. Well, that is at the frontier, it is something that still belongs *completely* to the Overmind world, the Overmind creation and which from there seems to be looking towards this “other thing” which is a new creation it cannot grasp—which it tries to reach, feels coming, but cannot grasp. To grasp it, a reversal is needed. It is necessary to leave the Overmind creation. It was necessary that the new creation, the supramental creation should take place.

And now, all these old things seem so old, so out-of-date, so arbitrary—such a travesty of the real truth.

In the supramental creation there will *no longer be any religions*. The whole life will be the expression, the flowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call gods.

These great divine beings themselves will be able to participate in the new creation; but to do so, they will have to put on what we could call the “supramental substance” on earth. And if some of them choose to remain in their world as they are, if they decide not to manifest physically, their relation with the beings of a supramental earth will be a relation of friends, collaborators, equals, for the highest divine essence will be manifested in the beings of the new supramental world on earth.

When the physical substance is supramentalised, to incarnate on earth will no longer be a cause of inferiority, quite the contrary. It will give a plenitude which cannot be obtained otherwise.

But all this is in the future; it is a future... which has *begun*, but which will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world; it is very young, very weak—not in its essence but in its outer manifestation—not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely *sure* of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out—nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, a *universal beginning*. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: “I invite you to the great adventure.”

It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails—a *real adventure*, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will *never* be again in the same way. If that interests you... well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow—I have no idea.

One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then... set off walking into the unknown. And—come what may! There.

\* \* \*

1. On 24 November 1926 Sri Aurobindo withdrew into seclusion and Mother assumed charge of the running of the Ashram. [See pp. 1113-16 in this issue.]

(M 9: 148-52)

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(*To be continued*)

### ***On First Meeting Sri Aurobindo***

*Gradually the horizon becomes distinct, the path grows clear, and we move towards a greater and greater certitude.*

*It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.*

*O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.*

*My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent.*

*The Mother*

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 113)



## ‘MODERN SCIENCE’

THE only really important thing modern science has discovered is that from the purely outer and physical point of view things are not what they seem to be. When you look at a body, a human being, an object, a landscape, you perceive these things with the help of your eyes, your touch, hearing and, for the details, smell and taste; well, science tells you: “All that is illusory, you don’t see things at all as they are, you don’t touch them as they really are, you don’t smell them as they really are, you don’t taste them as they really are. It is the structure of your organs which puts you in contact with these things in a particular way which is entirely superficial, external, illusory and unreal.”

From the point of view of science, you are a mass of—not even of atoms—of something infinitely more imperceptible than an atom, which is in perpetual movement. There is absolutely nothing which is like a face, a nose, eyes, a mouth; it is only just an appearance. And scientists come to this conclusion—like the uncompromising spiritualists of the past—that the world is an illusion. That is a great discovery, very great.... One step more and they will enter into the Truth. So, when somebody comes and says, “But I *see* this, I *touch* it, I *feel* it, I am sure of it”, from the scientific point of view it’s nonsense. This could be said only by someone who has never made a scientific study of things as they are. So, by diametrically opposite roads they have come to the same result: the world as you see it is an illusion.

Now what is the truth behind this? People who have sought spiritual knowledge tell you, “We have experienced it”, but of course it is a purely subjective experience; there are as yet no grounds on which one can say absolutely that the experience is beyond question for everybody. Everyone’s experience is beyond question for him. And if one takes it a little further...

In fact, the value of an experience or a discovery could perhaps be proved by the power it gives, the power to change these appearances and transform things, circumstances and the world as it appears to us, in accordance with the will that manifests through that experience. It seems to me that the most universal proof of the validity of an individual or collective experience would be its power to make things—these appearances that we call the world—different from what they are. From the subjective point of view, the effect of the experience on an individual consciousness is an undeniable proof; for one who attains bliss, sovereign peace, unchanging delight, the profound knowledge of things, it is more than proved. The effects on the outer form depend on many other things besides the experience itself—depend perhaps on the first cause of these experiences—but out of all this, *one* thing seems to be a proof which is accessible to other people as well as to the one who has the experience; it is the power over other people and things—which for the ordinary consciousness is “objective”. For instance, if a person who has attained the state of consciousness I am speaking about, had the power of communicating it to others, it would be partially



—only partially—a proof of the reality of his experiences; but further, if the state of consciousness in which he is—for instance, a state of perfect harmony—could create this harmony in the outer world, in what apparently is not harmony, it would be, I think, the proof most readily accepted, even by the materialist scientific mind. If these illusory appearances could be changed into something more beautiful, more harmonious, happier than the world we live in now, this would perhaps be an undeniable proof.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers* 57-58, CWM, Vol. 9, pp. 239-40)

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### SRI AUROBINDO’S COMPASSION

*Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion* is everywhere.

The flowers have bloomed in abundance in all their glory.

They are of every possible shade of pink, yellow, orange, red and purple.

The pinks awaken the psychic depths, reminding us of our Mother.

The yellows and golds and orange suggest the heights from mind to supermind and beyond revealed to us by Sri Aurobindo.

The reds and purples send thrills through our physical and vital auras.

And the pure brilliant whites pour the pearl-like integral light all over us and the entire atmosphere.

*Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion*: these flowers had never bloomed in such abundance and profusion.

The year 2005 perhaps needed this overwhelming compassion—and it comes in the form of flowers which even the not-so-conscious can see.

We bow down in gratitude.

SUNANDA

## ‘SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE’

THE scientist will tell you: Study the laws of Nature, know all that it can teach you, and it will give you the knowledge which will enable you to master life and become its possessor instead of being possessed by it. But here we see, according to what we have just read, that as he goes on studying and searching, sincerely and more and more deeply, he becomes aware that there is something which eludes him, because, quite naturally, he comes to the limit of the material world and, there, he faces a precipice; he can no longer carry on his research in what is beyond, because the same methods don't suffice.

\*

*Is it not possible to know the universe in its reality as it is in itself, independently of the observer or thinker?*

Yes, there is a way: it is by identification. But obviously it is a means which eludes absolutely all physical methods. I think that this weakness comes solely from the method used, because one has remained in an absolutely superficial consciousness; and the phenomenon which took place the first time takes place again a second time. If you push your investigation far enough, you suddenly come to a point where your physical methods are no longer of any worth. And in fact one can know only what one is. So if you want to know the universe, you must become the universe. You cannot become the universe physically, you know; but perhaps there is a way of becoming the universe: it is in the consciousness.

If you identify your consciousness with the universal consciousness, then you know what is happening.

But that's the only way; there are no others. It is an absolute fact that one knows only what one is, and if one wants to know something, one must become that.

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1955, CWM, Vol. 7, pp. 317, 319)*

## EINSTEIN'S FOUR-DIMENSIONAL CONTINUUM

*(Continued from the issue of November 2005)*

### 2

If Einstein's four-dimensional continuum of space-time is, as we have shown, a reality and a revolutionary one at that because of the actual fusion of space and time in it, is the revolution introduced by it confined to physics, with no bearing on a philosophical view of the world, or does it call for a look by us in a direction beyond materialism?

The actual fusion does not, of course, reduce time to a space-dimension: time is still time, but it acquires the properties of space. A fourth dimension of space would break the limitations of the three space-dimensions: for instance, if one had a fourth space-dimension to move in, one would not be limited by being enclosed in a room covered in the directions of length, breadth and height, for one more direction would remain without any cover and one could enter the room from it. But the time-element would not be changed in any basic sense: time would continue to be a movement from past to present to future just as much as it is now in our normal vision of it. When the dimension of time enters into a four-dimensional continuum and is welded on to space in the way in which within space itself the three dimensions of length, breadth and height are welded to one another, then it is not the spatial limitations of these dimensions that are broken. What are broken are the limitations of time itself for those dimensions—limitations due to time's being a separate dimension from them. If time is fused with space in the continuum whose mathematical structure is specified by Minkowski's elucidation of the background of Einstein's relativities, time without ceasing to be time gets spatialised. To put it more concretely: just as all points of space are co-existent, all instants of time are co-existent—the past and present and future of spatial points co-exist as if they themselves were spread out in space.

Our heads are bound to grow dizzy with this import. But that is no test of its not being the truth. Nor can truth stop being truth when our heads grow dizzier still on our understanding what the scientific concept of causality and determinism becomes in connection with this import. Strict causality and determinism are there in the sense of an unseverable hanging together: the very word "continuum" ensures unbrokenness. But pre-relativity physics took causality and determinism to be working from past to present to future. In the four-dimensional continuum of actually fused space and time, where the three times co-exist, there is evidently no one such unique direction for causality and determinism to work in. So the scientific use of causality and determinism may be considered as representing for practical purposes the truth only if the experience which leads us to this use is the sole one or the predominant one. It certainly is not the sole one. We have the experience in which we feel a sense of freewill: there

we appear to be to some extent unbound by the past and creative of the future and able to recreate the past by depriving it of the effect the scientific use of causality and determinism would ascribe to it as inevitable. We have also the experience in which we feel a sense of goals or ends, of a purpose that seeks realisation as if from a future through the present and which, by causing the present, determines also the past which the present constantly becomes. The whole time-flow then seems in the direction opposite to that which is assumed by science. But, inasmuch as the latter is also never absent in our experience even when we have a sense of freewill and a sense of pre-existing and purpose-realising future and inasmuch as there has been no sure ground for not regarding the future as still to be born rather than as something already real and for regarding the present as co-existent with the past no less than with the future, we have allowed the experience leading to the scientific use of causality and determinism to bulk in our minds above any other. We have let this experience cast on the others a colour of unreality or lesser reality, things to be somehow brought into line with it. With the concept of the four-dimensional continuum we find that there is no reason to give that experience any predominance. So the direction dictated by that experience to causality and determinism can have only a certain degree of truth. Degrees of truth are possessed also by the directions suggested by our sense of freewill and our sense of pre-existing and purpose-realising future.

Perhaps the greatest degree of truth is given by what is actually our time-experience. What we know as time is a continuous present with projections into both the past and the future, projections concealed in the one case except in the form of memory and in the other except in the form of imaginative or predictive anticipation. The primary datum is the present, from which past and future are arrived at by means of theoretical constructions. If this is so, then in view of the impartiality of the four-dimensional continuum, our sense of limited freewill which is associated with the present may be taken by us as the truth predominantly supported by the absolute arrived at in Einsteinian physics.

We may even say that the four-dimensional continuum is precisely such as predominantly must support this truth in the world of threefold time-experience that is ours. For, what do we mean by a co-existence of past and present and future? Do we not mean an all-comprehensive Now, with no succession of events—a Now of which our continuous present is a faint inkling?

And taking a cue from our own limited Now and its sense of freewill we may surmise that the comprehensive Now of the ordered totality of events in all the three times is an immense multiple creativity. Such a conception does full justice to both the truths involved in the irregular regularity of the four-dimensional continuum: the truth of space by which points stand together and the truth of time by which instants succeed each other—a co-existence coupled with dynamism so that the spread-out events of the three times are the signs of an ordering creativity immense and multiple though non-successive.

It is difficult not to think this creativity the physical counterpart or expression of the freewill of a cosmic consciousness. We have definitely to look beyond materialism if we accept Minkowski's fusion of space and time to be actual. And Einstein's general relativity theory, which came ten years after his special or restricted one, does not in the least forbid us to do so. What that theory does is just to link up material masses with the four-dimensional continuum: it establishes a certain relation between these masses and space-time in the sense that the amount of material mass is proportional to a degree of geometrical structure of space-time and that the accelerations of the masses can be calculated according to the overall space-time structure answering to the comparatively larger or smaller mass-amounts neighbouring one another. Thus the movements of the planets around the sun are said to be in accordance with the more dominating structure in space-time answering to the sun's greater mass than the one answering to the smaller masses of the planets. Newton's force of gravitation which was supposed to act directly from mass to mass is dispensed with and an entirely new notion comes in by which the state of space-time between the disproportionate masses explains their mutual "gravitational" behaviour—a new notion which has passed some crucial tests in which Newton's calculations proved wrong.

The state of space-time involved is called in technical mathematical language "curvature". Newton had considered space to be "flat": just as on a flat surface the natural motion, as well as the shortest line between two points, is straight, so also in flat space the natural motion is straight and a straight line is the "geodesic" or shortest distance between two points. Space thus considered is known as Euclidian. Although some geometricians in the nineteenth century had evolved non-Euclidian geometries of space, nobody ever imagined that these could correspond to reality. But when, as we saw, Minkowski set up the formula of an irregularly regular four-dimensional continuum, the minus sign of the fourth dimension prevented the geometrical properties from being quite Euclidian as they would have been if no irregular feature had been there. His geometry was semi-Euclidian or hyperbolic rather than non-Euclidian. However, it opened Einstein's eyes to further possibilities and, when he attempted to bring into his scheme the accelerated motion characteristic of "gravitational" effect, he applied to the four-dimensional continuum the spherical geometry of Riemann, the geometry which Riemann had extended to space of three or more dimensions from a curved surface instead of the Euclidian geometry which had been extended to space from a flat surface. Einstein discovered that in space-time the simplest analogue of the quantity which for a curved surface is termed "curvature" solved his problem if he made the curvature proportional in a certain manner to the amount of material mass present. The curvature of space-time calculated in the region of the sun's neighbourhood gave in space the exact orbits of the planets and in time the exact change of speed-rhythm which the planets exhibit as they move nearer or farther from the sun in their various ellipses.

What bearing have the several features of the general relativity theory on the beyond-materialism interpretation? First, if the continuum is capable of geometrical structure, it must be “substantial” in some sense: the ordering, immense and multiple though non-successive, would represent not only a cosmic consciousness but also a cosmic being. The pointer away from materialism seems strengthened. Secondly, the material masses by being brought into relation with the “substantial” continuum may themselves be thought not only integrated with it in one whole but also identical with certain characteristics of it and appearing otherwise by simply being a certain manifestation of it. Of course, until all the characteristics of matter, particularly its atomicity, are explicable in terms of space-time structure, we cannot affirm this last possibility. Signs, however, are not lacking to persuade us that we are on the right track. They are noticeable in connection with the invariant “interval” in space-time which is the absolute of the relative distances and durations.

Sullivan, in his *Aspects of Science* (Second Series) puts the case very well. “From this relation, the interval,” he writes, “various complicated mathematical expressions may be built up by purely mathematical analysis. At a certain stage in this process we reach expressions which obey exactly the same equations as density, stress, momentum etc. Now these latter quantities, density and so on, form what a physicist means by a piece of matter. But the mathematical expressions derived from the interval refer to geometrical properties of the continuum—to its *curvature*, for example. What is the meaning of the fact that certain geometrical properties of the four-dimensional continuum and certain physical quantities, characteristic of matter, obey the same equations? The suggestion is that the physical quantities and the geometrical properties are the same thing...”

Their being the same and yet seeming different is explained by Sullivan in the immediately next phrase in terms that are a little doubtful. He states the above suggestion in other words as “that what we call matter is, indeed, only the way in which our minds perceive the existence of these geometrical peculiarities of the four-dimensional continuum.” No doubt, the human mind has a good deal of say in the perceptual experience that it has of reality; but the more balanced view would appear to be that the world of matter and of relative space and time is itself an actual manifestation of the four-dimensional continuum and certain aspects of this manifestation are discovered and interpreted by the human mind rather than completely created by it in response to that hidden reality. That reality and this manifestation have both of them the look of a physical counterpart or expression of a Conscious Being at work; so the granting of an “objective” status to the world of matter and of relative space and time does not diminish the primacy of Consciousness and what the human mind does in its perceptual experience is just to get into a particular sort of communication with the ultimate Consciousness. All is play of Consciousness, but a complex multifold play. And part of the play is the actual existence of Sullivan’s “matter” and of scientifically measured space and time as differentiations of one and the same quantity,

differentiations which seem distinctions as of two quantities so long as an event is studied in reference to a frame in relative motion at a rate very far from that of light but which reveal their true nature as soon as velocities nearing that of light are met with. The world or perceptual experience is very different really from our older pre-Einsteinian picture of it, yet it still remains objective in a certain valid sense so far as the human mind is concerned.

But, objective or no, the main point stands that material properties appear to be basically identical with space-time structure. And we may add that the whole implication of Einstein's repeated effort to create a "unified field theory" taking into its sweep electro-magnetism no less than gravitation and accounting for the particle-nature of matter is this very point. So the curving that the general relativity theory gave to space-time has brought in its train a many-sided accession of strength to the interpreters who feel drawn by the special relativity theory beyond the confines of physics and beyond a materialistic world-view.

*(Concluded)*

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

(From *Science, Materialism, Mysticism*, 1995, pp. 102-08)

*The non-mathematician is seized by a mysterious shuddering when he hears of "four-dimensional things", by a feeling not unlike that awakened by thoughts of the occult. And yet there is no more commonplace statement than that the world in which we live is a four-dimensional continuum.... That we have not been accustomed to regard the world as a four-dimensional continuum is due to the fact that in physics before the advent of the theory of relativity, time played a different and more independent role, as compared with the space coordinates.*

*Albert Einstein*

# THE MOTHER TAKES CHARGE OF THE ASHRAM

## —A Presentation of Documents—

(Continued from the issue of November 2005)

(5)

**Nolini Kanta Gupta**

In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as Mira. For some time afterwards (this may have extended over a period of years) we could notice that he stopped at the sound of M and uttered the full name Mira as if after a slight hesitation. To us it looked rather queer at the time, but later we came to know the reason. Sri Aurobindo's lips were on the verge of saying "Mother"; but we had yet to get ready, so he ended with Mira instead of saying Mother. No one knows for certain on which particular date at what auspicious moment, the word "Mother" was uttered by the lips of Sri Aurobindo. But that was a divine moment in unrecorded time, a moment of destiny in the history of man and earth; for it was at this supreme moment that the Mother was established on this material earth, in the external consciousness of man.

Let me now end this story for today with a last word about myself.

I have said that so far the Mother had been to us a friend and companion, a comrade almost, at the most an object of reverence and respect. I was now about to start on my annual trip to Bengal—in those days I used to go there once every year, and that was perhaps my last trip. Before leaving, I felt a desire to see the Mother. The Mother had not yet come out of her seclusion and Sri Aurobindo had not yet retired behind the scenes. I said to him, "I would like to see Her before I go."—Her with a capital H, in place of the Mother, for we had not yet started using that name. Sri Aurobindo informed the Mother. The room now used by Champaklal was the Mother's room in those days. I entered and waited in the Prosperity room, for Sri Aurobindo used to meet people in the verandah in front. The Mother came in from her room and stood near the door. I approached her and said, "I am going," and then lay prostrate at her feet. That was my first Pranam to the Mother. She said, "Come back soon." This "come back soon" meant in the end, "come back for good."

*Reminiscences* (1969), pp. 82-83

### *Compiler's Note*

*Nolini Kanta Gupta's spontaneous gesture of lying prostrate at the feet of the Mother and doing his "first pranam" to her, marked a great change in him. "Mira" was no more to him "a friend and companion" or a "comrade" on the way, but the Mother*



*who would take charge of his life and guide him in his sadhana. Nolini came back from his last trip to Bengal in **April 1926**, cutting off all relations with his family.*

(6)

*On what date in 1926 did Mother take up full charge of the Ashram?*

Mother does not at all remember the correct date. It may have been a few days after 15th August. She took up the work completely when I retired.<sup>1</sup>

17 May 1936

Sri Aurobindo

*Compiler's Note—An Overview*

*The Mother started guiding Sri Aurobindo's disciples from a few days after **15 August 1926** until she "took up the work completely" when Sri Aurobindo retired on the Siddhi Day (**24 November 1926**). But this transition was preceded by a longer period of preparation. Sri Aurobindo began openly mentioning the Mother as his equal from the **beginning of 1926**.<sup>2</sup> He wrote a letter to Daulat Ram Sharma on **26 March 1926**<sup>3</sup> instructing him "not to make a rigid separation between A.G. and Mira" because "both influences [were] necessary for the complete development of the sadhana". In the evening talk of **18 May 1926**,<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo explained why, in his own case, a Shakti was necessary, "By the coming together of Mirra and myself certain conditions are created which make it easy for you to achieve the transformation."*

*At the same time, there was a growing regard for the Mother as a spiritual guide among the disciples of Sri Aurobindo. The case of Tirupati in **February-March 1926** has already been noted in a previous article.<sup>5</sup> Though his sadhana went in the wrong direction, he was probably the first disciple to accept the spiritual unity of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In **April 1926**, before going on his last trip to Bengal, Nolini Kanta Gupta prostrated himself for the first time at the feet of the Mother.<sup>6</sup> From **15 August 1926**, there was a further intensification of this movement. Anilbaran Roy offered his pranams to Sri Aurobindo on his birthday and "for the first time*

1. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 479.

2. **Prior to 1926**, there are several instances of Sri Aurobindo mentioning in his letters to disciples that he had consulted the Mother on their sadhana, or even referring them to her for her direct spiritual help, but he does not seem to project her forward as his equal, though the equality seems to be implicit. As Sri Aurobindo remarked in the evening talk of 25 April 1940, her position "was special even from the very beginning" and "there was no comparison between others and Mother."

3. *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1976, pp. 25-27.

4. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (1995), pp. 323-24.

5. *The Golden Chain* (15 August 2003).

6. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences* (1969), p. 83.

entered into Sri Aurobindo's room" where the Mother was sitting, and bowed down to her and meditated at her feet.<sup>7</sup> Haradhan Bakshi likewise noted in his diary, "On the **15<sup>th</sup> of August** when I came out of your [Sri Aurobindo's] room after bowing down to Mirra Devi, I became aware that there was something psychic working in and through my mind. From that time forward the psychic element in the mind is gradually developing." On another occasion, he wrote that "the preparation was going on in a concentrated process from the day of the **15<sup>th</sup> of August 1926.**"

On **16 August 1926**, Sri Aurobindo said in his evening talk, "When I came to Pondicherry I got from within a programme of my sadhana. I did it myself but I could not make any progress as to how to help others. Then came Mirra; I found it out with her help."<sup>8</sup> The implication was so obvious that it invited the following questions from a disciple:

*May I ask one audacious question?*

What is it?

*What is Mirra's contribution to this Yoga?*

You can ask that question but I am not going to answer it as you will not be able to understand.

From **2 September 1926**,<sup>9</sup> the Mother started having collective meditation with a few sadhikas. Champaklal was the first sadhak to join these collective meditations<sup>10</sup> and, soon, others followed him. Both Pavitra and Haradhan Bakshi first sought guidance from the Mother and had individual meditations with her before joining her collective meditations. Rajani Palit came at the end of **October 1926** and immediately requested Sri Aurobindo's permission to meditate with her. At first, Sri Aurobindo acted only as an intermediary between the Mother and the sadhaks, without imposing her on them. When he met some resistance, he explained to them indirectly and with great discretion, the necessity of having a Guru. For example, he did not immediately answer the above-quoted "audacious question" on **16 August 1926**. But later he explained during the same session that "the impersonal attitude [was] not sufficient". Pavitra found it difficult to understand why there was a great difference between his meditations with the Mother and his own. He asked Sri Aurobindo on **2 October 1926**,<sup>11</sup> "When I meditated with the Mother last Tuesday the divine force came down. But what is the part of either you or Mother in such a coming down?" Sri Aurobindo replied, "Even in the case of those who look only for liberation, such a help from someone who has realised before, is generally necessary." However, Sri Aurobindo

7. Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1982, p. 40.

8. Anilbaran Roy, "Conversations with Sri Aurobindo", Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1983, pp. 44-45.

9. A. B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo* (2001), p. 209.

10. Champaklal Speaks (2002), p. 73.

11. "Conversations with Pavitra", *Bulletin*, August 1971, pp. 40, 42.

seems to have made an exception in the case of Jaya Devi. When one day she offered two garlands to him, he asked her to give one of them to the Mother. On **14 October 1926**, she was even allowed to perform puja to him and the Mother.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile the atmosphere had become intense with the approach of the overmental descent and there began what Sri Aurobindo later called “the brightest period in the history of the Ashram”.<sup>13</sup> The sadhaks experienced contacts with higher beings and came to know about their past lives in their meditations with the Mother. Pavitra became aware of the emanation presiding over his life. (**13.11.1926**)<sup>14</sup> The Mother told Champaklal, “The Being which we want to manifest in you demands complete surrender.” (**20.11.1926**)<sup>15</sup> Another day, she said, “The Being has entered into you.” Rajani Palit was told by the Mother that Kubera, the God of Wealth, was descending in him. (**5 to 22 November 1926**) To Haradhan, she said that he was an occultist in France in one of his past lives. (**18.11.1926**) The Mother’s meditations with the sadhaks became “more concentrated and intense”. Sri Aurobindo began to arrive late for the evening sittings. In A.B. Purani’s words:

It was as if Sri Aurobindo was slowly withdrawing himself and the Mother was spontaneously coming out and taking up the great work of direction of the sadhaks’ inner sadhana and of the organisation of the outer life of the Ashram.<sup>16</sup>

The last evening talk noted down by Purani is dated **9 November 1926**, after which, either it must have been no longer possible to record the talks or the talks themselves might have ceased. Instead of coming “at half-past four, the usual time, Sri Aurobindo came at six or seven, or eight o’clock. One day the record was two o’clock in the morning.”<sup>17</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta recounts how Sri Aurobindo’s lunch-hour “shifted gradually towards the afternoon” until he came at four o’clock on **23 November 1926**.<sup>18</sup> By then, Sri Aurobindo had sent his brother, Barin Ghose,<sup>19</sup> to personally inform all the sadhaks that he was going to retire and that henceforth the Mother

12. *The Golden Chain* (15 August 2003).

13. Going by the Mother’s description of the brightest period—“marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous”—it seems to have begun even before, though not much earlier than, the Siddhi Day. This extraordinary period of sadhana is linked with the “Overmind creation” which became possible with the descent of the Overmind. When the Mother worked out this “brilliant creation”, Sri Aurobindo said, “It will be a great success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want; we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.” The Mother immediately dissolved the creation. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9, pp. 147-48)

14. “Conversations with Pavitra”, *Bulletin*, November 1972, pp. 36, 38, 40.

15. *Champaklal Speaks* (2002), pp. 69-70.

16. A. B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo* (2001), pp. 211-12.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.

18. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Volume 8, p. 203.

19. “Reminiscences of Barin Ghose”, *All India Magazine*, November 2002, pp. 28-30.

would guide them in their sadhana. The Mother's own description of the Siddhi Day confirms that Sri Aurobindo not only handed over the charge of the Ashram to her on that day but also announced to his disciples that henceforward she would "represent" him and "do all the work".

...I had begun a sort of 'overmental creation', to make each god descend into a being—there was an extraordinary upward curve! Well, I was in contact with these beings and I told Krishna (because I was always seeing him around Sri Aurobindo), "This is all very fine, but what I want now is a creation on earth—you must incarnate." He said, "Yes." Then I saw him—I saw him with my own eyes (inner eyes, of course), join himself to Sri Aurobindo.

Then I went into Sri Aurobindo's room and told him, "Here's what I have seen." "Yes, I know!" he replied (*Mother laughs*) "That's fine; I have decided to retire to my room, and you will take charge of the people. You take charge." (There were about thirty people at the time.) Then he called everyone together for one last meeting. He sat down, had me sit next to him, and said, "I called you here to tell you that, as of today, I am withdrawing for purposes of sadhana, and Mother will now take charge of everyone; you should address yourselves to her; she will represent me and she will do all the work." (**He hadn't mentioned this<sup>20</sup> to me!**—*Mother bursts into laughter*)<sup>21</sup>

20. The word "this" (especially in the corresponding text of the French original) would refer to the very last part of the previous sentence, "she will represent me and she will do all the work". This sudden responsibility thrust on her appears to be the cause of the Mother's laughter. Though Sri Aurobindo had already told her "you take charge of the people", he had not mentioned to her his intention of putting her forward as his representative and making her "do all the work".

21. The Mother's conversation of 2 August 1961.

The last sentence has been highlighted to draw the attention of the reader to it.

**ACCOUNTS WRITTEN BY THE MOTHER IN 1926**

1. The headings "Kitchen Accounts", "House Account" etc. along with the sub-headings "Daily Account", "Brought forward" and "Total monthly expenditure" have been added by the compiler for the convenience of the reader.

2. Crossed out in manuscript but counted in the daily account. There seems to be a mistake here in the calculation of the total expenditure.

3. Same as above footnote.











### *Compiler's Note*

*The accounts presented here are from a diary used by the Mother in 1926. It is interesting to note that towards the Siddhi Day there is a transitional phase during which the Mother hands over the responsibility of maintaining the accounts to a disciple. We notice that from 16 November 1926, the entries in the daily Kitchen Accounts are both in the Mother's and the disciple's handwriting. On 24 November 1926 and after it, all the entries are in the disciple's handwriting, just as before 16 November 1926, all the entries are in the Mother's handwriting. Though this by itself does not show that the Mother took charge of the Ashram on the Siddhi Day, it marks the beginning of the delegation of work to the disciples. Within three years the Ashram went through a rapid phase of development and a number of essential services were established such as the Dining Room and Kitchen, the Building Service, the Atelier, the Bakery and the Dispensary, with a sudden increase in the number of disciples who not only submitted themselves to the Mother's spiritual guidance but also worked under her supervision.*

*The first series of dated accounts are the daily "Kitchen Accounts" which list the cost<sup>4</sup> of provisions bought for the day. These are followed by the total "Food-expenses" account for November 1926, which includes the total Kitchen Accounts of the same month under the account head "book" along with other expenses on food such as milk, bakery products, etc. and miscellaneous items such as petrol, fuel, etc. The "Food-expenses" is itself listed with other major account heads such as rent [for Library House], wages for domestic servants, electricity charges, etc., in what can be called the "House Account" for November 1926. "The Yearly Account" at the end, though incomplete, gives us an idea of the total expenditure incurred for running Sri Aurobindo's house in the year 1926.*

RAMAN REDDY

(Concluded)

4. The Kitchen Accounts seem to be noted in French India rroupies, fanons [*panam* in Tamil] and caches [*kas* in Tamil]. Note that the last columns can be calculated in multiples of 24 and the second columns in multiples of 8. The monetary system of the French India rroupie was 1 French India rroupie = 8 fanons; 1 fanon = 24 caches. The other accounts seem to be in British India rroupies and annas as the last columns can be worked out in multiples of 16. The monetary system of the British India rupee was 1 British India rupee = 16 annas; 1 anna = 12 pie or 4 pice. During this period, both the French India and the British India rupees were circulated in Pondicherry, though the latter was more commonly used. According to the *Tables of Modern Monetary History: Asia* by Kurt Schuler ([www.dollarization.org](http://www.dollarization.org)), the French India rroupie was pegged to the British India rupee, while the exchange rate of the French franc to the French India rroupie varied from 1.44 in 1895 to 13.23 French India rroupies in 1939. Note that a small sum was charged for the conversion of the French India rroupie to the British India rupee as indicated by the item "exchange" at the bottom of some of the Kitchen Accounts (see 18.11.1926 & 21.11.1926).

## WHAT THE BLEEP DO WE KNOW?<sup>1</sup>

THE question “What the bleep do we know?” has an unambiguous answer: both surprisingly much and amazingly little.

Quantum mechanics, the theoretical framework of contemporary physics, is a probability algorithm. We use it to assign probabilities to possible measurement outcomes on the basis of actual measurement outcomes. While the (probabilistic) predictions of quantum mechanics are, as far as we know, always exactly right, they tell us amazingly little about the nature of Nature.

The problem of making physical sense of the mathematical formalism of quantum mechanics is known as the “measurement problem”. With regard to this problem, the physics community is divided into three factions. The first advocates agnosticism. It asserts that the quantum world cannot be described; its features are forever beyond our ken. All we can usefully talk about is statistical correlations between measurement outcomes. The second faction aspires to describe the quantum world without reference to measurements. This faction is split into numerous warring sects. This is how physicist Christopher A. Fuchs describes the situation: “Go to any meeting devoted to some aspect of the quantum foundations, and it is like being in a holy city in great tumult. You will find all the religions with all their priests pitted in holy war—the Bohmians, the Consistent Historians, the Transactionalists, the Spontaneous Collapseans, the Einselectionists, the Contextual Objectivists, the outright Everettics, and many more beyond that... They all declare to see the light, the ultimate light...” The third faction—arguably the majority—is tired of this spectacle and no longer cares what (if anything) quantum mechanics is trying to tell us about the nature of Nature.

The agnostics have a point in that nothing of relevance can be said without reference to measurements. They are wrong in asserting that the features of the quantum world are beyond our ken. A great deal can be learned about its features by a careful examination of the quantum-mechanical probability assignments. The “priests” too have a point in that it is indeed possible to describe the features of the quantum world. They are wrong in their belief that these features can be described without reference to measurements. Instead of trying to understand the extraordinary role that measurements play in quantum mechanics, they aim to divest measurements of their special status. As a referee of a philosophy-of-science journal put it to me, “to solve [the measurement problem] means to design an interpretation in which measurement processes are not different in principle from ordinary physical interactions.”

There is another faction, a tiny one, whose members are rarely invited to a

1. The title of this article is also the title of a recent movie that invokes features of the quantum world as well as misconceptions about quantum mechanics.

conference on quantum foundations, but which enjoys some popularity with ordinary folks. Physicists habitually refer to measurements as “observations”. Observations presuppose observers. According to said faction, measurements owe their special status to the consciousness of the observer. I am not opposed to the idea as such. I am opposed to it because it makes it impossible to see the real ontological implication of quantum mechanics.

I have explored these implications in a number of publications.<sup>2</sup> Here is a very brief summary:

The most important consequence of the manner in which quantum mechanics assigns probabilities, is the existence of limits to the distinctions that we are allowed to make. Two examples:

1. Electrons are launched in front of a metal plate with two slits. After they have passed the slits, they hit a screen and leave a mark. If only the left slit is open, we see a certain distribution of marks. If only the right slit is open, we see another distribution of marks. If both slits are open, anyone uninitiated into the mysteries of the quantum world expects to see the sum of these two distributions. What we actually see is completely different. The electrons behave as if each went through both slits. Since this is the kind of behaviour displayed by waves, electrons (as well as atoms, molecules, and bigger things) are often said to behave in “complementary” ways (a euphemism for mutually inconsistent ways of thinking): sometimes like particles (we never detect half an electron) and sometimes like waves.

If we do not remain satisfied with mutually inconsistent ways of thinking about one and the same thing, we discover that quantum mechanics imposes limits on our spatial distinctions. If there is no way of finding out through which slit an electron went, the distinction we make between “the electron went through the left slit” and “the electron went through the right slit” is a distinction that Nature does not make. It corresponds to nothing in the physical world. It exists solely in our heads.

If we carry this implication to its logical conclusion, we discover an extraordinary fact: the spatial differentiation of the world is incomplete; it doesn’t go all the way down. If we mentally partition the world into smaller and smaller regions, there comes a point when there isn’t any material object left for which these regions, or the corresponding distinctions, exist. Much the same is true of the world’s temporal differentiation: if we mentally divide the world’s temporal extent into smaller and smaller intervals, there comes a point when the corresponding distinctions cease to have counterparts in the physical world. They exist solely in our heads.

2. Two particles of the same type move towards each other, one coming from the North, the other from the South. They “collide”, and the next thing we know is

2. Interested readers are invited to visit my website ([www.ThisQuantumWorld.com](http://www.ThisQuantumWorld.com)) and/or consult my article “The Pondicherry interpretation of quantum mechanics: An overview.” The latter appeared in PRAMANA (Vol. 64, February 2005, p. 171), the journal of physics of the Indian Academy of Sciences, and can be downloaded in several formats (I recommend PDF) from the preprint server at [arxiv.org/abs/quant-ph/0412182](http://arxiv.org/abs/quant-ph/0412182).

that there are two particles moving away from each other, one eastward and one westward. Which is which? Is the particle moving eastward the one that came from the North or the one that came from the South? Once again the quantum-mechanical probability assignments imply that our question makes no sense. In asking it, we make an illegitimate substantial distinction. Quantum mechanics allows us to distinguish between *this* particle and *that* particle only to the extent that particles have properties by which they can be distinguished, and they have such properties only to the extent that their possession can be inferred from actual events or states of affairs (“measurements”).

If we carry this implication to its logical conclusion, we discover another extraordinary fact: the so-called ultimate constituents of matter, *considered by themselves*, independently of their measured properties, are identical not just in the weak sense of exact similarity but in the strong sense of *numerical* identity. If you have a particle here with these properties and a particle there with those properties, what you have is not two substances each with a set of properties—this is one “two” too many—but one substance with two sets of properties.

What can we say of a structureless particle—a quark or an electron—*considered by itself*, out of relation to anything else? Since a structureless particle lacks internal relations, we cannot attribute to it a form. (All empirically accessible forms are sets of internal relations.) Out of relation to other objects, it lacks external relations, so we cannot attribute to it a position. (Positions are always defined in relation to each other.) Nor can we say that it moves, since motion, too, is relatively defined. So we cannot attribute to it any of the properties that derive their meanings from the quantum-mechanical description of motion. All we can say about a structureless particle considered by itself boils down to this: if it exists, then it exists!

The bottom line: What ultimately exists is a single substance. Call it whatever you like. (As a Vedantist, you might want to call it *brahman*.) Both matter and space come into being when this enters into spatial relations with itself, for space is the totality of existing spatial relations, while matter is the corresponding apparent multitude of relata—*apparent* because the relations are *self*-relations. The beasts and baubles of this world are not made of any kind of stuff; they are “made of” the self-relations of a single formless Reality. (As a Vedantist, you should be pleased: quantum mechanics affords us an insight into how *brahman* has made this world.)

\* \* \*

So why do measurements play such an important role in quantum physics?

“Ordinary” objects have spatial extent (they “occupy” space), are composed of a (large but) finite number of objects without spatial extent (particles which do not occupy space), and are stable: they neither explode nor collapse the moment they are formed. Such an object occupies as much space as it does because atoms and molecules

occupy as much space as they do. So how is it that an atom occupies a space roughly one tenth of a nanometer across? Thanks to quantum mechanics, we understand that the stability of matter rests on the *fuzziness* of the relative positions and momenta of its constituents. This is what “fluffs out” matter. The hydrogen atom is as big as it is because the position of the electron relative to the nucleus is as fuzzy as it is.

And what is the proper (mathematically rigorous and philosophically sound) way to describe a fuzzy position? It is to assign probabilities to the possible outcomes of position measurements! This is the principal (albeit not the only) reason why our fundamental physical theory is a probability algorithm, and why it refers to measurements.

Here is the real problem caused by the fact that measurements play this pivotal role: a fundamental physical theory concerned with nothing but statistical correlations between measurement outcomes presupposes outcome-indicating events. How can such a theory be complete? How can it at the same time *encompass* these events? Attempts to divest measurements of their special status sweep this problem under the rug without solving it. The solution calls for a judicious reality assignment: which feature of the quantum world—which theoretical construct of the quantum formalism—corresponds to what exists by itself, rather than by virtue of outcome-indicating events? The only possible answer: the macroworld (properly defined), in which the outcome-indicating events occur.

This makes three reasons why the quantum world is built “from the top down” rather than “from the bottom up”. (i) The numerical identity of the so-called “ultimate constituents” of matter is inconsistent with the traditional attempt to construct reality by assembling a pre-existent multitude of building blocks. (ii) The fact that the quantum world is not completely differentiated either space-wise or time-wise, is inconsistent with the attempt to construct (a theoretical model of) reality on an intrinsically differentiated spacetime “manifold”. (iii) The fact that the properties of the microworld exist only because, and only to the extent that, they are indicated by what happens or is the case in the macroworld, is inconsistent with the notion that the macroworld is made out of the ingredients of the microworld.

\* \* \*

The presupposition of an intrinsically differentiated spacetime is all but universally shared by physicists and philosophers of science alike. Because it makes it impossible to realise the ontological implications of the quantum-mechanical probability algorithm, it has generated a variety of pseudoproblems and gratuitous solutions. The physics community appears to be irrevocably committed to the evolutionary paradigm—the notion that physics can be neatly divided into kinematics, which concerns the description of physical “systems” at any one time, and dynamics, which concerns the development (“evolution”) of physical systems from earlier to later

times—and this paradigm *entails* the existence of an intrinsically differentiated spacetime. The members of the second faction mentioned above—the “priests”—are unanimous in their belief that the quantum-mechanical wave function (or state vector) represents the actual state of the world at an instant of time, and that the quantum laws describe how this evolves. As a result, they are faced with the mother of all quantum-mechanical pseudoproblems: how is it that this instantaneous state has *two* modes of evolution?

As an algorithm for assigning probabilities to possible measurement outcomes on the basis of actual outcomes, the wave function has two obvious dependences. It depends continuously on the time of a measurement: if you change this time by a small amount, the probabilities assigned to the possible outcomes change by small amounts. And it depends discontinuously on the outcomes that constitute the assignment basis: if you take into account an outcome that you could not previously have taken into account, the assignment basis changes unpredictably as a matter of course. Transmogrify the wave function into the description of an evolving, instantaneous physical state, and you have to explain why it has (or appears to have) two modes of evolution rather than one: between measurements, it evolves continuously and predictably; at the time of a measurement, it evolves (or appears to evolve) discontinuously and unpredictably—it “collapses”.

The most “compelling” reason for misconstruing the wave function as an evolving instantaneous physical state is that it permits us to believe in our own “omniscience”, at least in principle: we know what exists, inasmuch as we have a complete mathematical description of the physical world at any one time, and we know how what exists behaves, inasmuch as we know the laws that govern its evolution. In the good old days of classical physics, we had algorithms for calculating the effects that material objects have on material objects, and it was possible, with a certain measure of consistency, to transmogrify these algorithms into a description of what exists and how this evolves. The attempt to transmogrify an algorithm for calculating the probabilities of measurement outcomes into a description of what exists and how this evolves produces nothing but absurdities (such as the “many worlds” extravaganza, to mention but one).

To the great Niels Bohr, this was obvious from the beginning. To lesser mortals, it ought to have been obvious ever since John Bell proved his two famous theorems, which led him to conclude that “there must be a mechanism whereby the setting of one measurement device can influence the reading of another instrument, however remote.” Is there any hope of understanding this mechanism? Not if quantum mechanics is the fundamental theoretical framework that most physicists (including yours truly) believe it is. Since “fundamental” has no comparative, there *cannot* be a “more fundamental” theory that could explain the quantum-mechanical correlation laws. The explanatory buck stops right there.

To give you an idea of what is at stake, consider the following example due to



Greenberger, Horne, and Zeilinger. Quantum mechanics makes it possible to condition three particles in such a way that the following correlations are observed: Whenever the x-components of the spins of the three particles are measured, the product of the results is -1. Whenever the y-components of the spins of any two particles and the x-component of the spin of the third particle are measured, the product of the outcomes is +1. (The possible results of each measurement are +1 and -1.) Is it possible that both the x-component and the y-component of the spin of each particle are in possession of values if these values are not actually measured? Suppose it is. If we call these values  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$  and  $Y_1$ ,  $Y_2$ ,  $Y_3$ , they must satisfy the following four equations:

$$X_1 \times Y_2 \times Y_3 = 1, \quad Y_1 \times X_2 \times Y_3 = 1, \quad Y_1 \times Y_2 \times X_3 = 1, \quad X_1 \times X_2 \times X_3 = -1.$$

Multiply the left-hand sides of the first three equations to find that their product equals  $X_1 \times X_2 \times X_3 \times (Y_1)^2 \times (Y_2)^2 \times (Y_3)^2$ . Since the squares of the Y's equal 1, and since the product of the right-hand sides of these three equations equals 1, these equations imply that  $X_1 \times X_2 \times X_3 = +1$ . This obviously cannot be reconciled with the fourth equation. It is impossible to satisfy all four equations, and therefore it is impossible that both the x and the y components of the spins of the three particles are in possession of unmeasured values. This illustrates that, in the quantum world, measurable quantities (“observables”) have values only if and when they are measured. Measurements *create* their outcomes.

Observe that whenever the x components or the y components of two spins are measured, the outcome of a measurement of the x component of the third spin can be predicted with certainty. By the same token, whenever one x component and one y component are measured, the outcome of a measurement of the y component of the third spin can be predicted with certainty. How can we understand this given (i) that the values of the spin components are created as and when they are measured, (ii) that the relative times of the measurements are irrelevant, and (iii) that in principle the three particles can be millions of miles apart? How does the third spin “know” about the outcomes of the two other spin measurements? What mechanism correlates the outcomes? You understand this as much as anybody else!

If the outcomes of measurements performed on two or more physical systems are correlated, the systems are said to be “entangled”. Entanglement is undoubtedly the most perplexing feature of the quantum world. Einstein spoke of “spooky actions at a distance” and hoped they would eventually go away. Nine years after Einstein’s death, this hope was dashed by Bell. Spooky actions at a distance are here to stay. What is so unsettling is not that we cannot explain them; no fundamental theory can be explained by a “more fundamental” theory, and the transmogrification of a mathematical symbol into a physical entity has never been more than a sleight of hand. What is so unsettling is that they do not seem possible at all.

Given the manner in which the *perceived* world is constructed by our minds and/or brains, we naturally share Einstein's belief that "things claim an existence independent of one another" whenever they "lie in different parts of space". Fact is that those three particles, irrespective of the distances between them, are not independent of one another. Fiction is that they lie in different parts of space. Space is not something that has parts. It is a system of more or less fuzzy relations between formless particles. (If we insist on thinking of space instead as an expanse that exists independently of its material "content", quantum mechanics does not permit us to think of this expanse as divided. Instead of separating things, it unites things by its lack of parts.) Besides, all existing relations are self-relations—relations between *brahman* and *brahman*. This being so, how could things possibly "claim an existence independent of one another"?

I will conclude on a more personal note. The interpretation of the quantum formalism is a metaphysical and therefore to some extent a religious issue. The attempt to interpret the formalism in such a way that we can continue to believe in our "omniscience in principle" obviously plays into the hands of the materialists, which probably explains the relative popularity of this approach among theoretical physicists. But materialism is just one of many possible metaphysical stories, and it is not in any way more "scientific" than other stories that are consistent with the quantum-mechanical correlation laws.

The quality of our lives depends to a considerable extent on the metaphysical stories that most appeal to us. Such stories can dishearten as well as inspire. Although I will not deny it the aesthetic appeal of a Greek tragedy, I find the materialistic story depressing: in it, consciousness, free will, quality, and value play at best minor parts; evolution has no goal, life no real purpose; the paltry range of achievements offered to us is not worth mentioning.

Here is my favourite story: Ultimate reality is ineffable. Following a great tradition, I call it *brahman*. While there are no words to describe what *brahman* is in or by itself, we can say something about how it relates to the world. It relates to it in three ways: as the substance that constitutes it (*sat*), as the consciousness that contains it (*chit*), and as something—subjectively speaking, an infinite delight, objectively speaking, an infinite quality—that throws itself into finite forms and movements (*ānanda*). Consciousness, free will, quality, and value all have their roots in what is ultimately real. At the roots of our consciousness is *chit*, at the roots of quality and value is *ānanda*, at the roots of our free will is the infinite power by which *chit* creates its content, *sat* creates its forms, and *ānanda* expresses itself.

Given an infinite and omnipotent quality and delight as the creative principle, there can be many differently constituted worlds—many ways of expressing and experiencing this quality and delight in self-relations. In the physical world, *brahman* is playing Houdini, imprisoning and enchaining itself as completely as divinely possible, challenging itself to escape, to re-discover itself, to realise its powers against

formidable odds, in what appears to be a huge inert unconscious mass governed by mechanical forces and random events, but what is really the foundation of greatest stability and concreteness for a progressive self-realisation that may go on for ever. The range of possible achievements offered to us by this story is infinite.

Turning once more to physics, recall that it is strictly impossible to account for the efficacy of fundamental laws, whatever they are. For the materialists, this is a serious problem, hence their (futile) attempts to render the fundamental laws self-sufficient by transmogrifying the mathematical formalism into a physical ontology. But if the force at work in the world is ultimately an omnipotent conscious force (*chit-tapas*), then this is not a problem at all. There obviously is no need to account for the efficacy of an omnipotent force! The question that then calls for attention is, why does this force subject itself to the quantum-mechanical correlation laws? And why these particular laws rather than any others? The answer: in order to set the stage for *brahman*'s adventure of evolution, and because this requires the validity of these very laws! (I am not claiming that my favourite story is corroborated by the fact that it entails the quantum laws. There may be many other stories that entail the same laws.<sup>3</sup>)

ULRICH MOHRHOFF

3. See my paper "Why the laws of physics are just so" in *Foundations of Physics*, Vol. 32, 2002, p. 1313; quant-ph/0202149.

### On Quantum Mechanics

Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood a single word.  
— Niels Bohr

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Very interesting theory—it makes no sense at all. — Groucho Marx

\*

Marvellous, what ideas the young people have these days. But I don't believe a word of it. (after Heisenberg's 1927 lecture) — Albert Einstein

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I myself ... only came to believe in the uncertainty relations after many pangs of conscience.... — Werner Heisenberg

\*

A philosopher once said, "It is necessary for the very existence of science that the same conditions always produce the same results." *Well, they don't!* (1965)  
— Richard P. Feynman

## A FAMILY

A family is a special gift  
That only God can give.  
A special bond between us  
For as long as we shall live.

The love we give each other  
Adds much to our success.  
When all is good they're always there  
To share our happiness.

When times are tough they're by our side  
To lend a helping hand.  
You tell them things no one can know  
And they seem to understand.

Right or wrong, through thick and thin,  
They're always there to guide.  
When we achieve our special goals,  
They look at us with pride.

The thoughtful things they say and do  
In many different ways,  
Adds a special meaning  
To our sometimes gruelling days.

With warm and everlasting love  
They're always helping me.  
Oh thank you God for giving me  
The perfect family.

MARY (ANGEL) FINN

## DOOM OF ANANKE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

There is a law of stern necessity,  
The immemorial ordinance of the gods  
Made fast for ever, bravely sworn and sealed:  
Should any Spirit, born to enduring life,  
Be fouled with sin of slaughter, or transgress  
By disputation, perjured and forsworn,  
Three times ten thousand years that soul shall wander  
An outcast from Felicity, condemned  
To mortal being, and in diverse shapes  
With interchange of hardship go his ways,  
The heavens force him headlong to the Sea;  
And vomited from the Sea, dry land receives him,  
But flings unwanted to the burning sun;  
From there, to the heavenly vortex backward thrown,  
He makes from host to host, by all abhorred.

Awed Empedocles<sup>1</sup> sang of Necessity. The same Necessity failed to secure a hiding place from the denuding vision of Sri Aurobindo.

An inert Soul and a somnambulist Force  
Have made a world estranged from life and thought;  
The Dragon of the dark foundations keeps  
Unalterable the law of Chance and Death;...

*(Savitri, p. 336)*

Sri Aurobindo had noted as to how Necessity usurped the role of God on earth.

Although God made the world for his delight,  
An ignorant Power took charge and seemed his Will  
And Death's deep falsity has mastered Life.  
All grew a play of Chance simulating Fate.

*(Ibid., p. 629)*

1. Empedocles (492-432 BC), was a disciple of Pythagoras. He was a poet-philosopher and physicist. He theorised that all matter is constituted by four elements; earth, air, fire and water. Like his fellow Greeks, Empedocles believed in rebirth. He asserted that he was an immortal in the heaven who committed the "sin" of slaughter and eating meat and was therefore condemned out of the felicity of the heaven by Necessity. To atone and go back to his native country, he remained a vegetarian in his life as Empedocles. This was supposedly his last life out of heaven following atonements during innumerable lives.

At its outpost of empirical understanding, the mind of man cannot fail to observe that a Law (or a set of laws together) determine, govern and operate the changing order of the physical world and so also the biological systems. All the empirical phenomena have a predictable course in time and behaviour. Any breach of these fixed rules appears as a miracle to the human mind. Together, these laws are referred to as Necessity by the philosophers. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines the word necessity as: the fact of being inevitably fixed or determined; the constraining power of something; constraint or compulsion caused by circumstances or the operation of natural processes especially regarded as a law throughout the material universe and governing human actions. In general the term connotes: an essentiality with no alternatives and choices; and a condition without which a certain end can not be reached under the existent order. Necessity on earth represents all that is imperfect and consequently disharmonious and evil; that follows rigid determinism and fate; and that perishes in time. Sri Aurobindo uses the terms Inconscience, Nescience and Ignorance to describe Necessity at places.

Necessity is inherent within the constitution of the physical universe and all the contingent beings, *i.e.*, the beings who are not their own cause and are rather manifestation of a beginningless, unchangeable and eternal Reality. Death is the law for all the beings born. It is the inevitable, unalterable, firm Law ruling the universe and maintaining the cosmic order, *i.e.*, the process of creation, sustenance of the creation and eventual destruction of matter and life. The ancient Greeks feared and revered Necessity also called Ananke as a goddess. The worship of Ananke began with the Orphic mystery cult in ancient Greece. In Delphi they worshipped Clotho and Atropos, two of her three daughters only. The third one, Lachesis is not mentioned in worship rituals. These daughters are referred to as Morae or Fates. Lachesis sings of the things past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of things to come. The third Morae, Atropos, the Unbending, like the Indian god of death, Yama, cuts the thread of life.

Even God himself obeys the Laws he made:  
The Law abides and never can it change,  
The Person is a bubble on Time's sea.

(*Ibid.*, p. 654)

A gaol is this immense material world:  
Across each road stands armed a stone-eyed Law,  
At every gate the huge dim sentinels pace.

(*Ibid.*, p. 18)

### **Images of Ananke in *Savitri***

Greek mythologies, which are diverse and often contradictory, give two popular accounts of creation of the universe,—one, Hesiodic and the second, Orphic. The

poet Hesiodus (Hesiodos) wrote in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, that Chaos, the empty fathomless void, abyss, or a chasm, was not a deity. It was just a yawning hiatus through which emerged, 1) Earth (Gaea); 2) Eros (Amor), the desire or love; the binding principle in nature, the force of attraction; or the first movement; and 3) Erebus (Darkness). From Earth emerged a son, Sky (Uranus); from Eros the Nyx or Nox (Night) on Earth which produced dark Necessity (Ananke), and Adrastesia (Nemesis or Retribution) who brings pain and punishment. In some accounts Adrastesia is a daughter of Ananke. Erebus and Nyx sexually produced their opposites Aether (heavenly light) and Hemera (earthly light or day). According to the Orphic creation myth, when nothing else existed, emerged the self-formed unaging time, Chronos or Khronos and Ananke, incorporeal serpentine beings. The two created a mist of matter which condensed and formed a gigantic silver egg of solid matter. Their serpentine coils encircled the breadth of the cosmic egg. The first god, Protogonos or Phanes hatched out splitting the egg into heaven, earth and sea, and the universe began. There are several other variations too but in all of them Ananke remains one of the primordial constituents of cosmic order. It antecedes gods. Thus, either the Darkness was the origin of Necessity or the blind Necessity was self-formed and created the universe. One can feel the primal force of Necessity in the physical cosmogenesis described by Sri Aurobindo before the birth of gods:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.  
 Across the path of the divine Event  
 The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
 In her unlit temple of eternity,  
 Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.  
 Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,  
 In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse  
 The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;  
 A fathomless zero occupied the world.

(*Savitri*, p. 1)

As in a dark beginning of all things,  
 A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown  
 Repeating for ever the unconscious act,  
 Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,  
 Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force  
 Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns  
 And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.  
 Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,  
 Its formless stupor without mind or life,

A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,  
 Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,  
 Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs  
 Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.

(*Ibid.*)

The above passage in *Savitri* partly reflects the view of a highly developed reasoning mind, evolved through sense-perception of the empirical world and phenomena. The ancient Greek philosophers were scientists who reasoned on the basis of sensory observations and understood the world and natural forces. Their philosophy and spiritual experience emerged from the reasoning mind which was also the soul for them. They believed that death is separation of soul from matter and that reason was the immortal essence of the soul. This soul, or the reasoning mind, when thrown out of heaven took varied forms of life by transmigration and having exhausted the sins returned to heaven but was never ever freed from the power of Necessity.

Plato considered Necessity as the primary mover of the universe. He describes the role and power of Necessity in his *Republic* through the experiences of a soul on the threshold of its birth: "...they [the souls on the threshold of birth] could see a straight shaft of light, like a pillar, stretching from above throughout heaven and earth...". "The Spindle turned on the knees of Necessity." "And from time to time Clotho lays her right hand on the outer rim of the Spindle and helps to turn it, while Atropos turns the inner circles likewise with her left, Lachesis with either hand takes hold of inner and outer alternately."

No one was considered above Necessity and Fate which made the earth and heaven both to revolve.

A quantum dance remained, a sprawl of chance  
 In Energy's stupendous tripping whirl:  
 A ceaseless motion in the unbounded Void  
 Invented forms without a thought or aim:  
 Necessity and Cause were shapeless ghosts;  
 Matter was an incident in being's flow,  
 Law but a clock-work habit of blind force.

(*Savitri*, p. 254)

Necessity is the Greek goddess of **all bonds, compulsion in choice** and demands **absolute obedience**. She fulfils the destiny a man makes through his karmas and desires. In the Greek tradition Clotho, the Spinner appears as a maiden, spinning the thread of life. Lachesis, the Caster of Lots, appears as a matron and keeps in her lap



the lots of new destinies to be offered to the souls waiting for rebirth and a new round of life ending in death. Thus the souls choose their future destinies and are bound to it from birth. Thus the heaven is blameless in this choice according to Plato in his *Republic*. However none of these lives determine the condition of the soul. The soul needs to change its character according to the life it chooses as the Greeks would believe.

Man's hopes and longings build the journeying wheels  
That bear the body of his destiny  
And lead his blind will towards an unknown goal.  
His fate within him shapes his acts and rules;  
Its face and form already are born in him,  
Its parentage is in his secret soul:  
Here Matter seems to mould the body's life  
And the soul follows where its nature drives.  
Nature and Fate compel his free-will's choice.

(*Ibid.*, p. 465)

And, she is the goddess of **Fate and Death** too. Necessity with her family rules the fate and death of the mortals.

A bond is put on the high-climbing mind,  
A seal on the too large wide-open heart;  
Death stays the journeying discoverer, Life.

(*Ibid.*, p. 18)

The Greeks accepted the finality of Necessity and Fate for the mortal beings and there was nothing beyond the heaven of anthropomorphic immortals. Their heaven too was not a permanent state of bliss or extinction of miseries. Gods too were never at peace there. The law of karma, and the resultant fate, and the end of the physical body of an eternal reality, the soul, were considered mechanical necessities.

A grey tribunal of the Ignorance,  
An Inquisition of the priests of Night  
In judgment sit on the adventurer soul,  
And the dual tables and the Karmic norm  
Restrain the Titan in us and the God:  
Pain with its lash, joy with its silver bribe  
Guard the Wheel's circling immobility.

(*Ibid.*, p. 18)

### **Determinism of Necessity vs Chance and Evolution**

Ananke's engines organising Chance,  
 Channels perverse of a stupendous Will,  
 Tools of the Unknown who use us as their tools,  
 Invested with power in Nature's nether state,  
 Into the actions mortals think their own  
 They bring the incoherencies of Fate,  
 Or make a doom of Time's slipshod caprice  
 And toss the lives of men from hand to hand  
 In an inconsequent and devious game.

(*Ibid.*, p. 162)

The fundamental question that Sri Aurobindo raised and answered was, that if the cosmos is governed by a strict Law that is binding on all matter and life, then what process makes it escape into a newer order and establish newer determinism in course of time and make the evolutionary movement for the generation of diversity and unfold ever higher life-forms? There must exist a superior Law exceeding the former for diversity and superior forms to arise. Or, is it pure Chance that overrules Necessity?

A necessity of immutable sameness at the base, of free and unaccountable variations on the surface seems to be the law; but who or what necessitates or determines? (*The Life Divine*, p. 300)

Is it a Chance or Necessity? Chance refers to one possibility out of innumerable possibilities. Such a Chance by its nature is opposite to that of Necessity. Both are mutually exclusive in nature. Does Chance, which is without a determining principle, maintain unchanging order through its persistent repetition? Does mechanical Necessity regulate both the fixed order and variation?

But a theory of mechanical Necessity by itself does not elucidate the free play of the endless unaccountable variations which are visible in the evolution...

(*Ibid.*, p. 301)

Necessity arises out of inconscience to labour out the world which has the seed of heaven enclosed within. Its antagonist, Chance the invisible, under a self-directed will further unfolds the forms which are more perfect. Mutually exclusive and incompatible powers, Necessity and Chance together create newer and higher possibilities.

The apparent inconscience of the material Energy would be an indispensable condition for the structure of the material world—substance in which this Consciousness intends to involve itself so that it may grow by evolution out of its apparent opposite; for without some such device a complete involution would be impossible. If there is such a creation by the Infinite out of itself, it must be the manifestation, in a material disguise, of truths or powers of its own being: the forms or vehicles [Necessity/Ananke] of these truths or powers would be the basic general or fundamental determinates we see in Nature; the particular determinates, which otherwise are unaccountable variations that have emerged from the vague general stuff in which they originate, would be the appropriate forms or vehicles of the possibilities that the truths or powers residing in these fundamentals bore within them. The principle of free variation of possibilities natural to an infinite Consciousness would be the explanation of the aspect of inconscient Chance of which we are aware in the workings of Nature,—inconscient only in appearance and so appearing because of the complete involution in Matter, because of the veil with which the secret Consciousness has disguised its presence. The principle of truths, real powers of the Infinite imperatively fulfilling themselves would be the explanation of the opposite aspect of a mechanical Necessity which we see in Nature,—mechanical in appearance only and so appearing because of the same veil of Inconscience. It would then be perfectly intelligible why the Inconscient does its works with a constant principle of mathematical architecture, of design, of effective arrangement of numbers, of adaptation of means to ends, of inexhaustible device and invention, one might almost say, a constant experimental skill and an automatism of purpose. The appearance of consciousness out of an apparent Inconscience would also be no longer inexplicable. (*Ibid.*, pp. 303-04)

(*To be concluded*)

ANAND KUMAR

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

*(Continued from the issue of October 2005)*

WE have already referred to the idea brought forward by the Russian Revolution—federation of free republics. A chapter is devoted here to the consideration of this idea. A recent footnote runs thus: “The component states of Sovietic Russia are allowed a certain cultural, linguistic and other autonomy, but the rest is illusory as they are in fact governed by the force of a highly centralised autocracy in Moscow.” But this must be read with a sentence from another footnote, “Still the principle is there and capable of development in a free future.”

Hitherto both the Nation idea and the State idea have been built on a physical and vital basis, i.e., on a geographical, commercial, political and military union. The earlier vital principle of racial unity remained, more or less, as a fiction. But the real principle that has brought together smaller units to form a nation has been mainly psychological, based on a common language, common culture and common interests. The Nation idea and the State idea do not always coincide. Where they are in conflict it is the latter that usually prevails. The right of every natural grouping to choose its status was pushed forward a great deal after the first war under the name of self-determination, but “it has been disregarded as soon as the cry had served its turn”. There were sordid motives behind the cry and the world saw through them.

The two rival principles—vital and psychological—have been at work in Russia. Sri Aurobindo shows how that country has never been a homogeneous Nation-State like, say, France. It was a cluster of many nations grouped together under the Czar. Its only psychological aspect was a hope that it would, one day, be fused together into a nation with one language as the instrument of culture, thought and government. Such an end could only be achieved by force, and force was being constantly applied by the Czarist government (much as it was being tried by England in Ireland). If things had gone on as in the pre-war days, Russia would probably have been largely successful in the Slavonic part of her empire, but she could not have continued very long to drag Finland and Poland at her chariot wheels. But all these speculations have lost their force in the present setting. In Sri Aurobindo's words, “All these advantages have been destroyed, temporarily at least, by the centrifugal forces let loose by the Revolution and its principle of the free choice of nationalities.” We have here to see clearly the difference between a purely vital and physical necessity, and a psychological and moral justification. “The Russian principle belongs, in fact,” says Sri Aurobindo “to a possible future, in which moral and psychological principles will have a real chance to dominate and vital and physical necessities will have to suit themselves to them...” The Russian principle may have to struggle against immense difficulties. In the world, as it is, ideals can be imposed only if they have a

strong physical backing. The Russian idealists found in their attempt to effectuate their principle that they were "helpless against the hard-headed German cynicism" because under the new conditions they could not muster an organised and united action. But it has undoubtedly a great meaning for the future. Unfortunately, affairs in Russia are not the same as in Lenin's time, and the change takes away most substantially from the idea of adopting free agreement between different groups as a substitute for conflict. When the book was written, Sri Aurobindo said that if this idea could work itself out even within the limits of Russia, it would mean a new moral power in the world. A footnote has now been added, "The idea was sincere at the time, but it has lost its significance because of the principle of revolutionary force on which Sovietism still rests." But what is most important is that "even if it fails entirely in its present push for realisation, it will still have its part to play in a better prepared future". Sri Aurobindo next goes on to consider the conditions necessary for a free world-union.

Obviously, it must be a unity in diversity and the diversity must be founded on self-determination. The physical principle of union must be subordinated to the psychological, and union accomplished by free will and natural affinities—no compelling force or constraint should come into action. Countries as far apart as England and Canada and Australia may be unified by free will, while adjoining countries like England and Ireland, and Spain and Portugal, may stand apart. In the old days a clear and radical difference used to be made between the position of a colony like Canada and that of a dependency like India. But the present Commonwealth idea has put an end to such difference. All the units are free and the solidarity of the Commonwealth rests on this freedom.

As the world is just now, there appears to be serious difficulties in the way of a free union such as we are considering here. For, the groupings today are built on political, commercial and military considerations—considerations affecting the interests of a particular grouping. It might suit a particular State to be rich and powerful enough to bully others. But the world in general is not interested in a brigand state for the purpose of crushing it. Unfortunately the brigands are many and they are constantly manoeuvring themselves into different positions for their own aggrandisement, regardless of the peace and safety of the world. The great problem is: how to coax a robber state to take to a more peaceful career. Of course, such brigands can be squashed, as were Kaiser Wilhelm or Führer Hitler, by forming a strong combination of powers against them. But is it much good? Does not an outgoing brigand state leave in its place another quite as bad? It is bound to be so as long as egoism rules mankind. Sri Aurobindo says, "The elimination of war and the settlement of differences by peaceful means would remove the military necessity for forced unions, while the right of every people to a free voice and status in the world would remove its political necessity and advantage." These two necessities are closely bound up with each other. This interdependence of nations will have to be permanently

recognised if there is to be any human unity. The economic question still remains at the present time. It is, at least, as important as the political. The economic exploitation of one nation by another, which is so large a part of the present order, would have to go if we wish to achieve human unity. If the element of rivalry and struggle is removed from the political field, at least if an honest effort is made to remove it, the economic struggle would decrease automatically. "The principle of a free world-union being that of the settlement of common affairs by common agreement, this could not be confined to the removal of political differences and political relations alone, but must naturally extend to economic differences and economic relations as well."

There remains now the question of the advantage of unity to the soul of mankind, to its culture and even to its spiritual growth. The old idea we are familiar with: it was the right of a dominant race to foist its culture and language on the conquered people. That right is no longer admitted anywhere. Germany in attempting to establish it has eliminated itself for the time being. England has had to give it up in Ireland and Wales as well as in India. The attempt of the ancient Romans to Romanise their conquered peoples was largely responsible for the rapid decay of their empire. When peace and freedom have been secured for the world, man's mind and power—individual, local, regional as well as national—will flower out in the firm frame of a united humanity. As to what exact form the framework would take, we can only speculate. The dream of a world-parliament is not likely to materialise. An assembly of the present-day national type could only belong to a unitary world-state. A world-federation of the American type would also be inappropriate. Sri Aurobindo says, "Some kind of confederation of the peoples for common human ends, for the removal of all causes of strife and difference, for interrelation and the regulation of mutual aid and interchange, yet leaving to each unit a full internal freedom and power of self-determination, would be the right principle of this unity." But this kind of unity is likely to be somewhat loose physically; what, then would prevent the inherent spirit of separativeness and strife from endangering the union? Surely not coercion! Because any use of force would strike at the very root of the fraternity that is essential to such unification. The bark of world-unity can be saved from floundering only by an inner change in man's psychology—a new development of the mind—the growth of a living religion of humanity based on the realisation of spiritual oneness.

Chapters XXXII and XXXIII deal with the growth of Internationalism, which is defined by the Master as "the attempt of the human mind and life to grow out of the national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it in the interest of the larger synthesis of mankind." It was felt and voiced in a vague way at the commencement of the French Revolution, but it came to nothing as the Revolution followed its own narrower course. Later on, in alliance with Socialism and philosophical Anarchism it began to grow in the minds of philosophers and thinkers into a more definite form—but, still, more as an ideal than a practical proposition. Before the First War the ideal found expression in the Hague Tribunal which can undoubtedly be called a step in

the right direction. Socialism was, however, discredited hopelessly in practice, in both Germany and Russia, where its victory completely annihilated individual freedom. German socialism passed away; Russian socialism survives as a national, and not an international system. "But what is the cause of this almost total bankruptcy of the international ideal under the strong test of life?" asks Sri Aurobindo. He gives an explicit reply too. "The real truth, the real cause of the failure is that internationalism is as yet, except with some exceptional men, merely an idea; it is not yet a thing near to our vital feelings or otherwise a part of our psychology." As long as internationalism is merely an intellectual ideal it cannot go far; it is only when it has grown into man's feelings, sympathies and natural habits that it would be something more than an external adjustment, than a matter of expediency. We have to wait for man's heart to be ready before a profound change can come about in world conditions.

Anyhow, the idea of humanity is certainly at work and has begun to influence our actions, even though slightly. We have to help this idea along. But, how is this to be done? The family, the clan and the tribe were natural groups rising out of vital necessity, but the nation unit has been brought about by the pressure of circumstances and environments—out of a geographical and historical necessity, and force of one kind or another has had a great deal to do with it. Force here includes resistance or reaction against force. The nation so created endured when, behind the conscious national ego, there was a nation-soul. In the absence of such a soul, nation and state flourished for a time only to disappear in a cloud of dust. What, then, of the international unity we are considering? What is there at the back of it? There is here no vital necessity. The race, as a whole, can get on well enough without this unity, so far as mere living goes. And vital satisfaction suffices for the vast majority of men who are essentially vital. There may be a small handful of thinkers and idealists who wish for other things as well, but the decision of things is with the vital majority. Geographical necessity need not be considered, as there is ample room on the earth for all. But a kind of historical necessity is real. It has arisen as the result of certain actual circumstances that have grown up in the evolution of international relations. That necessity is economic, political and mechanical, sufficient to make people think of the possibility of making some arrangement to minimise certain perils, such as the constant danger of war. The thought is there, though as yet vague and speculative.

There is, however, another power, more subtle, that we have to consider. Behind all external circumstances, there exists always "an internal necessity in the being, a will and a design in Nature itself". This is a well-known biological truth. Subconsciously, even unconsciously, there is always "a blind will, a mute idea which contains beforehand the form it is going to create". This proposition is also psychologically true. A man is an individual unit ever emphasising his separate being; but he is also a unit driven by an inner Idea or Truth to unite himself with others of his species to form groups and aggregates ever larger and larger. If the international idea has established itself in his conscious mind, we may well expect that idea to



materialise. Sri Aurobindo says, “Such a will in Nature creates for itself favourable external circumstances and happenings or finds them created for it in the stress of events.” It may then be said—let us rely on this will in Nature and proceed to create a framework of the aggregate; anyhow, even by force if it must be, let us build the body, the soul will grow in it; we should not be disheartened if the body be artificial and the spirit of psychological unity ever so small; it will all come in time, as it did with the nation.

The old means of unification, conquest by one single nation, is not feasible under the present conditions. The concentration of such overwhelming power is bound to be known by other countries beforehand and they are bound to combine against its fulfilment. There is much secrecy possible in these days, at least not for long. Sri Aurobindo said, thirty years ago, that there was a greater chance, before the first Great War, of three or four large empires arriving at an understanding in order to establish complete domination over Asia, Europe and Africa. The two great world conflicts have put an end to such a possibility. So as far as human unity is concerned, the situation has undoubtedly deteriorated. On the other hand, the activities of the U.N.O. are beginning to be appreciated by the weaker nations and may, if there is no serious check, bring about a general desire in them to try and develop internationalism, in spite of the power-grabbing policy of some of the bigger nations. An artificial and external world-unity may be brought about by circumstances—in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “a sufficient formal unity might come into existence”. But the jump is very long from this kind of make-shift arrangement to a true psychological unity. None of the great empires in the past succeeded in bringing about this essential unity. Of course, the world-empire would have this advantage that there would be no external powers to attack it. But the very absence of outside enemies, Sri Aurobindo says, “might well give greater room and power to internal elements of disintegration and... decay.” There is in human affairs an inherent tendency of exhaustion and stagnation to which such an empire would succumb after a period of progress and well-being. A break-up would then be necessary to restore vitality to mankind. The growth of a powerful psychological factor would alone be able to keep the world-empire together. We have stressed the need of a new religion of humanity but it should be understood that this religion of humanity is something above and beyond a common desire to ensure peace, prosperity and progress. For there is in man a natural tendency to compete and combat and struggle—an instinct for liberty, individual and collective, side by side with his instinct for unity. Only a religion of humanity can assure long life to the world-union, if achieved.

This religion of humanity may be either an intellectual and sentimental ideal or a spiritual aspiration which would bring about a change of heart in humanity. The intellectual and sentimental ideal is already in existence, but it has to grow in intensity and acquire a spiritual character before it can bring about an enduring unity of mankind. It has, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “to make itself more explicit, insistent



and categorically imperative." Freedom, equality and unity have to be achieved and they are, we must remember, attributes of the spirit. The soul in man is, then, to be awakened and egoism eliminated in order to establish the true religion of humanity founded on the realisation of men's inner oneness.

Chapter XXXV is the summary of all that has gone before and the last chapter is a postscript that brings the book up to date. We shall go briefly over these two chapters for our readers. A precarious and mechanical oneness of mankind can be constructed by physical and external means and possibly will be, tentatively, in a not very far-off future. But this unity can be assured only if the religion of humanity, which has already appeared in the mind of the thinker and the idealist, spiritualises itself and becomes the inner law of man's life.

There is a force of outward necessity that Nature has used in the past for building up Nation-Units, and she is employing the same force today for driving mankind towards the larger supranational unification. This force has not always been gentle and peaceful, for Nature has freely employed methods of cruel warfare and conquest and devastation. And it is not at all unlikely that she would force man to pass through worse tribulations to prepare the ground for universal amity. This feeling of amity has in the past brought about union as well as cemented it. But for the greater work of constructing and cementing a world-union, it has, as we have noted already, to grow more intense and take a spiritual turn. In the meantime, "Nature herself is sure to shape upheavals in such a way as to bring about her end." An eventual unification is practically inevitable. As to its ultimate form, we can but speculate. It may be a centralised World-State or a looser world-union which may take the form of a close federation or a simple confederacy of nations for the common ends of humanity. Serious objections can be brought against all the three forms. The evils of over-centralisation we have discussed often enough. A loose confederacy, on the other hand, would be more liable to a break-up. The saving power needed is a new psychological factor which would harmonise freedom with unity. Sri Aurobindo says, "The religion of humanity seems to be the one growing force which tends in that direction." But, as he has emphasised often enough, its intellectual form is not enough, it has to be definitely spiritualised. A religion of humanity means a growing realisation that there is a secret spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one. Pending the growth of this realisation, man must go forward with the work of unification, even though the method employed be external and physical and intellectual.

In the post-script chapter, Sri Aurobindo briefly deals with the world-conditions of today and shows how in spite of two devastating wars the idea of human unity has moved forward steadily. In fact the two conflagrations have been of immense use in the practical development of that idea. "The League of Nations", he says, "came into being as a direct consequence of the first war, the U.N.O. similarly as a consequence of the second world-wide conflict. If the third war... does come, it is likely to precipitate as inevitably a further step and perhaps the final outcome of this great world-

endeavour.” Nature uses such means, apparently opposed to her purpose, in order to fulfil that purpose. Sri Aurobindo is optimistic both as to what has been achieved so far and as to our prospects in the future. There were certain initial defects in the structure of the League of Nations which the U.N.O. sought to avoid. An attempt was made, at least in principle, but that attempt, too, was not thoroughgoing and successful. A strong element of oligarchy still survived. Still, as Sri Aurobindo says, “a too hasty or radical endeavour to get rid of these defects might lead to a crash of the whole edifice”. A new world-wide catastrophe would probably remedy this, for Nature herself raises obstacles and again removes them to facilitate the fulfilment of her intention. But, for this, a World-State will have to be built up without exclusions and on a principle of equality.

Just at the present stage<sup>1</sup> the real danger is not the defective structure of the U.N.O. but the division of the people of the earth into two bitter factions. If this division does not cease, Nature may bring on a dire cataclysm to open the world’s eyes. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, ominous and reassuring at the same time, “A new, a difficult and uncertain beginning might have to be made in the midst of the chaos and ruin after perhaps an extermination on a large scale, and a more successful creation could be predicted only if a way was found to develop a better humanity or perhaps a greater, a superhuman race.” It is clear that humanity is not willing to stop at the Nation-State. There have been innumerable attempts to go beyond it. But, so far, it has taken the form of one nation establishing its sway over others. Sri Aurobindo sums up the whole book<sup>2</sup> in the following eloquent and lucid passage:

“We conclude then that in the conditions of the world at present, even taking into consideration its most disparaging features and dangerous possibilities, there is nothing that need alter the view we have taken of the necessity and inevitability of some kind of world-union; the drive of Nature, the compulsion of circumstances and the present and future need of mankind make it inevitable. The general conclusions we have arrived at will stand and the consideration of the modalities and possible forms or lines of alternative or successive development it may take. The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities.”

(Concluded)

C. C. Dutt

1. This concluding article in the series first appeared in the January 19, 1952 issue of *Mother India*.

2. *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

## TWO WORDS

### A prayer

When all is said and all's been done  
There is often but one prayer to be uttered.  
It is more sweetly resounding  
Than the formulas daily muttered.

It lies hid in the deep silence  
Within the core of our heart.  
Before you enter there  
Put all phantom words apart.

It begins with space,  
The space we have cleared out of what is already known;  
Carefully remove reason's every littlest clod  
Soft-footed, follow the path untrod.

At first we may hear dying echoes following  
A child's laugh, the song of a lark,  
Murmurs of past or future...  
It is not to these we must hark.

At last we dip into utter silence  
And begin to receive an unspoken message  
Not yet taken by the mind,  
Something to be found, as yet a dim presage.

Then with a bolt it frays through the brain its passage.  
All is clear, unsealed,  
Written on the slate in Light, revealed.  
A pause.  
Our turn.  
Two words, two syllables.  
No more, no less:

“Lord, yes.”

MAGGI

# SANSKRIT—A CREATIVE FORCE

## Introduction

WHEN we speak about the greatness of Sanskrit we often underline the importance of ancient culture, religion, literature, poetry, science, psychology etc. But we hardly pay attention to the great creative power of this beautiful language. Sanskrit is not just a language but a Force that is ever creative and formative. Not because it created prolifically the most profound literatures, philosophies, religions etc., and refined its own categories till it achieved the highest perfection, but because it is capable of producing new categories, new literatures, new philosophies etc. It creates and creates, profusely, endlessly. Yet never satisfied, never exhausted. What could be the reasons behind this creative power of Sanskrit? Here are a few points which highlight this aspect of the Sanskrit language.

## Originating from the Highest Source

Sanskrit is a language which is intuitively metaphysical and revealingly poetic, subtle and suggestive, symbolic and figurative. This language has been evolved and perfected in the Vedas and Upanishads. It is a language of Mantra, 'a word of power, of illumination, of light'. "The theory of the Mantra is that it is a word of power born out of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental, framed in the heart and not constructed by the intellect, held in the mind, again concentrated on by the waking mental consciousness and then thrown out silently or vocally—the silent word is perhaps held to be more potent than the spoken—precisely for the work of creation. The Mantra can not only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychical being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did not before possess, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the production of material forms on the physical plane." (Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 12, pp. 169-70) Thus Sanskrit is a living and conscious Force, an entity that has directly come from the highest source, and is capable of conveying infinitely more than what the surface sense of language seems to indicate. It is not any man-made invention or mere tool for communication, but a revelation. It is much more than merely a meaning or a sound devoid of deeper sense other than that attributed by convention. It is a living and creative mode of power, by itself formative and creative and not merely a conventional symbol for lifeless ideas.

## A Language of Great Resonance

The resonating power and vibrational purity of Sanskrit make it a perfect instrument for a spiritual growth. Its very name *Samskritam* means ‘polished’, ‘refined’, ‘sculpted to perfection’. The physical structure of the language is flawless. Its construction follows an organic and logical development. In Sanskrit all the sounds are articulated through five distinct regions of articulation located in the mouth: throat, palate, hard palate, root of the upper teeth, and lips. On the basis of this the sounds are either guttural, palatal; cerebral; dental or labial. Though the letters of one group are articulated from one position yet each sound of that group differs from the other because of its internal efforts. For example: *ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *gha* and *na* belong to the guttural group. Here *ka* is a hard unvoiced consonant with minimal breath, *kha* is also hard and unvoiced but it is pronounced with maximal breath; *ga* is soft and voiced with minimal breath but *gha* is soft and voiced with maximal breath; *na* is the last sound in the group which is soft and voiced but nasal. For this sound the breath gets released through the nostrils and the mouth. The arrangement of all consonants in the Sanskrit alphabet follow the same order. Thus, organised scientifically within the five distinct mouth positions, the sounds of Sanskrit are extraordinarily capable of creating the highest degree of resonance and clarity of articulation. The importance of this scientific organisation lies in the degree of resonance created by each sound. One can consciously articulate any sound with minimal breath and experience the intensity of a focused one-pointedness of concentration. With a sound produced by maximum breath one can experience a sense of relaxation or expansiveness.

The mere speaking of or listening to the sounds of Sanskrit generates joy, clarity and inspiration. It has a refining influence on one’s consciousness. By conscious use of this language one gets the result of doing Pranayama. Thus, Sanskrit, with its power of great resonance is highly powerful and potent for creating a happy and peaceful atmosphere in and around the one who uses it consciously.

## Transparent System of Root-Sounds

Sanskrit in its purity is the language “based on the true and a perfect relation of *vāk* and *artha*. Everyone of its vowels and consonants has a particular and inalienable force which exists by the nature of things not by development or human choice”, says Sri Aurobindo. (*SABCL*, Vol. 11, p. 449) In Sanskrit the meaning of any word is not derived by chance or from any convention but from its own depth, the system of root-sounds, sound-ideas. It is because of this transparency of the system of root-sounds and clear semantics that Sanskrit has the ability to discover its own history, and eventually it may lead us to the origin of human speech.

“When in English,” for example, “we use the word ‘wolf’ or ‘cow’, we mean by it simply the animal designated; we are not conscious of any reason why we

should use that particular sound for the idea except the immemorial custom of the language; and we cannot use it for any other sense or purpose except by an artificial device of style.” (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 51) But in Sanskrit the word for ‘wolf’ is *vṛka*. If one looks at the history of this word one finds that the word *vṛka* has been derived from the root *vraśc* meaning ‘to tear’, ‘to cut asunder’. So *vṛka* means ‘the tearer’ and therefore ‘among all other applications of’ its senses ‘a wolf’. The root *vraśc* is again a member of a simple root-sound *vṛ* which, further, has in it the seed-sounds *v* and *ṛ*. So to know the meaning of the root *vraśc* one has to be aware of the significance of the seed-sounds *v* and *ṛ*, and one also has to see whether these sounds have the same significance wherever they occur. A proper investigation of many Sanskrit words shows that the result does not vary. In this way a Sanskrit word is not a “conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history.” (*Ibid.*) This transparent system of formation of words from the root-sounds follows a natural process and is one of the important factors that makes Sanskrit an ever creative language. It also provides enough clues to rediscover the lost heritage of Sanskrit.

### Unique Significance of Sanskrit Words

Sanskrit words are highly connotative as well as denotative in their implications. Each and every word here has a number of things to suggest. They reveal the inner significances of the objects that they express. If one understands this nature of the Sanskrit language and uses it consciously it will help one in many spheres. Even a perfect understanding of just one word and living the truth that the word carries in it will lead to great results. एकः शब्दः सम्यक् ज्ञातः सुप्रयुक्तः स्वर्गे लोके च कामधुग् भवति। These are not any fanciful statements but the result of the direct experiences of our ancient Rishis.

A letter in Sanskrit is called *akṣara* which literally means imperishable. This is not merely attributive but the term *akṣara* reveals the whole secret of the speech process or the sound system. It says that sound is eternal. It does not perish. शब्दो नित्यः। नित्या वै वाक्। न वाक् क्षीयते। The letter is also called *varṇa* which originally means hue, colour. Thus every letter as a sound symbol is to be seen as a hue. So *vaṛṇamālā*, the term used for alphabet, means a garland of colours or qualities or hues for the artist to paint with on the sheet of Reality. The word *vyākaraṇa* is not limited simply to grammar. It shows the development and growth of speech from its undistinguished stage to the distinguished stage, and while doing so it leads to the Sound-force, the eternal *śabdabrahman*. The word *darśana* is not philosophy, but a seeing, a revelational expression; *svādhyāya* is not mere reading but going deep in self-contemplation; *anuśīlanam* is not just glancing but bringing into conduct. The word *sat-saṅga* is not merely a company of good people but a body of people who have come together (*saṅga*) to ascertain reality (*sat*). The word *chatra* is not an umbrella but anything that covers. These are a few examples showing the high connotative power of Sanskrit

words. Similarly the significance of the synonyms in Sanskrit has to be noticed. A synonym in Sanskrit is not just one more word for an object, but a word expressing another quality of that object. For example *Amarakosha* (a synonymic dictionary in Sanskrit) lists 34 words for ‘fire’. Each word reveals a particular quality of fire. The word *vahni* means that which carries the oblation or offerings to the gods; *pāvaka* means that which purifies; *anala* means not enough, the fire can devour the entire world, and that is still not enough, so it is *anala*, the all-devourer.

All this shows how minutely discerning our ancient Rishis were in their observations. At the same time it also reveals the fact that our ancients, the guardians of the language, were highly conscious in the matter of using the language. They did not use the language just to communicate among themselves. They used it as a tool for discovering the true nature of themselves and all that they saw in and around them. Herein lies the sacredness of Sanskrit—it helps to discover the nature of everything; it helps to discover the sacredness of life. It is a Force functioning on many levels of consciousness, ever purifying, ever formative and creative. So the rediscovery of Sanskrit means to grow conscious of the hidden forces in the sounds of Sanskrit.

SAMPADANANDA MISHRA

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## SANSKRIT

(1)

...The language of  
seers  
and  
saints  
cultures  
the  
mind  
...Sanskrit  
is  
the  
Divine thread  
which  
can  
brighten  
the  
future  
of  
mankind...

(2)

...Sanskrit is  
the  
language  
of  
the  
Gods  
the *Kosha* says...  
...the mind  
that learns it  
also  
prays...

PRIYA M. VAIDYA



## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of November 2005)

### The Mother's Classes in the Playground

THE first French class that the Mother started in the Playground used to take place on its eastern side in a small room. This was the same room where She gave interviews. In fact we called it the Mother's Interview room.

Pavitra-da's laboratory was in a smaller room next to it. All the students of this class were grown-ups. We were about ten or twelve: Pavitra-da, Nolini-da, Amrita-da, Kalyan-da, Dayakar, Ranju, Amiyo and we five girls, Minnie-di, Millie-di, Tehmi-ben, Violette and I.

The Mother would come to the class immediately after finishing Her game of tennis. We had almost everyday a dictation. I had just begun the second book in my learning of French and so naturally I felt extremely scared of dictations. I would sit there like an idiot, a "Royal" pencil in hand, amidst all those pundits. While giving the dictation the Mother would repeat the whole sentence in her soft voice very slowly so that I could write. Out of fear I would be drenched in sweat. After giving the dictation She would take each notebook one after the other and attentively correct the mistakes Herself. My notebook was full of red marks. The Mother would look at me and gently smile as if to say: 'Ink-stained hands, ink-stained mouth, why, my child has returned from school!' I would keep my notebook in such a way that nobody could see it. After the dictation everyone had to recite poems. Even Nolini-da, Pavitra-da and Amrita-da had to do it. No one could escape this. And everyone got nervous in front of the Mother. I have recited a lot of poems before the Mother: *Les Elfes* by Le Conte de Lisle, *Liberté* by Paul Eluard, *Booz Endormi*, *La Conscience* by Victor Hugo, the famous poem *Ballade de Florentin Prunier* by Georges Duhamel and other poems by reputed poets. Minnie-di once recited a poem most beautifully in her sweet voice. We were all enchanted. Tehmi-ben, in her lovely voice, recited the very well-known poem by Paul Verlaine "*Il pleure dans mon coeur/Comme il pleut sur la ville*". The most mischievous of the lot, Amrita-da always brought the shortest poem to recite. His recitation would be over in no time! He would then heave a sigh of relief and look at the others and quietly smile. He was a great fun-loving man and was known for his joviality in the Ashram. Even when he spoke to the Mother, there was a glint of mischief. Let me recount one incident. In the Mother's room near Her door there was a small area that was slightly raised. Almost everyone stumbled there. One day somebody suggested that this area be levelled off. The Mother objected, saying strongly:

"You should all be a little conscious."

One day Amrita-da while coming into the room knocked his foot very badly



against this same place. The Mother exclaimed:

“Amrita!”

Pat came the answer from his mischief-filled eyes:

“Mother, just trying to be conscious!”

And everyone present there burst out laughing. The Mother Herself could not control Her laughter. This was our Amrita-da. And so naturally his presence made the French class most interesting and amusing.

The Mother would Herself read out each of the poems that were recited to Her. If only we could have recorded those poems then in the Mother’s voice! It was only after listening to the Mother that I understood how words combined with music and rhythm in order to bring out the actual meaning of the poem.

In this French class, the Mother read out from books by Molière, Racine, Corneille, Anatole France. She enjoyed reading *Révolte des Anges* by Anatole France and *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand. She also read *Andromaque*, *Le Cid*, *Les Femmes Savantes* and other such books. We would just sit and listen entranced.

I remember an incident now. The Mother asked me to go to the board to write something. I started writing. When I finished, I noticed that my line instead of being straight was going upward. I was deeply embarrassed. Everyone else was laughing merrily. She told me very gently:

“*C’est ton aspiration qui monte tout droit vers l’Infini.*” (It is your aspiration that is rising straight towards the Infinite.)

This was the Mother’s way. She would never embarrass anybody. She always encouraged us at every moment. How She helped us to get rid of fear and diffidence from our nature!

Once while taking the dictation instead of writing *vraiment* I wrote *vraiment*. Pavitra-da started teasing me. I told the Mother: “In French it is with the feminine form of the adjective that the adverb is made.”

She called Pavitra-da and said:

“Now, great pundit, explain to her why you should write *vraiment*.”

And the Mother went on looking teasingly at Pavitra-da.

Pavitra-da just said:

“Priti, this is how it is written.”

I kept quiet. The Mother went on smiling at me and in order to console me said: “I too used to make a lot of spelling mistakes earlier.”

This was truly Mother’s way. Always encouraging us, giving us instances from Her own life, She took us forward. When I returned home I took up the French grammar book and studied very carefully the chapter on adverbs. Only then did I feel confident.

The most difficult thing for me was to be able to speak French without making any mistakes. The Mother would not talk to us in any other language.

Here I am reminded of an incident from Amrita-da’s childhood. He had grown

restless to have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. He requested Bejoykant to take him to Sri Aurobindo. Evidently Amrita-da had already had Darshan of the Master previously. Bejoykant (the same person who had come away to Pondicherry with Sri Aurobindo) replied that he would ask Sri Aurobindo and let him know. Four or five days later, Bejoykant told Amrita-da in the morning that he could have Sri Aurobindo's Darshan that evening. Bejoykant accompanied Amrita-da to Sri Aurobindo that evening with a little hesitation. Sri Aurobindo was writing at that time. He left his writing and turned towards Bejoykant and Amrita-da to look at them. Amrita-da turned around and saw that Bejoykant was no longer with him. Amrita-da was all alone.

Sri Aurobindo went on looking at Amrita-da and Amrita-da lost himself in His eyes. He could not speak English very well then and so he was extremely nervous. He however tried to speak a little. The few words that he had learnt before coming to see Him also got stuck in his throat. Somehow he managed to blurt out:

“I want come daily see you.”

My condition in trying to speak French was a little like Amrita-da's speaking English. I don't know whether Sri Aurobindo laughed on hearing Amrita-da's English but the Mother would often tease me while listening to me speak French. I would sometimes get almost angry with irritation. Two incidents come to mind.

One day I had very high fever and so I went to inform the Mother. I blurted out in my wrong French:

“*Mère, j'ai du fièvre.*”

As soon as She heard me say this She started teasing me.

“*J'ai du fièvre, j'ai du fièvre,*” She went on repeating.

She gave me a flower and once again repeated:

“*J'ai du fièvre.*”

On another occasion I blurted out:

“*Ce livre appartient à moi.*” At once the Mother took up the wrong sentence “*appartient à moi, appartient à moi.*” She repeated it in such a way that I felt very embarrassed. Her eyes glimmered with an unforgettable mischief. That look of Hers flashes in my memory even today like a living photograph.

\*

The Mother was sitting with an open book and we all sat around Her, staring at Her intently in pin-drop silence. But within we felt a suppressed excitement. What is She going to tell us today? There was a table-lamp beside Her to illumine the book from which She would read. In a thousand rays its light had completely surrounded the Mother and was bowing down to Her. We waited quietly. Bathed in that cascading light the beauty of the Mother's pure white body was incomparable.

All of us, young, old and adults, sat mesmerised by the Mother's face. The Mother turned the pages of the book. Just the sound of shuffling paper. That is all.

The creatures of the world were impatient to hear the Mother's voice, so soft to the ears. Even the gods had come down to the Playground. They too sat in our midst. They too had never seen such a sight! The Divine Mother herself teaching Her human children! The gods too had never had Darshan of the Mother in a human body. That is why they would come down to be close to Her. I have also heard that in the evening when the Mother came downstairs to give us flower-blessings in the Ashram, the gods would gather in the Meditation Hall. The Divine Mother Herself had taken on a human body in order to descend into this dust-filled earth of ours. It was but natural for the gods to desire to have Her Darshan. After all, they never get to see the Mother like this. How fortunate we are then to be blessed with human life!

When the Mother read out "The Four Aspects of the Mother" from Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*, we all just stared at Her face unblinkingly. While reading the descriptions of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati, She would bring down the Power of each one on to the Playground. Even Her voice would change for each of the four Powers. "*Mahakali is of another nature. Not wideness but height, not wisdom but force and strength are her peculiar power.*" While reading this part there was so much power and intensity in the Mother's voice! The whole Playground reverberated with the sound of the Mother's deep, grave voice. The Mother's physical appearance changed too. Seeing Her then we felt like little ants. The ground was enveloped in a profound hush. Everyone, the young, the adults, the old, remained silent. What an enchanting atmosphere was created in these classes during those days!

*Janani tomar maranharan bani*

*Nirob gaganey bhori uthey chupey chupey.*

(Your voice that stamps out the fear of death,  
Rises and fills up the sky imperceptibly.)

Sometimes the Mother would give mischievous answers to our questions. On days when She was in a jovial mood, She recounted to us incidents from Her own life. We shall come to those stories a little later. Stories would come tumbling out of "grandma's bag" [*thakumar jhuli*, a Bengali expression referring to a collection of enthralling stories for children], as it were. Her bag was full of all kinds of stories. The more we heard these stories, the more we felt like listening to more. We would all push one another to try and sit as close as possible around Her. The Mother had a marvellous way of telling stories. It was in this class that She told us about Her time in Algeria where She had gone to learn occultism with Mr. Théon. She told us many stories from that time. Days just flew past...

Everyone wanted to join the Mother's French class just to listen to Her and understand what She said. Sometimes the class would go on till nine o'clock. But She never got tired. She just went on talking and we just went on gleefully drinking it all in. Sometimes the subjects were subtle philosophical ones: the Mother would

explain to us about death in such a simple language that even we, with our little minds, could naturally understand some things about it.

Sometimes the Mother told us such amusing things that the whole Playground would resound with laughter, why even those serious-minded “who were forbidden to laugh” could not control themselves and had cramps in their stomachs. The Mother laughed heartily too and enjoyed herself tremendously.

Nolini-da and Pavitra-da were always present in this class. The Mother used to look upon Pavitra-da like her young son. If there was any scientific thing to be explained in the class, She at once called Pavitra-da.

“Pavitra, O great pundit, would you kindly explain this question?”

And Her eyes would light up with mischievous glee. Poor Pavitra-da looked a little flustered in front of all his students and then he would start explaining seriously. He really got quite nervous. And we used to all enjoy the scene. How bottled up he looked then!

The Mother had a different relationship with Nolini-da—as with an elder son. One day there was an animated discussion on ‘purusha’ and ‘prakriti’. The younger ones were just not getting the essence.

I remembered how in my college days our philosophy professor had tried so desperately to make us understand the concept of ‘purusha’ and ‘prakriti’. The moment he mentioned ‘purusha’ and ‘prakriti’ we would immediately think of man and woman and start laughing! What on earth was the teacher trying to tell us?

I did not think that one day this same question would come up in the Mother’s class as well. I felt greatly frustrated.

The Mother avoided the question and sweetly asked Nolini-da:

“Nolini, why don’t you explain this to them simply. I don’t know anything.”

We all sat expectantly waiting to see how Nolini-da would explain it.

Nolini-da did not speak for some time. We just kept on looking at his face with uncontrollable curiosity. Then finally he said:

“If the Mother herself does not know then how can Nolini know anything?”

We were dumbstruck!

What an answer! Bravo! All these old sadhaks like Pavitra-da, Nolini-da, Amrita-da always had that attitude of great humility *vis-à-vis* the Mother. It was such an admirable trait in them. We have learnt so much from their beautiful conduct by keeping the goal of faithful love for the Mother always intact.

The Mother kept looking at Nolini-da for a while. Love was overflowing from Her eyes.

Then the Mother herself explained the difficult concept of ‘purusha’ and ‘prakriti’ so simply and so beautifully that we could not believe it! And when we went on to read “The Divine Shakti” from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga* I realised I had finally understood!

The Mother had this natural gift of being able to explain clearly in simple

language difficult philosophical concepts and spiritual subjects. She used to teach us so many things with so much patience! Things that I had imagined I would never understand, I began following almost without my knowing. The Mother shaped us with limitless patience. She would tell us many stories from Her life. Those were the days when we received supreme lessons. I can still hear that marvellously soft, gentle voice of the Mother today. With words it is impossible to catch that blissful state we lived in under the beautiful musical cascade of that voice of pure sweetness. Those words articulated in that voice still resonate within me.

*Kaaneyr bhitor diya mormey poshilo go  
Aakul korilo mor praan.*

(Through my ears they entered my inmost heart,  
And made my being hunger for yet more.)

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

(Translated by Maurice Shukla from the original Bengali *Abismaraniya Muhurta*)

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## I'M SORRY...

I'm sorry I kept you waiting  
'Tis so very unfortunate  
Not to have another way  
Into my apartments...  
Every time I run into you  
Carrying crates of garbage  
Empty tins of sausages  
And countless ends of cigars.  
I'll need ages to clean these corners  
And dust the darkness out  
To call you in.  
Ah me!  
I can't bear to see you blushing  
And waiting all the time  
At my doorstep...

CHANDRASHEKHAR RATH

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of November 2005)

## 24. Salutations! Mother Bhagavata!

BEGINNING with the *Vishnu Purana*, all the Puranas have had a big hand in sustaining India's Vedic stream and spreading the Bhakti Movement. However, the *Bhagavata* has proved to be the most popular of them all with the individual aspirant, the masses as well as the scholar. One of the reasons might be historic. When Sri Chaitanya, the great Naiyayika scholar, chose the *Bhagavata* as the base plank of his darshana, the Purana ceased to be just one of the eighteen but became an image of Krishna himself for the devotees. It is said that Sri Chaitanya was once asked why he had not chosen to write a commentary on the Brahma Sutras as other great Acharyas (Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva) had done. He replied simply that the best commentary on the work of Badarayana is the *Bhagavata* itself.

If the Alwars and the Ramanuja School took the *Vishnu Purana* as the witness of their spiritual endeavours, Sri Chaitanya considered the *Bhagavata* as *pramāṇa*. The Chaitanya School's (known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism) scriptural foundations have been laid down firmly by the writings of Rupa Goswami (*Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*), his uncles Jiva Goswami and Sanatana Goswami and other great scholar-thinker-devotees like Ramananda Ray, Kavi Karnapura and Narottama Das Thakura. All of them drew their inspiration from the *Bhagavata*. According to Amar Nath Chatterjee:

With a view to supremely project the divinity of Krishna and identify Him as *Bhagavān Svayam* the Chaitanya philosophers skillfully geared their epistemology and recognised the Bhagavata Purana as the greatest of all sources of knowledge (*sarvapramāṇam cakravartibhūtam*). Keeping in view their own metaphysical problems they found the said text as the most convenient and consistent for their purpose and therefore considered the same as sacrosanct.<sup>1</sup>

Then the logical conclusion is underlined: Sri Krishna is the Supreme Bhagawan. The inference is drawn from a phrase in the Purana itself: *Krishnastu bhagavān svayam*. Taking in the legend suggested in the *Padma Purana* that Krishna withdrew physically into the ocean of the *Bhagavata* at the conclusion of his incarnation, it is but natural that even the text of the Purana is considered a holy image. The orthodox will keep their copies used for "parāyaṇa" bound in a silk cloth and will carry the precious text on their head, to show their intense reverence. The Bhakti Movement which was given a tremendous push forward by Sri Chaitanya has continued to wax

1. *Sri Chaitanya and the Chaitanya Movement* (2001), pp. 98-9.

till today, and has become a global presence with the *Bhagavata* as the guide. The founder of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Sri-la Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada says:

We must know the present need of human society. And what is that need? Human society is no longer bounded by geographical limits to particular countries or communities. Human society is broader than in the Middle Ages, and the world tendency is towards one state or one human society. The ideals of spiritual communism, according to *Srimad Bhagavatam*, are based more or less on the oneness of the entire human society, say of the entire energy of living beings. The need is felt by great thinkers to make this a successful ideology. *Srimad Bhagavatam* will fill this need in human society. It begins, therefore, with the aphorism of Vedanta philosophy *janmādyasya yataḥ* to establish the idea of a common cause.<sup>2</sup>

But how can a single scripture take charge of the entire humanity? But the *Bhagavata* is special as it can teach people to learn the value of peace in a war-torn world, says Sri-la Prabhupada. Introducing the Purana in schools and colleges would change “the demoniac face of society”. Swami Tapasyananda, who has translated every verse of the Purana as Sri-la Prabhupada, also concludes that this is a universal scripture because there is such a plasticity about its message, indicated by the first verse, that suits all levels and facets of human thought:

The first verse of the *Bhagavata* is very enigmatic in its meaning. Many of the cardinal words in it are vague in their import, capable of diverse interpretations. So all the commentators have interpreted the verse in the way it suits the metaphysics of their school—whether monistic, dualistic or positions between these extremes. It would seem that the author of the *Bhagavata* has introduced this vagueness purposely. For, from the examination of the Text as a whole, one will find that he has no objection to any metaphysics, provided it supports and fosters Bhakti, which according to him is the *summum bonum* of life.<sup>3</sup>

Bhakti or devotion is the very basis of all religions and the Purana is verily a

2. *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Second Canto—Part I (1986), p. xi.

The first verse of the Purana, beginning *janmādyasya yataḥ* referred to by Sri-la Prabhupada:

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

3. *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Volume I (1980), p. 3, fn.



*bhakta-samrājya*, an empire of devotees. All the Bhakti Movements in the last one thousand years have drawn their inspiration from its legends and the moral world in-built in it. Every one of the Indian languages has its own version of the *Bhagavata* and the twentieth century has not lagged behind in literal translations as well as recreations of *Bhagavata* episodes. Dilip Kumar Roy, an ardent disciple of Sri Aurobindo, has brought the Aurobindonian diction to his English selection, *The Immortals of the Bhagavat*. Already, his Bengali volume, *Bhagavati Katha* (1946) had elicited an emotional message from Sri Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon) about the Purana:

In the whole body of the Hindu scriptures I do not know of any book that is the equal of the *Bhagavata*—at least, to put it personally, there is none that has been such a profound and continuous source of inspiration to me. It was the first book I read with my Guru. And also the last; from the very first time I read it, almost spelling my way through a Hindi translation, I knew that here was what I had sought, the one fixed point in the everchanging flux of joy and sorrow, success and failure, life and death.<sup>4</sup>

Another Englishman, Paul Dukes, who wrote the foreword to Dilip Kumar Roy's book has profound arguments in favour of its universality and says:

The spiritual prescriptions of the *Bhagavata* are suited to every type of worshipper, whether his preference be for idols or abstractions.

It is obvious that despite reservations from a quarter of educated Indians influenced by a few western scholars who could not see anything more than mere pantheism even in the Vedas, discriminating intellectuals from all over the world have found the Purana world fascinating and recognised the *Bhagavata* as an infallible guide in regulating and sustaining one's temporal, religious and spiritual life. The Puranas, according to them, were part of the evolutionary process from the Vedas to help the man of the world in his quest for the life eternal. Sri Aurobindo says that the change in form from classical Sanskrit poetry to the Puranas and the Tantra did not mean any change in the spirit:

On the contrary all the type of the mind reflected there is of the familiar Indian character, constant through every change, religio-philosophic, religio-ethical, religio-social, with all the past spiritual experience behind it and supporting it though not prominently in the front.... The difference is that they take in the hands of these poets more of the form of a tradition well understood and worked

4. *The Immortals of the Bhagavat* (1957), p.viii.



upon by the intellect than of an original spiritual creation, and it is the intelligence that is prominent, accepting and observing established ideas and things in this frame and type and making its critical or reproductive observation and assent vivid with the strong lines and rich colours of artistic presentation and embellishing image.<sup>5</sup>

The religio-spiritual genius of India was simply reacting and readjusting itself to the changed Indian scenario because by then the nation had slipped into a prolonged battle to safeguard itself from Islamic attacks and occupation. The common man who was harried no end needed something to hold on to and the Puranas gave him the required sustenance through positing the cult of bhakti. The hymns of the Bhakti Movement became possible because of the work-base of the Puranas. The Alvars had only to refer to an elephant that had been saved by the Lord or the dwarf who had been transformed into a cosmic figure and the listeners caught the background tale and were comforted. These images of a Gajendra, a Vamana or a Prahlada were the kindly lights that led the Indian from the encircling gloom of foreign occupation, forced conversions and destruction of all that they had cherished in their national art and literature. It was not the Vedic stream alone that suffered so. The Sramanic stream, especially Buddhism, which had institutionalised learning in a big way had built massive universities at Taxila and Nalanda. These were destroyed by the maddening fury of the Islamic invaders. According to Hieun Tsang, the Nalanda University alone had nine thousand manuscripts. One has only to go to Taxila near Islamabad in Pakistan and visit the Museum there to realise what India has lost. These pitiful remains remind one of what was once the centre of Gandhara art and sculpture, Buddhist learning and the message of self-denial and universal peace propounded by the renunciates in the Viharas.

In these centuries that seemed an Eternal Night for the common man, the Puranas provided the needed support. Sanatana Dharma is indeed the Way Eternal. It cannot be destroyed by mere iconoclasts and land-hungry invaders. So much so that even stray glimpses of a single century (20<sup>th</sup>) are enough to prove how the Purana experience with its emphasis on bhakti continues to this day. Sri Aurobindo's placement of the Puranas in our cultural foundations was a great eye-opener for many educated Indians who had been brought up to scoff at our past by the myopic west. Dilip Kumar Roy, for instance, retold in effective English some of the *Bhagavata* legends. He chose the English language to do so, encouraged by his guru, Sri Aurobindo who wrote to his disciple:

My aim in writing or in encouraging others to write is not personal glory but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry.

5. *Foundations of Indian Culture* (1959), pp. 351-2.

You are right in saying that up till now the English people have not smiled on Indian poets writing verse in English. But the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.

It is Mother Bhagavata herself who sustains all her children and makes their endeavours successful. She does not expect anything from them either, except bhakti. Dilip Kumar Roy's recreation of some of the *Bhagavata* legends (Ambarisha, Vamana, Narasimha) do prove that the Purana still reigns supreme. Whether it is the Islamic or British or a Multinational occupation that strike terror in us and get us worried about the future of cultured living, we always get a message of hope from these legends. What if the language is not Sanskrit or Telugu or Bengali or Oriya? What if it is English from an entirely different culture? The heart-beats are the same; the problems are the same; the aspirant's anxieties are the same and so is the unfailing Grace from above which comes as a load of love and compassion as in this paean of gratitude from Serpent Kaliya's queens:

Out from the womb of Rapture supernal,  
 Out from inviolate Peace  
 Who art thou risen, O fadeless New Dawn,  
 Heralding darkness' surcease?

Krishna we name thee, Announcer of sky-thrill,  
 Ultimate Bourne of all Gleam!  
 Longing, for aeons, we waited thy Advent,  
 Asking when thou wouldst redeem.<sup>6</sup>

While most of the legends retold in the *Bhagavata* continue to be used for lectures and even for concocting secular similes, the legend of an unnamed Gopi who must have been very much part of the Brindavan atmosphere has now become the Queen of our Emotional Throne. Radha's name is not found in the *Bhagavata*. But her presence in the post-*Bhagavata* period has elevated the Purana to great heights and it has become the main scripture of the followers of Chaitanya. She is a Gopi and the cow-herdresses are altogether on a different, higher plane than the rest of the people we encounter in the Purana. Sri Aurobindo refers to the Gopis as "embodiments of a spiritual passion, extraordinary by their extremeness of love, personal devotion... unreserved self-giving."

Tomes have been written about Radha among these cowherdresses. It is said that the Kerala poet Lilasuka was the first to refer to Krishna as 'Radhavara' in his *Krishna*

6. *The Immortals of the Bhagavat*, p. 138.

*Karnamrutam*. There are references to Radha in *Brahmavaivarta* and *Padma Puranas*. Hala's *Gatha Saptasati* (2<sup>nd</sup> century) also associates Radha with Krishna:

Krishna! When you remove with the breath of your mouth a particle of dust from Radhika's eye, you take away at the same time the pride of these other milkmaids.<sup>7</sup>

Radha who has been somewhat of a shadow till the time of the *Bhagavata*, comes to the forefront of Vaishnava culture in Jayadeva's *Gita Govindam*. Another two centuries, and we have Vidyapati who took the Radha-Krishna theme to the very pinnacle of exquisite poesy cast in the mould of bridal mysticism.

The *Bhagavata* inspiration in the religio-spiritual history of India took another big turn with Vidyapati's *padāvali* that celebrated the love of Radha and Krishna in the schemata laid down for bhakti yoga. While one can approach the Divine as mother, father, friend and teacher, it is only when we approach the Divine as the Beloved that the spiritual mathematics of "Equals One" is solved. Sri Aurobindo says this is "the highest and greatest relation" we can achieve with the Divine:

Love is a passion and it seeks for two things, eternity and intensity, and in the relation of the Lover and Beloved the seeking for eternity and for intensity is instinctive and self-born. Love is a seeking for mutual possession, and it is here that the demand for mutual possession becomes absolute. Passing beyond desire of possession which means a difference, it is a seeking for oneness, and it is here that the idea of oneness, of two souls merging into each other and becoming one finds the acme of its longing and the utterness of its satisfaction.<sup>8</sup>

The mysterious alchemy of devotion makes use of the *Padāvali* of Vidyapati to transform an erudite Naiyayika scholar from Nadia into Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1456-1534) who used group sankirtan to spread Krishna bhakti all over India. His inspiration has raised several paramparas in the course of these five hundred years. His discovery of Brindavan brought back alive the racial memory of the childhood, boyhood and youth of Krishna. In fact, he was considered to be Krishna himself, manifest now in the Chaitanya image. It is said that Ramananda Roy, the Governor of the southern provinces of the Orissan Empire once met and had a long conversation with Sri Chaitanya about bhakti. Chaitanya was happy that Roy considered the love of Radha for Krishna as the supreme form of bhakti. "Her (Radha's) happiness consists in the happiness of Krishna, *tatsukhasukhitvam*." Presently Sri Chaitanya disappeared:

In his place (Chaitanya's) stood the Holy Couple, Radha and Krishna, united in

7. Quoted in Krishna Chaitanya, *The Betrayal of Krishna* (1991), p. 233.

8. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part III, chapter iii.

one body (*rasarāj mahābhāva dui ekrup*), with Radha with her golden hue, on the outside and Krishna within her (*antahkrishnabahihgaur*), displaying astonishing and unspeakable beauty and sweetness. He fainted at the sight.<sup>9</sup>

The Radha-Krishna image is so profound, beautiful and soulful that today we cannot think of the *Bhagavata* world without her presence. Our finest songs and visual art have been the gift of this Two-in-One presence. So powerful has been her image that Radha often becomes all of the foreground and is even seen as the very image of Eros. A modern classic in Oriya, *Sri Radha* by Ramakanta Rath seems to take this view. Speaking of the work, Kathleen Raine says:

Ramakanta's poem inspired by Radha's erotic love for the divine flute-player belongs to the Indian mainstream, and the poems and prose-poems in the book move with ease between intense eroticism and implicit cosmic transcendence. I know of no other poet who has achieved so intense and profound a poem of love—a masterpiece of remorseless uncovering of the ever-unfulfilled experience of erotic love that aspires to union with the divine which lies beyond human reach in this life.<sup>10</sup>

Which only proves that the use of bridal mysticism to gain the finest relationship with the Divine is literally like walking on the razor's edge. But the *Bhagavata* is a Mother too. And this Mother will not deal harshly with the offenders. She leaves Old Man Time to teach a lesson to the impure practitioners of bhakti yoga who dare to misuse the concept. For instance, an 18<sup>th</sup> century poetess, Muddu Palani, a courtesan in the court of the Thanjavur ruler Raghunatha Nayak wrote a highly erotic narrative called *Radhika Santwanamu*. Attempts to give it a place in the general spread of Radha-Krishna literature have not been successful. Bangalore Nagarathinammal daringly printed the work but all the copies were seized and the book was banned. Though the ban was lifted in 1947, the work is not seen in the ken of the *Bhagavata* world.

For, it is Radha's self-offering to the Divine that touches the devotee, nothing else. Rather, invoking Radha has helped the aspirant cleanse himself of the dross of material living. As such, she has been the path-finder for all devotees who have been drawn by the call of Krishna's flute.

Even after Radha's own withdrawal  
following Krishna's passing,  
something hers—her willed if partial presence—  
had charged Brindavan anew.

9. Sishir Kumar Ghose, *Lord Gauranga* (1961), p. 180.

10. Ramakanta Rath, *Sri Radha* (2002).

Amid the changes inner and outer  
 That invaded Brindavan  
 In later centuries, the supreme Grace  
 Of Radha was the Great Bass.

Later generations were thus content  
 To surrender to Radha  
 So readily accessible, and win  
 Their way to Krishna as well.<sup>11</sup>

Raised by Mother Bhagavata, these devotees have been the pride of the nation. They have been an unrivalled spiritual force. Like Dhruva, like Ambarisha, like the Gopis, these aspirants have also delinked themselves from a materialistic world and have sought fulfilment elsewhere. Well, the historical Mira's life does prove the legendary Radha's love!

The charm of thy face has made me captive, my beloved. When once I saw that face the whole world lost its charm for me and my mind remained no longer attached to it.

To go for the pleasures of this world is like trying to hold water in a sieve. I can now disdain those.

Lucky is Mira; her hopes have come true. Now am I the most fortunate of all.<sup>12</sup>

Mira's own presence, continuing the *Bhagavata* tradition has been made a contemporary experience by the Mother. Born in Paris, Mirra Richard had come to India in search of Light which she had already glimpsed as she prepared herself by reading spiritual literature and meditation. Then came 1914 when she reached Pondicherry.

Increasingly inward-oriented,  
 she met Sri Aurobindo  
 and knew he was verily the KRISHNA  
 she had oft seen in her dreams.

'twas as though Radha had met at long last  
 her Krishna, and found her voice:

11. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Krishna Geetam*, Epilogue, verses 21-23.

12. Translated by Anath Nath Basu.

*'At first sight of You, I knew You the Lord  
of my being, and my God.*

*My thoughts, emotions, actions, my heart-beats  
And cellular vibrations,  
All, all are Thine without any reserve:  
And my future too is Thine:*

*Be it life or death apportioned to me,  
Happiness or suffering,  
Whatever may come from You is welcome,  
And will bring felicity.'*

After the frustrating pulls and chilling  
Shortcomings of the body,  
Vital and mind, this call of the Spirit  
Was clearly definitive.

Thus commenced the grand collaboration  
Between the Mahayogi  
And Mirra on the supreme Agenda  
For building the Life Divine.<sup>13</sup>

The rest is not just history but a continuing experience which has kept us all holding hands in the *Ras* revels. Did they really take place so long ago in the Purana of *Bhagavata*?

The *Bhagavata* Purana has been the life-sustaining source of Indian culture in many ways, but chief of them is this strength that the work instils in a person to turn away from the temptations of material life and enter the *rasa mandala* of divine living. As if to prove the strength of the "Purana Bhagavata" in giving indestructible sinews to the Vedic culture, we have the remarkable tale of "Purun Bhagat" by Rudyard Kipling. There was this brahmin Purun Dass who was brilliant and was educated in England. He rose to become the Prime Minister of an Indian State.

When he returned to India there was a blaze of glory, for the Viceroy himself made a special visit to confer upon the Maharajah the Grand Cross of the Star of India—all diamonds and ribbons and enamel; and at the same ceremony, while the cannon boomed, Purun Dass was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire; so that his name stood Sir Purun Dass, K.C.I.E.

13. *Krishna Geetam*, Epilogue, verses: 133-138.

Kipling who had watched India carefully and had drawn close to the secret that illumined the genius of India now proceeds to tell us of a marvellous transformation which only an Indian is capable of, when he is at the apex of his material success:

Next month, when the city had returned to its sun-baked quiet, he (Purun Dass) did a thing no Englishman would have dreamed of doing; for, so far as the world's affairs went, he died. The jewelled order of his knighthood went back to the Indian Government, and a new Prime Minister was appointed to the charge of affairs, and a great game of General Post began in all the subordinate appointments. The priests knew what had happened, and the people guessed; but India is the one place in the world where a man can do as he pleases and nobody asks why; and the fact that Dewan Sir Purun Dass, K.C.I.E., had resigned position, palace, and power, and taken up the begging-bowl and ochre-coloured dress of a Sunnyasi, or holy man, was considered nothing extraordinary.

For, all these are Mother Bhagavata's children. The various vibgyor shades of life are used in the *Bhagavata*, and the common man gets the message without fail. Purun Dass becomes Purun Bhagat. It is the Divine alone who is Real and seeking Him is life's fulfilment. Meanwhile learn soul-togetherness, learn to become a link in the *Ras*, learn to be a child of the *Bhagavata* which continues to sustain the Bhakti Movement! For, approached with meditative aspiration, the Purana can become our life's breath to help us build the life divine even if this century should be full of menacing terrors. When Mother Bhagavata is our guardian, what is it that we have to fear?

A wonderful face looked out with deathless eyes;  
 A hand was seen drawing the golden bars  
 That guard the imperishable secrecies.  
 A key turned in a mystic lock of Time.  
 But where the silence of the gods had passed,  
 A greater harmony from the stillness born  
 Surprised with joy and sweetness yearning hearts,  
 An ecstasy and a laughter and a cry.  
 A power leaned down, a happiness found its home.  
 Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss.<sup>14</sup>

Salutations! Mother Bhagavata!

14. *Savitri*, Book Eleven.

*(At the outset, my deep gratitude to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For the last two years, Mother India gave me the privilege of sharing my studies of the Bhagavata literature with the renowned magazine's widespread array of discriminating readers. I am thankful to Shri K. D. Sethna for his loving ways, and to Shri R. Y. Deshpande who invited me to do this series. As mentioned at the beginning of the series, all English translations from the Bhagavata are by Swami Tapasyananda. I am grateful to Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, for this excellent edition of a great translation. Also to the readers who read the series and shared their happiness with me. It has certainly been a Rasa-mandala! — P.N.)*

*(Concluded)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

### Songs of Bidyapati

#### XI

How shall I tell of Caanou's beauty bright?  
Men will believe it a vision of the night.

As lightning was his saffron garment blown  
Over the beautiful cloud-limbs half shown.

His coal-black curls assumed with regal grace  
A peacock's plume above that moonlike face.

And such a fragrance fierce the mad wind wafts  
Love wakes and trembles for his flowery shafts.

Yea, what shall words do, friend? Love's whole estate  
Exhausted was that wonder to create.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Translations, SABCL, Vol. 8, p. 229)*



## THE SEASON OF LIGHT

A Christmas mist settles over the city  
at dawn. It is the season of light.

The matrix race roves the earth  
in travail with birth  
of a new being.

Out there beyond  
the barbarous comedy  
of mind, glimmerings of the sacred

advance of Spirit involved  
in flesh, the gene evolving

in light, bring *Magi*,  
the children...

JOSEPH KENT

## OF SAINTS, SAGES AND ANGELS

*(In the Nineteen Forties the word “Pondicherry” was spelt, in their script, and pronounced by the Bengalis as “Pondichāri”, of course. A little Bengali lad who came to visit the Ashram at that time was intrigued by the word “Pondichāri” and was keen on finding its origin. The grown-ups around him proved to be of little help. Left to his own resources and having already visited the Ashram many times, he worked out an etymology of his own. Since “Pondichāri” to him meant nothing but the Ashram and in the Ashram lived Pundits and Brahmacharis, he came to the conclusion that “Pondichāri” was a derivative of these two words. “Out of the mouth of babes...”!)*

Would we some prize might hold  
To match those manifold  
Possessions of the brute,—gain most as we did best.

WHILE studying “Rabbi Ben Ezra” with my students, I have come across these wistful words of Robert Browning year after year. But today, I do not know by what happy chance, they set me thinking. It is undoubtedly true that the possessions of the brute, that is, the animal man, who works mainly for his material gains, are manifold and eminently palpable. His intelligence, judicious use of his skills and hard work mostly reward him immediately and tangibly with wealth, comfort, praise, power and what not; whereas there is no such visible “prize” for the man who strives ceaselessly and sincerely for his spiritual progress. Apparently he remains the same old man that he always was, without even the rudiment of a halo to show for his labour but certainly with stern Time taking the daily toll made evident in terms of feebleness, sickness and decay.

It makes one pessimistic, does it not? But suppose we draw aside the veil of our ignorance and look beyond the appearance. Perhaps we shall discern on the faces of some people

...that content surpassing wealth  
Which sage in meditation found  
And walked with inward glory crowned.

One such person was Biren Palit, commonly known as Biren-da of the Old Bindery (thus distinguishing him from Biren-da, the boxer and Biren-da of the Flower Room) when it was situated in a downstairs room in Dortoir. Later this Old Bindery was merged with the Binding Department of the Ashram Press. In Biren-da the Ashram Press received one of its most precious assets. For Biren-da was a sadhak of that generation whose *raison d'être* was to serve the Mother and Sri Aurobindo body and soul, through work.

I came in contact with Biren-da when I had just joined the Ashram as a young boy of thirteen. I have no idea how he got on my track but he did and said to me, “You will need Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s photos to keep on your desk. Come to the Bindery tomorrow, I shall have something ready for you.” When I went to the Bindery the next day, he gave me a set of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s photographs, aesthetically mounted on a piece of very dark green cardboard and covered with glass, the whole bordered by some matching dark green material and supported by a cardboard prop.

Very reverently I took the framed photos and, on reaching home, placed them on a chest of drawers in my room where they receive my daily prayers and confidences to this day. Cardboard and glass! But they were strong enough to withstand the ravages of time, save for some minor repairs, for the last fifty-eight years. It is only this year that I have had the photographs reframed more durably in a wooden frame.

But to get back to my childhood and Biren-da! Stamp-collecting was then the craze among the young Ashram boys. Apart from begging and borrowing from likely sources, that is people who received letters from abroad or who were philatelists themselves and ready to barter, we tapped the dustbins of Pondicherry, especially the ones near the French Post Office. When I had collected a sizable number of stamps, the need for a good stamp album was keenly felt. But in those days money was in short supply and in any case our policy was the same as that of Dennis the Menace—get things free! I approached Biren-da. But soon it became apparent that he was not *au courant* with the ramifications of stamp-collecting. My friends had advocated the convenience of a loose-leaf album. But Biren-da was equally in the dark about this particular species. With all the enthusiasm of a young neophyte, I explained everything in detail. Patiently he heard me out then asked me to give him forty-eight hours. When I saw him on the appointed day, he held out my loose-leaf album. Most ingeniously he had punched a couple of holes along one side of a few quires of thick foolscap paper and their thick dark blue cardboard covers and passed two thin white silk ribbons through these holes, holding everything together by means of slip knots. Needless to say that it served my purpose admirably.

Many years passed. In the early Sixties I began editing the Bengali youth magazine, *Purodha*, and my work necessitated my haunting the Ashram Press. One day Biren-da suddenly asked me to tell him something about Arab-Israeli relations *à propos* the famous six-day war. I don’t know what prompted him to ask me, but it so happened that I had just read Leon Uris’ *Exodus*, Collins and Lapierre’s *O Jerusalem* and to cap it all, James Michener’s *The Source*. I was fairly brimming with information on that subject. I made out such a case for the Jewish cause that if the Zionists had heard me then they would have made me their honorary life member on the spot. Biren-da listened to me very humbly and attentively and thanked me when I had finished.

Around this time Biren-da had to spend a few days in our Nursing Home. Being

a most undemanding person himself, he was superlative in his praise of the selfless service rendered to him by the doctors and nurses. He wrote a very fine poem on the subject, which we were glad to publish in *Purodha*.

After this, for quite a few years I did not come into direct contact with him although I often saw his familiar figure walking slowly down the Balcony Street (Rue Saint Gilles)—a quiet man of medium height, clad in white *dhoti* and *chaddar*, his long hair neatly descending on his back, the dark face clean shaven except for a thick moustache on his upper lip.

One day I heard that Biren-da was keen to see our Lake Estate which he had not visited for many years. In his younger days, like many other Ashramites, he used to go there often, covering the distance of six miles on foot, to enjoy its wild beauty and to meditate. But now old age and frail health prevented him from making the trip. Very providentially, I had at that time a second-hand jeep at my disposal. I offered to take him to the Lake Estate and organised a picnic for him. The happiness that shone on his face when once again he saw his beloved Lake was unforgettable. Slowly but on firm feet he walked quite a distance, breathing in the fresh air and absorbing the glory of Mother Earth. We made plans to repeat the experience but alas, to my everlasting chagrin, circumstances prevented me from keeping my promise.

Another quiet, unassuming gentleman was Amal-da. To this day I do not know his surname nor did I ever come to know him personally, although I saw him everyday in the Dining Room. He served rice during the midday meal. He was a tall, wheat-complexioned young man, wore steel-framed glasses and, I heard, lived with his widowed mother. There was nothing in his appearance such as long hair or beard or moustache or even the aura of a strong character to distinguish him from the next man.

At this point the impatient reader may well ask, like the Prince of Denmark, “The concernancy, Sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?”

Please hold your horses. The reason is forthcoming. In the late Forties almost all the members of the Ashram had all their meals in the Dining Room with a few exceptions, those whose nature of work did not permit them to keep the Dining Room hours. There was a special home delivery service for them. A big, man-powered, rubber-tyred cart, filled with tiffin-carriers, was a common sight in those days in the streets around the Ashram area. This cart used to be drawn by Ravindra-ji to begin with, and later by Damodar-bhai and Keshav-ji. At the house of each recipient there would be a plate filled with ant-deterrent water and an empty tiffin-carrier, the former to receive the full tiffin-carrier and the latter to be taken away for the next meal.

But I digress, although it is a necessary digression for getting the full picture. Even after accounting for these exceptions, there were some eight hundred regulars who ate in the Dining Room. Amal-da, apparently, kept track of every one of them. For if by any chance somebody did not turn up for a meal, Amal-da, on his own initiative, would fill up a tiffin-carrier and walk all the way, often under the tyrant

glare of a blazing summer sun, to deliver it to that person's house. He performed this service beyond the call of duty, purely out of the goodness of his heart. He did not expect even a smile of gratitude. But, sad to say, a snub or even a rebuff was often the reward for his kind gesture which some people misinterpreted as officiousness. I heard that he was also censored by the higher-ups. Be that as it may, to me Amal-da's action exemplified

...the best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love.

There were many, many others, too many in fact for this short essay to cover, whom I took for granted at that time, but who, in retrospect, appear on the silver screen of my memory wearing the halo which I had failed to detect when they were in our midst. Jyotin-da of the Ashram Bakery comes to mind, who gave us delicious hot buns freshly out of the oven and about whom the Mother had said that after his death his soul had ascended to the solar world. There was Jiban-da of the Flower-Room, a tall, thin, dark gentleman who poured out his love when he gave you flowers to take to the Mother and who made special bouquets for you to receive them from the Mother on your birthday. There was Satyanarayan-da, universally known as Dadu (not to be confused with Sri Aurobindo's friend, Shri Charu Chandra Dutt, also called Dadu by the young children in an earlier period), the Homoeopath par excellence, yet so humble and unassuming, to whom so many people were grateful for curing them and relieving their suffering. There was Sanjiban-da with a charming shy smile always playing on his lips. He was a true artist, heart and soul. Beauty had a magnetic attraction for him. I myself have seen him and so had many others, three or four miles out of Pondicherry, walking in the hot afternoon sun with an umbrella over his head. To our astonished query as to what he was doing so far out of town and at that godforsaken hour, he would reply sheepishly, "I saw a beautiful cloud formation in the western sky. I had to come out in the open fields to see it in all its grandeur."

A superb painter and an excellent art photographer, the shy, retiring Sanjiban-da had made his life's motto:

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty; that is all  
Ye know on earth and all ye need to know.

When Bhavani Prasad-ji joined the Ashram he was a full-fledged sannyasi who had renounced the world. He was in his early thirties then, a tall, strongly built, very handsome person, with a golden complexion, clad in spotless white *dhoti* and *chaddar*. But as the Mother gave a lot of importance to the physical education in those days, he immediately made his appearance in the playground donning the group uniform of shorts and banian. I used to see him regularly in the Body Building Gymnasium

seriously exercising with the barbells and the dumb-bells or in the Sports Ground putting the shot or studiously preparing for some athletic event.

The Mother took a keen interest in Athletics. The annual athletic competition, which might aptly be termed “The Ashram Olympics”, used to be a very important occasion in the Ashram life of the Nineteen Fifties. The competitions were held in the Sports Ground, beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July with an impressive March Past by all the Group members and ending with the Novelty Races on the 31<sup>st</sup> August. Small children as well as the elders, boys and girls, men and women, ages ranging from six to sixty, actively participated in the various items. The groupings were done, not age-wise, but capacity-wise. Hence it was a common sight to witness an eight-year-old from the Green Group competing with a venerable sixty-year-old Blue Group member in the same foot race. To be more precise, little Swadhin often competed with Nolini-da in the sprint event.

And the Mother watched each and every item, being present in the Sports Ground from five to six forty-five every afternoon. For the running races, she held one end of the tape at the finish line. The joy and the sense of achievement that one had if one was fortunate enough to breast the tape that the Mother was holding were unimaginable.

With this much as background information, let us get back to Bhavani Prasad-ji. Came the day when Bhavani Prasad-ji participated in a track event for which he had practised assiduously over a whole year. His dedication bore fruit. Enthusiastically cheered by all the spectators he led the pack. But at the last moment tragedy struck. Just short of the finishing line he slipped and fell flat on his face. A general groan went up, commiserating with him for his misfortune. But Bhavani Prasad-ji got up with a big smile. Later when we went to sympathise with him, he said, “What does it matter that I did not get a place? Didn’t you see where I fell? Right at the Mother’s feet! I am very, very grateful to Her for granting me this rare privilege.”

And who can ever forget Nripen-da, the one and only doctor of the Ashram who presided over the one and only Ashram Dispensary for some four decades starting from the Nineteen Forties? A tall, handsome, well-built gentleman, with an ever-present beatific smile twinkling in his eyes, Nripen-da will always be remembered for his numerous contributions to the Ashram, his *chef d’œuvre* being the beautiful and eminently efficient Nursing Home on Goubert Avenue, overlooking the Bay of Bengal,—a testimony to his efforts and indomitable spirit. Although he himself lived most frugally on whatever was supplied by the Ashram, he made arrangements for the Ashramites, especially the children, to have additional nutrition in the form of soup and “vitamins”, a spinach preparation. (Did he have Popeye the sailor in mind, whose source of strength lay in spinach?) Nripen-da left us in the year 1981, but the practice which he instituted—that of providing something nutritious as well as tasty to the growing children and the Ashramites,—continues unabated.

Recently a former student of mine and now a good friend, who has settled in

England, told me a story about Nripen-da which I must share with my readers. Theirs was a big family with lots of children whom the parents wanted to educate in the Ashram. The father lived in England while the mother stayed in Pondicherry with the children, the eldest of whom was a girl, barely sixteen years old. Due to some unavoidable circumstances the mother had to rush back to England, leaving all her children behind, some of whom were mere toddlers, in the care of the eldest daughter. For a while all went well but soon their money ran out. Nripen-da, who was always very close to small children, came to know that they did not have enough food at home. At once he wrote an urgent letter to the Mother. On reading the letter the Mother exclaimed, "How can my children go hungry!" and arranged for them to have free food from the Dining Room. My friend ended her story saying, "My family and I will be eternally grateful to Nripen-da."

Nripen-da's special attention was reserved for the little children. He was indefatigable in catering to their needs. To distract them from their suffering he would draw pretty pictures for them. If a child had a plaster cast, he would take out his paints and brushes and decorate it with colourful flowers and animals, bringing a smile to the child's tear-stained face.

That Nripen-da had a soft corner for animals too, I came to know when a friend of mine and I happened to rescue a squirrel, what the purists would insist on calling a chipmunk. It all happened in this way. One July afternoon we found a squirrel entangled in a jumble of thin wire. With the help of a wire cutter we disentangled the creature only to find that two of its lower incisors were inextricably caught in some wire. Not only that, in its frantic effort to get free, the squirrel had placed itself in a most serious situation. The two lower incisors had been pulled out of the gum to an unnatural length, completely blocking its mouth so that if we set it free it would starve to death. There was only one thing to do—take the squirrel to a veterinary surgeon. But there were no vets in Pondicherry in those days, at least not to our knowledge. So we did the next best thing. After cutting the offending wire, we took the squirrel to Nripen-da. It was a hot afternoon and Nripen-da was taking his much-needed rest. But answering our timid knocks, he came out and at one glance took the situation in. Full of sympathy for the wretched creature, he went immediately to the Dispensary, opened the cupboards, took out the necessary instruments and with infinite care snipped off the extra length of the obstructing incisors. All this he did in a most professional manner but what distinguished him from any other doctor was the beautiful, compassionate smile that never left his face. It was as though he was thanking God for giving him this opportunity to alleviate the pain of a helpless creature.

Nripen-da's was

A combination and a form indeed  
 Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
 To give the world assurance of a [saintly] man.



My far from complete list of saints will remain still more incomplete if I fail to mention our dear Rani-di. Rani Moitra, wife of the well-known professor of philosophy, Dr. Sisirkumar Moitra, of the Benaras Hindu University, was my guardian here when I joined the Ashram at the age of thirteen. Mother had given me a room in the house where she lived so that she could keep an eye on me. She was not a demonstrative person by nature but I was always aware of her quiet love and affection. She did her duty in an unobtrusive way and saw to it that I never lacked anything. The most striking thing about her was her elegance, outer as well as inner. She was then in her forties, a beautiful lady, very fair in complexion with dark black hair; she always looked tip-top in the simple Ashram cotton sari, with never a strand of hair or crease out of place. The outward appearance reflected the inner person. I never saw her lose her temper or get ruffled. Her whole life was a saga of selfless, dedicated service.

*(To be concluded)*

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

*A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way. The evolution of Mind working upon Life has developed an organisation of the activity of Mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity without an inner change.*

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 1055)*



## PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

*(A Travelogue and an Exploration: Can this Mountain, meaning “Five Seats of the Divine Mother”, be an indication of a living Vedic culture?)*

### (1) The Vedic symbol ... Introduction

*“Strength has taken his seat as the Priest of the offering mighty for sacrifice in the lap of the Mother and in that rapturous other world,...”*

*“The mother is Earth, our physical being; the other world is the supramental existence; the vital and emotional being is the world in between. Agni manifests in all of these simultaneously.”*

*(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)*

The relationship between an experience of a Vedic Mother-nature, and the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram is obvious. The Integral Yoga brings a relationship with the Mother at every level, whose Vedic Mother-nature parallel can be subjectively verified along the lines suggested in *The Hymns to the Mystic Fire* by Sri Aurobindo. The Vedic Age had a nature setting that is described as the Mother in Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic Sanskrit translations.

The Divine Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram has described the aspiration of Nature in terms of the plant’s *effort* to reach for the sunlight, and how we possess the same effort. Called the Mystic Fire in the Vedas, this effort or force is still a living culture in the Himalayas, and so is a natural part of the pilgrimages there. In these mountain-traditions the physical experience contains a spiritual effort: aspiration is provided by trees and plants and the whole of Nature, as a divine Female, *en route*.

*...the splendour of the divine Presence in a love shining in all things. That is probably why those who wished to live in this state [of divine Love] used to withdraw from the world and find the universal contact through Nature... it is infinitely easier to realise this state of consciousness when one is surrounded by trees, flowers, plants and even animals than by human beings. (The Mother)*

Also, on these ancient pilgrimages one can experience the Vedic nature-imagery coined by Sri Aurobindo in a yoga-framework, with an opening in the vital. This vital connection bridges the experience of the Yoga-mother with the Nature-mother, the psychic-mother with the physical-mother.

*[the ascending journey] ...It has to climb... from plateau to plateau as of a mountain.... (Sri Aurobindo, Hymns to the Mystic Fire)*

One such Vedic pilgrimage in central Nepal is directly in the front of the Annapurna range, called Panchassee mountain. In a way similar to that of the Toda people on the Nilgiri plateau in India, it is also in the physical consciousness that the Himalayan villagers revere the Mother as Nature. It is for me parallel to the aspiration for sunlight in Nature, a devotion to a divine Mother symbol, that is a Vedic framework for Yoga. When devoted to a divine-Mother symbol, Nature is also an environment for yoga experience.

Panchassee peak is a day's journey from Pokhara. This town sits beside a wonderful lake named Fewa, whose meaning no local people remember: this lack of memory for the meaning of the name of the largest lake in central Nepal suggests a distant past far beyond the historical record of Nepal.

The antiquity of this region and culture has some connection with the Vedas, for in the village homes before the cooked rice is served, some of it is flicked back into the wood-fire flames as an offering. Fire is a central Vedic symbol still amply acknowledged in Nepal, as also in Indian society. But with a daily wood-fire for cooking and warmth, the Himalayan cultures include a living physical experience of this central Vedic symbolism.

Being able to look closely at this Himalayan Nepali culture was made possible by my few years in Mountain Paradise, the Ashram apple orchard in Nainital district of India's Himalayan foothills, where I learned to speak a little of the mountain-village dialect of Hindi.

Earlier, I had visited the Nilgiri plateaus for 10 consecutive years. But when the sandalwood smuggler Veerappan became a problem in the forests around that region, the forest officials feared I might be kidnapped and so would no longer let me enter. I had to find some other place to visit. To continue the correlating of Vedic symbols in Sri Aurobindo's Sanskrit translations with Nature photography which was the project I was engaged in, the Himalayas beckoned; they were seen as an alternative place to look for "*the rivers that are self-revealed*".

It is now the seventh year since a fateful evening's meal in a village travellers' lodge on the trail to Langtang National Park in eastern Nepal. The first day's walk was a very beautiful climb out of Kathmandu valley. That first night was spent at the valley edge, and for the next night a village lodge was found some hours further, in a nature-saddle from where the path continued towards the holy lake called Gosaikunda at 14,000 feet. These Himalayan villages in intimate valleys always have some holiness attached to their traditions, called Deurali, meaning roughly, a seat of the divine Mother. I stopped there because in the soft pastels of village decor, there stood this bright purple cloth-covered table beside the trail at the entrance to the village.

Now two days had passed since leaving the Buddhist Boudha shrine on the outskirts of Kathmandu, on one of the original tracks to Tibet. The dust and heat left a layer of tinted rose on my boots, clothing and packs, as if we visitors also were to be decorated and form a part of the general colour scheme. And so after walking into

a bright purple tablecloth as the trail entered a mountain village, I questioned,—  
“What?”

Behind this bright tablecloth was an ancient stone-and-mud construction with two floors, a typically clean and orderly mountain lodge. The porter and myself were given rooms upstairs, and invited to dinner downstairs in an hour. I still have a photo of that room: out of my small wooden window I saw a solid green with only jungle to fill its frame.

The young, perhaps 25-year-old wife and lodge-owner with a small baby, was happy and smiling. Beside an open wood-fire whose smoke flew out of a tiny opening just above her head, this young woman was rolling out *chapatis* with the child nestled on her lap. The room colours were tinted with wood-fire red, and this warmth seemed to settle everything into a restfulness.

*It is surely not the River Goddess whom he is thus hymning but the Power, the River if you will, of inspiration, the word of the Truth, bringing its light into our thoughts, building up in us that Truth, an inner knowledge.*

*(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)*

On the trail I had seen the worship of a water-source, always a Vedic symbol of a divine Female in its primal nature perspective. Perhaps femaleness was first described in the Vedas? Having an interest in photographing this nature imagery, I asked the young lady, in my very poor and blunt mountain-Hindi,

“Where is the village nature-shakti?”

“I am shakti,” was her reply.

I chuckled thinking that she had misunderstood me, and clarified my question further:

“No, no, I mean where is the shakti in the area of your village?”

“My house is shakti,” she added, now stopping the rolling of *chapatis*, and tilting her head to look at me as if to ponder why I would ask such a question.

I enjoyed her reply and expressed a feeling of humorous pleasure as my porter explained further in their own dialect, what I wanted for my photograph. But in my mind I was stunned: a living Female tradition of the sort described in the Vedic translations by Sri Aurobindo was rolling out *chapatis* in front of me, probably still accepting life and the physical conscious as divine, for in these translations the word Wife is capitalised along with other divine symbols, these villages were perhaps continuing something of the long-lost tradition of a Nature-female Vedic culture.

*...the infinite Mother, Aditi, is the symbol; the lower is subject to her dark form Diti. (Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)*

In the Himalayas, most of the highest mountains are considered a *divine Mother* symbol as in the Vedic tradition, later called the *divine Shakti* in Puranic lore. Local people, for example, revere Everest, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna (all 8000 + metres high) as the divine Shakti. But these are out of our human reach, so to speak, and so these highest of mountains remain symbols at the universal level of a divine Mother with transcendent, universal and individual aspects.

*We may accept for the present the theory that the earliest fully intelligent form of human religion is necessarily, ... a worship of outward Nature-Powers invested with the consciousness and the personality that he finds in his own being.*

*(Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda)*

It is perhaps through the discovery of “this personality that he finds in his own being” that the Yoga processes evolved in the Vedic Age. With a Mystic Fire symbol in a divine Mother-nature, as today in Himalayan households, I wondered if any memory of Vedic Yoga practices were present.

After the introductory years of Himalayan trekking, I happened to stay in a Brahmin lodge by Fewa lake. Eventually I learned from the lodge grandfather that there was a local Mountain-mother named Panchassee, only 2000 metres high.

Local people, in fact this very grandfather, climb there on a pilgrimage to be blessed by the waters of a holy lake atop Panchassee mountain, as well as by Her five Peaks. The next year his son accompanied me there. The views from Panchassee’s summit were spectacular, and as She stood directly in front of the Annapurna mountain-massif, nothing thus far in my Himalayan visits could compare with this horizon-filling view.

Thus I returned again and again that year for the spectacular photographs from the tiny pilgrim-lodges one hour below the Panchassee peaks. But I returned alone, as the Brahmin son was in bed for two days after the first visit, and said he did not want to accompany me again. After a few visits I began to understand how the local Panchassee myth contains seed concepts from the Vedic Age as described by Sri Aurobindo.

One evening after a Panchassee-lodge rice and vegetable meal was completed, in the common room by the wood-fire, I asked a visiting buffalo herdsman, a Brahmin, if he knew any songs to Panchassee-Mother. In a split-second he filled the lodge with a full-throated melodic cry. I thought:

*“Oh, She’s alive here...”*

Thus began a yearly Himalayan pilgrimage in search of these most common and close experiences through which one can photograph the most remote and profound Vedic symbols.

*(To be continued)*

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of November 2005)

SRI AUROBINDO wrote on 9 October 1938: "...‘Worlds’ have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!"<sup>1</sup> Eight years later, in 1946, Sri Aurobindo acknowledged "that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length.... The small passage about Aswapati and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos with many thousand lines."<sup>2</sup> In all the cantos Sri Aurobindo describes in great detail the kingdoms of the various planes of existence which is possible only to one who has experienced them.

King Aswapathy had visitation from the subtle world which constantly reminded him of his spiritual role in the progress of humanity. He saw before his inner eye the hieroglyphs of the mystery of the universe. But such experiences were not permanent at first. He travelled through the fields of experience with their vast mutable play of knowledge, ignorance and pleasure.

In Canto One, "The World-Stair", Aswapathy saw how

A self-creation without end or pause  
Revealed the grandeurs of the Infinite:  
It flung into the hazards of its play  
A million moods, a myriad energies,  
The world-shapes that are fancies of its Truth  
And the formulas of the freedom of its Force.

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 95)

And he realised that

Here all experience was a single plan,  
The thousandfold expression of the One.

(*Ibid.*, p. 96)

For him

All thought can know or widest sight perceive  
And all that thought and sight can never know,  
All things occult and rare, remote and strange  
Were near to heart's contact, felt by spirit-sense.

(*Ibid.*, p. 97)

And from the status beyond the world,

He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile  
 Erect like a mountain-chariot of the Gods  
 Motionless under an inscrutable sky.

*(Ibid., p. 98)*

The secret Power that guided him led him on:

Apart in an unfathomed loneliness,  
 He travelled in his mute and single strength  
 Bearing the burden of the world's desire.

*(Ibid., pp. 101-02)*

In Canto Two, "The Kingdom of Subtle Matter", Aswapathy travelled through a world of subtle matter where he found that many are content to stay in its beauty, enraptured by its vision. Aswapathy, the heroic spirit, advances further

A world of lovelier forms lies near to ours,  
 Where, undisguised by earth's deforming sight,  
 All shapes are beautiful and all things true.

*(Ibid., p. 103)*

This world of subtle matter is really the origin of our gross earth. It is not as easily accessible as the world of gross matter. In fact it is the "brilliant roof of our descending plane" and it serves to protect the material world from the operation of subtle forces which might be too strong for it. It seemed that:

A carnival of beauty crowds the heights  
 In that magic kingdom of ideal sight.  
 In its antechambers of splendid privacy  
 Matter and soul in conscious union meet...

*(Ibid., p. 105)*

A subtle link of union joins all life.  
 Thus all creation is a single chain:  
 We are not left alone in a closed scheme  
 Between a driving of inconscient Force  
 And an incommunicable Absolute.  
 Our life is a spur in a sublime soul-range,  
 Our being looks beyond its walls of mind  
 And it communicates with greater worlds;  
 There are brighter earths and wider heavens than ours.

*(Ibid., pp. 110-11)*

Canto III, “The Glory and the Fall of Life” first describes the movement of Life’s yearning for the Infinite.

A movement of unquiet seas, a long  
And venturous leap of spirit into Space,  
A vexed disturbance in the eternal Calm,  
An impulse and passion of the Infinite.

(*Ibid.*, p. 116)

In the search for the elusive gleam the king crossed the fields of the embodied mind where doubt and contention reign. Danger was the norm of the soul’s life. Aspiration in material Nature strode from peak to peak seeking power. Her violent rapture was soon spent. One pure felicity came to her searching lip.

Aswapathy then travelled towards the higher level of life and found:

As saw some inner mind, so life was shaped:  
From thought to thought she passed, from phase to phase,  
Tortured by her own powers or proud and blest,  
Now master of herself, now toy and slave.

(*Ibid.*, p. 117)

The king sought the image of a happier life in the concealed architecture of hieratic Space. On the blue heights he saw in a glimmer the kingdom of griefless life. An archipelago of laughter, love and light rippled around him. As in a polished mirror his inner eye saw the images of the kingdoms of the beatitude immune from the touch of Death and Time revolving round the enchanted peripheries of the Absolute Bliss.

He saw the image of a happier state.  
In an architecture of hieratic Space  
Circling and mounting towards creation’s tops,  
At a blue height which never was too high  
For warm communion between body and soul,  
As far as heaven, as near as thought and hope,  
Glimmered the kingdom of a griefless life.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 118-19)

Again Sri Aurobindo writes:

As through a magic television’s glass  
Outlined to some magnifying inner eye  
They shone like images thrown from a far scene

Too high and glad for mortal lids to seize.  
 But near and real to the longing heart  
 And to the body's passionate thought and sense  
 Are the hidden kingdoms of beatitude.  
 In some close unattained realm which yet we feel,  
 Immune from the harsh clutch of Death and Time,  
 Escaping the search of sorrow and desire,  
 In bright enchanted safe peripheries  
 For ever wallowing in bliss they lie.

(*Ibid.*, p. 119)

From the far horizons the king saw above, the splendour of the high-born zones of the world of the rare substances and below, the regions of the dark abyss. But there is the Spirit's luminousness. Life changed from the Inconscience touched by the Supramental. Each act became perfect, each mood became joy. All was a creation of ecstasy.

Out of the Void's unseeing energies  
 Inventing the scene of a concrete universe,  
 By his thought she has fixed its paces, in its blind acts  
 She sees by flashes of his all-knowing Light.  
 At her will the inscrutable Supermind leans down  
 To guide her force that feels but cannot know,  
 Its breath of power controls her restless seas  
 And life obeys the governing Idea.

(*Ibid.*, p. 121)

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

### *References*

1. *Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 269.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 279.



## BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

**Puranic Tales for Cynical People** by Parasuram, translated by Pradip Bhattacharya and Shekhar Sen. Published by Indialog Publications Private Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, Pp. xiii + 242. Price: Rs. 250.00.

HAVING watched a performance of an Indian classical dance by a group of American dancers, a contemporary classical vocalist of repute remarked, “everything is all right technically but the delicate manner by which an Indian girl in *abhimān* covers her face and turns it away from the lover is missing.” He meant that the movements peculiar to an Indian girl can hardly be imitated by an American. Similarly, the niceties peculiar to the Bengali language can hardly be reproduced in English and particularly so in the case of Parasuram who uses, side-by-side, the classical style and the colloquial with absolute ease to express different moods in a single composition. Moreover, he has a humorous way, peculiar to himself, of creating and describing a situation. The translators admit that the ambience created by Parasuram’s language is impossible to be reproduced in another, and yet they have ventured to translate twenty of his short stories, in which Puranic characters have been recreated in an attempt to enable the reader to “catch a glimpse of the situational comedy”.

Parasuram’s witty sarcasms are directed against ideas and ideologies relating to religious, social, economic and cultural evils in Bengal and not against any individual. A careful reading of his stories provides not only delight but also shows that he has discussed high philosophy in the garb of comedy. In the story “The Three Creators” he imagines a conclave of the Supreme Gods of Islam, of Christianity and of Hinduism to find out ways and means to establish peace in the world. But, at the outset, there is a tussle amongst the Three about who will preside over the meeting. In this way he has shown the distinctions between the three religions at every step. The story ends without any solution due to the appearance of Satan which makes both Allah of Islam and God of Christianity leave the place and Brahma is left to deal with Satan in a way only the peculiar imagination of Parasuram could have invented. This is one instance of his ingenuity. Such instances can be found in all the stories.

Till now it was only the Bengali-knowing reader who had the opportunity to enjoy these stories. With the translation they are made available to a larger public and it is expected that the book will be liked by all who read it.

B.C.S.

## NAVANIT STORIES

### THE BRAHMIN'S PROSPERITY CHIT

INDOLENCE! Negligence! Sleep! The destiny of how many have they not destroyed? And yet, alas, there is no dearth of lazy people in this world!

Like a king of that race was the brahmin known as Oghadshankar. Only he who has seen him will believe it: If you don't find this *bhudev* (lord of the earth, as a brahmin is called) snoring away, you will find him yawning and dozing. He is never inspired to any activity. If by ill-luck his wife's nagging compels him to get up, he takes no more than a couple of steps before sitting down and curling up again. How can Mahalakshmi even touch him? The *Anna-devata*, as everyone knows, forsakes such a man's world, and sorrow, poverty and hunger rush into in his house. So, thrown by Destiny into his life, Oghadshankar's wife and their children breathed in dire misery, as if to atone for the sins of past lives.

"Have you heard?" The brahmini shook the inert brahmin several times before a subterranean sound surfaced, "Uhhnn... uhhnn." Bravely she screamed into his ear, "Do you know that our king is performing a special *yajna*? He will be giving away tonnes of money this morning. Are you listening?" Yet another "uhn, uhn," was the only response. Fuming, she pummeled that lump of inertia and shouted, "Do you hear me?" With a Herculean effort he pushed darling sleep away, and opened his eyes wide, as if cast into an alien world.

"Get up, go quickly!" the woman persisted. "The time fixed for the charity will flow away. Get rid of this poverty, at least provide your children sufficient food. This opportunity won't come again." Somehow, she got him to wash his face and go.

But how scandalous it would be if Oghadshankar were to go straightaway to his destination, if he didn't break that arduous journey to chat with this one and that, stop those returning with gifts from the king, and discuss what they had asked, and why, and what they received, and what they planned to do with it, etc. and etc.? And so by the time he arrived at the palace, the king had gone inside. Undeterred, our hero stood on the threshold and shouted, "Receive a brahmin's *āshirvād*, O King!" Fortunately the king was within hearing distance and decided to come back. "Namaskar, O Bhudev! Why this delay? The ceremony is over."

"O Master of the world! I was sleeping. And on the way, I stopped to talk with those returning from here. Alas, it is wretched Fate who is to blame, what else?"

"Ah, a master of laziness!" the king told himself. Then, "It is all right, Maharaj, don't worry. I shall give you a chit; take it to the Royal Treasurer. I am ordering him to give you as much money as you want before six o'clock this evening."

Jubilant, the brahmin rushed back to his wife. "Just look at this!" he crowed. "I have transformed our destiny—one look at me and the King granted me this entitle-

ment! Now tell me everything you want to have: how much food, how many ornaments, clothes, anything. But first cook us a great feast. Borrow freely; first let's celebrate. Here, look again at this royal requisition slip; out of this world, hein? Goodbye, Misery, I've thrown you out forever!"

The brahmini read: "*Up to six o'clock this evening, this brahmin is to be given as much as he asks.*" "It's true! So set off immediately; bring back all the money you can carry!"

"Oh, keep quiet, will you? What's the hurry? Plenty of time! Make the best halwa you've ever made, put plenty of ghee and nuts. What do we lack now? Bravo, my King! You have fulfilled another Sudama!"

The moment she left, Oghadshankar jumped into bed and slipped into a blissful dream: the Lord of the Universe has granted him permanent membership of Vaikuntha, the Prosperity of Mahalakshmi is eternally his. All the work he need do now is to walk from bedroom to dining room and back, and yet every conceivable luxury is his for the taking!

Meanwhile the harried brahmini went about her assignment. When the meal was ready she set about waking Oghadshankar. But even as he gobbled his food, he couldn't stop repeating, "Look again at this chit—zillionaires! Have you made your list?"

"All that can wait. First eat and depart. Go and bring back plenty of money."

"What an impatient woman! Doesn't this say give this bhudev as much as he wants?"

"Who denies that? But it is also says '*Up to six o'clock this evening.*' Don't delay or you'll miss your chance." When she finally managed to send him on, it was late afternoon.

On the way Oghadshankar stopped every passerby and bragged about his prosperity. At the grocer's he ordered a cartload of provisions: "See this authorisation? I am going to the Treasury. Dispatch all this immediately." The grocer read and said, "Yes, maharaj, but go quickly."

At the goldsmith's: "See this chit? Keep 100 grams of gold and 1000 grams of silver ready." The goldsmith read and exclaimed, "Hurry up, maharaj, it will soon be six."

At the cloth-merchant's: "Hello Panachandbhai! Pack 20 silk dhotis, 30 Banarasi saris, and 30 bundles long-cloth; send them home immediately. See this royal slip? I'll be back in a moment with the money." Panachand read and cried out, "Run, maharaj, run. Only five minutes are left. You'll be lucky to reach in time."

At last the thrice blessed brahmin stuffed the end of his dhoti in his waistband and scuttled. But scenes of Oghadshankar rolling in zillions danced before his eyes and punctured his pace. Panting and sweating, he reached the Treasury. The official read the chit and shook his head: "Maharaj! Your time is over. Now you can't get anything at all."

O how many Oghadshankars have been missing the auspicious hour, and instead of attaining the realms of Mahalakshmi, remain embedded in Misery!

PUJALAL

(Translated from *Navanit*, published by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada, Gujarat, 1945)

**The Mother:** *“...the Consciousness is here, penetrating all things and trying to manifest in all movements.... And if you don’t prepare yourselves to receive this, well, you will lose the chance that’s given to you!”*

4 August 1954

(CWM, Vol. 6, p. 269)

*“Sri Aurobindo said that the physical was to be taken into the yoga and ... almost all here thought they were doing yoga in the physical and fell a prey to physical ‘needs’ and desires.”*

12 July 1967

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 133)

*“Well, I am constantly struggling against people who have come here so that they may be comfortable and ‘free to do whatever they like’... — there is no soul, no aspiration, nothing.*

*“...To be satisfied with petty personal satisfactions... which take you nowhere, busy with what they are going to eat, oh!...”*

3 March 1971

(CWM, Vol. 11, p. 252)

*“Everywhere there is the possibility, I tell you, of an... extraordinary success....*

*“You see, there is the Will that is coming down and then there are all these formations that get in and delay its execution....”*

22 May 1971

(CWM, Vol. 11, p. 255)