

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## TWO CORRECTIONS

1. July issue, p. 611, last line:

It has been erroneously stated that Sri Aurobindo stayed in the Arya House.

2. August issue, p. 707 last line, and p. 709, footnote:

The reference should have been *CWM* and not *SABCL* in both instances.

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## A VISION OF SCIENCE

I dreamed that in myself the world I saw,  
Wherein three Angels strove for mastery. Law  
Was one, clear vision and denial cold,  
Yet in her limits strong, presumptuous, bold;  
The second with enthusiasm bright,  
Flame in her heart but round her brows the night,  
Faded as this advanced. She could not bear  
That searching gaze, nor the strong chilling air  
These thoughts created, nourishing our parts  
Of mind, but petrifying human hearts.  
Science was one, the other gave her name,  
Religion. But a third behind them came,  
Veiled, vague, remote, and had as yet no right  
Upon the world, but lived in her own light.  
Wide were the victories of the Angel proud  
Who conquered now and in her praise were loud  
The nations. Few even yet to the other clove,—  
And some were souls of night and some were souls of love.  
But this was confident and throned. Her heralds ranged  
Claiming that night was dead and all things changed;  
For all things opened, all seemed clear, seemed bright—  
Save the vast ranges that they left in night.  
However, the light they shed upon the earth  
Was great indeed, a firm and mighty birth.  
A century's progress lived before my eyes.  
Delivered from amazement and surprise,  
Man's spirit measuring his worlds around  
The laws of sight divined and laws of sound.  
Light was not hidden from its searching gaze,  
Nor matter could deny her myriad maze  
To the cold enquiry; for the far came near,  
The small loomed large, the intricate grew clear.  
Measuring and probing the strong Angel strode,  
Dissolving and combining, till she trod  
Firmly among the stars, could weigh their forms,  
Foretold the earthquakes, analysed the storms.  
Doubt seemed to end and wonder's reign was closed.  
The stony pages of the earth disclosed

Their unremembered secrets. Horses of steam  
 Were bitted and the lightnings made a team  
 To draw our chariots. Heaven was scaled at last  
 And the loud seas subdued. Distance resigned  
 Its strong obstructions to the mastering mind.  
 So moved that spirit trampling; then it laid  
 Its hand at last upon itself, how this was made  
 Wondering, and sought to class and sought to trace  
 Mind by its forms, the wearer by the dress.  
 Then the other arose and met that spirit robust,  
 Who laboured; she now grew a shade who must  
 Fade wholly away, yet to her fellow cried,  
 "I pass, for thou hast laboured well and wide.  
 Thou thinkest term and end for thee are not;  
 But though thy pride is great, thou hast forgot  
 The Sphinx that waits for man beside the way.  
 All questions thou mayst answer, but one day  
 Her question shall await thee. That reply,  
 As all we must; for they, who cannot, die.  
 She slays them and their mangled bodies lie  
 Upon the highways of eternity.  
 Therefore, if thou wouldst live, know first this thing,  
 Who thou art in this dungeon labouring."  
 And Science confidently, "Nothing am I but earth,  
 Tissue and nerve and from the seed a birth,  
 A mould, a plasm, a gas, a little that is much.  
 In these grey cells that quiver to each touch  
 The secret lies of man; they are the thing called I.  
 Matter insists and matter makes reply.  
 Shakespeare was this; this force in Jesus yearned  
 And conquered by the cross; this only learned  
 The secret of the suns that blaze afar;  
 This was Napoleon's giant mind of war."  
 I heard and marvelled in myself to see  
 The infinite deny infinity.  
 Yet the weird paradox seemed justified;  
 Even mysticism shrank out-mystified.  
 But the third Angel came and touched my eyes;  
 I saw the mornings of the future rise,  
 I heard the voices of an age unborn  
 That comes behind us and our pallid morn,

And from the heart of an approaching light  
 One said to man, "Know thyself infinite,  
 Who shalt do mightier miracles than these,  
 Infinite, moving mid infinities."  
 Then from our hills the ancient answer pealed,  
 "For Thou, O Splendour, art myself concealed,  
 And the grey cell contains me not, the star  
 I outmeasure and am older than the elements are.  
 Whether on earth or far beyond the sun,  
 I, stumbling, clouded, am the Eternal One."

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 42-44)*

*The Yogin's aim in the sciences that make for knowledge should be to discover and understand the workings of the Divine Consciousness-Puissance in man and creatures and things and forces, her creative significances, her execution of the mysteries, the symbols in which she arranges the manifestation. The Yogin's aim in the practical sciences, whether mental and physical or occult and psychic, should be to enter into the ways of the Divine and his processes, to know the materials and means for the work given to us so that we may use that knowledge for a conscious and faultless expression of the spirit's mastery, joy and self-fulfilment.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 142)*

## ON SCIENCE—TWO LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO

I THINK X bases his ideas on the attempt of Jeans, Eddington and other English scientists to thrust metaphysical conclusions into scientific facts; it is necessary that he should appreciate fully the objections of more austere scientific minds to such a mixture. Moreover, spiritual seeking has its own accumulated knowledge which does not depend in the least on the theories or discoveries of science in the purely physical sphere. X's attempt like that of Jeans and others is a reaction against the illegitimate attempts of some scientific minds in the nineteenth century and of many others who took advantage of the march of scientific discovery to discredit or abolish as far as possible the religious spirit and to discredit also metaphysics as a cloudy verbiage, exalting science as the only clue to the truth of the universe. But I think that attitude is now dead or moribund; the scientists recognise, as you point out, the limits of their sphere. I may observe that the conflict between religion and science never arose in India (until the days of European education) because religion did not interfere with scientific discovery and scientists did not question religious or spiritual truth because the two things were kept on separate but not opposing lines.

\* \* \*

The defect in what X writes about Science seems to be that he is insisting vehemently on the idea that Science is still materialistic or at least that scientists, Jeans and Eddington excepted, are still fundamentally materialists. This is not the fact. Most continental scientists have now renounced the idea that Science can explain the fundamentals of existence. They hold that Science is only concerned with process and not with fundamentals. They declare that it is not the business of Science nor is it within its means to decide anything about the great questions which concern philosophy and religion. This is the enormous change which the latest developments of Science have brought about. Science itself nowadays is neither materialistic nor idealistic. The rock on which materialism was built and which in the 19th century seemed unshakable has now been shattered. Materialism has now become a philosophical speculation just like any other theory; it cannot claim to found itself on a sort of infallible Biblical authority, based on the facts and conclusions of Science. This change can be felt by one like myself who grew up in the heyday of absolute rule of scientific materialism in the 19th century. The way which had been almost entirely barred, except by rebellion, now lies wide open to spiritual truths, spiritual ideas, spiritual experiences. That is the real revolution. Mentalism is only a half-way house, but mentalism and vitalism are now perfectly possible as hypotheses based on the facts of existence, scientific facts as well as any others. The facts of Science do not compel anyone to take any particular philosophical direction. They are now neutral and can even be used on one side or another though most scientists do not

consider such a use as admissible. Nobody here ever said that the new discoveries of Physics supported the ideas of religion or churches; they merely contended that Science had lost its old materialistic dogmatism and moved away by a revolutionary change from its old moorings. It is this change which I expected and prophesied in my poems in the first Ahana volume, “A Vision of Science” and “In the Moonlight”.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 205-07)

*Life would be stunted and narrow if we could feel no significance in the world around us beyond that which can be weighed and measured with the tools of the physicist or described by the metrical symbols of the mathematician.*

*Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington*

\*

*Science is chiefly useful to the God-lover & the God-knower because it enables him to understand in detail and admire the curious wonders of His material workmanship. The one learns & cries, “Behold how the Spirit has manifested itself in matter”; the other, “Behold, the touch of my Lover & Master, the perfect Artist, the hand omnipotent.”*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 494)

## IN THE MOONLIGHT

If now must pause the bullocks' jingling tune,  
Here let it be beneath the dreaming trees  
Supine and huge that hang upon the breeze,  
Here in the wide eye of the silent moon.

How living a stillness reigns! The night's hushed rules  
All things obey but three, the slow wind's sigh  
Among the leaves, the cricket's ceaseless cry,  
The frog's harsh discord in the ringing pools.

Yet they but seem the silence to increase  
And dreadful wideness of the inhuman night.  
The whole hushed world immeasurable might  
Be watching round this single spot of peace.

So boundless is the darkness and so rife  
With thoughts of infinite reach that it creates  
A dangerous sense of space and abrogates  
The wholesome littleness of human life.

The common round that each of us must tread  
Now seems a thing unreal; we forget  
The heavy yoke the world on us has set,  
The slave's vain labour earning tasteless bread.

Space hedges us and Time our hearts o'ertakes;  
Our bounded senses and our boundless thought  
Strive through the centuries and are slowly brought  
Back to the source whence their divergence wakes.

The source that none have traced, since none can know  
Whether from Heaven the eternal waters well  
Through Nature's matted locks, as Ganges fell,  
Or from some dismal nether darkness flow.

Two genii in the dubious heart of man,  
Two great unhappy foes together bound  
Wrestle and strive to win unhampered ground;  
They strive for ever since the race began.



One from his body like a bridge of fire  
Mounts upward azure-winged with eager eyes;  
One in his brain deep-mansioned labouring lies  
And clamps to earth the spirit's high desire.

Here in this moonlight with strange visions rife  
I seem to see their vast peripheries  
Without me in the sombre mighty trees,  
And, hark! their silence turns the wheels of life.

These are the middle and the first. Are they  
The last too? Has the duel then no close?  
Shall neither vanquish of the eternal foes,  
Nor even at length this moonlight turn to day?

Our age has made an idol of the brain,  
The last adored a purer presence; yet  
In Asia like a dove immaculate  
He lurks deep-brooding in the hearts of men.

But Europe comes to us bright-eyed and shrill.  
"A far delusion was that mounting fire,  
An impulse balked and an unjust desire;  
It fades as we ascend the human hill."

She cries to us to labour in the light  
Of common things, grow beautiful and wise  
On strong material food, nor vex our eyes  
With straining after visionary delight.

Ah, beautiful and wise, but to what end?  
Europe knows not, nor any of her schools  
Who scorn the higher thought or dreams of fools;  
Riches and joy and power meanwhile are gained.

Gained and then lost! For Death the heavy grip  
Shall loosen, Death shall cloud the laughing eye,  
And he who broke the nations soon shall lie  
More helpless than a little child asleep.

And after? Nay, for death is end and term.  
 A fiery dragon through the centuries curled,  
 He feeds upon the glories of the world  
 And the vast mammoth dies before the worm.

Stars run their cycle and are quenched; the suns  
 Born from the night are to the night returned,  
 When the cold tenebrous spaces have inurned  
 The listless phantoms of the Shining Ones.

From two dead worlds a burning world arose  
 Of which the late putrescent fruit is man;  
 From chill dark space his roll of life began  
 And shall again in icy quiet close.

Our lives are but a transitory breath:  
 Mean pismires in the sad and dying age  
 Of a once glorious planet, on the edge  
 Of bitter pain we wait eternal death.

Watering the ages with our sweat and blood  
 We pant towards some vague ideal state  
 And by the effort fiercer ills create,  
 Working by lasting evil transient good.

Insults and servitude we bear perforce;  
 With profitable crimes our souls we rack,  
 Vexing ourselves lest earth our seed should lack  
 Who needs us not in her perpetual course;

Then down into the earth descend and sleep  
 For ever, and the lives for which we toiled  
 Forget us, who when they their turn have moiled,  
 Themselves forgotten into silence creep.

Why is it all, the labour and the din,  
 And wherefore do we plague our souls and vex  
 Our bodies or with doubts our days perplex?  
 Death levels soon the virtue with the sin.

If Death be end and close the useless strife,  
    Strive not at all, but take what ease you may  
    And make a golden glory of the day,  
Exhaust the little honey of your life.

Fear not to take her beauty to your heart  
    Whom you so utterly desire; you do  
    No hurt to any, for the inner you  
So cherished is a dream that shall depart.

The wine of life is sweet; let no man stint  
    His longing or refuse one passionate hope.  
    Why should we cabin in such infinite scope,  
Restrict the issue of such golden mint?

Society forbids? It for our sakes  
    Was fashioned; if it seek to fence around  
    Our joys and pleasures in such narrow bound,  
It gives us little for the much it takes.

Nor need we hearken to the gospel vain  
    That bids men curb themselves to help mankind.  
    We lose our little chance of bliss, then blind  
And silent lie for ever. Whose the gain?

What helps it us if so mankind be served?  
    Ourselves are blotted out from joy and light,  
    Having no profit of the sunshine bright,  
While others reap the fruit our toils deserved.

O this new god who has replaced the old!  
    He dies to-day, he dies to-morrow, dies  
    At last for ever, and the last sunrise  
Shall have forgotten him extinct and cold.

But virtue to itself is joy enough?  
    Yet if to us sin taste diviner? why  
    Should we not herd in Epicurus' sty  
Whom Nature made not of a Stoic stuff?

For Nature being all, desire must reign.  
 It is too sweet and strong for us to slay  
 Upon a nameless altar, saying nay  
 To honied urgings for no purpose plain.

A strange unreal gospel Science brings,—  
 Being animals to act as angels might;  
 Mortals we must put forth immortal might  
 And flutter in the void celestial wings.

“Ephemeral creatures, for the future live,”  
 She bids us, “gather in for unborn men  
 Knowledge and joy, and forfeit, nor complain,  
 The present which alone is yours to give.”

Man’s immortality she first denies  
 And then assumes what she rejects, made blind  
 By sudden knowledge, the majestic Mind  
 Within her smiling at her sophistries.

Not so shall Truth extend her flight sublime,  
 Pass from the poor beginnings she has made  
 And with the splendour of her wings displayed  
 Range through the boundaries of Space and Time.

Clamp her not down to her material finds!  
 She shall go further. She shall not reject  
 The light within, nor shall the dialect  
 Of unprogressive pedants bar men’s minds.

We seek the Truth and will not pause nor fear.  
 Truth we will have and not the sophist’s pleas;  
 Animals, we will take our grosser ease,  
 Or, spirits, heaven’s celestial music hear.

The intellect is not all; a guide within  
 Awaits our question. He it was informed  
 The reason He surpasses; and unformed  
 Presages of His mightiness begin.

Nor mind submerged, nor self subliminal,  
But the great Force that makes the planets wheel  
Through ether and the sun in flames reveal  
His godhead, is in us perpetual.

That Force in us is body, that is mind,  
And what is higher than the mind is He.  
This was the secret Science could not see;  
Aware of death, to life her eyes were blind.

Through chemistry she seeks the source of life,  
Nor knows the mighty laws that she has found  
Are Nature's bye-laws merely, meant to ground  
A grandiose freedom building peace by strife.

The organ for the thing itself she takes,  
The brain for mind, the body for the soul,  
Nor has she patience to explore the whole,  
But like a child a hasty period makes.

"It is enough," she says, "I have explored  
The whole of being; nothing now remains  
But to put details in and count my gains."  
So she deceives herself, denies her Lord.

Therefore He manifests Himself; once more  
The wonders of the secret world within  
Wrapped yet with an uncertain mist begin  
To look from that thick curtain out; the door

Opens. Her days are numbered, and not long  
Shall she be suffered to belittle thus  
Man and restrain from his tempestuous  
Uprising that immortal spirit strong.

He rises now; for God has taken birth.  
The revolutions that pervade the world  
Are faint beginnings and the discus hurled  
Of Vishnu speeds down to enring the earth.

The old shall perish; it shall pass away,  
 Expunged, annihilated, blotted out;  
 And all the iron bands that ring about  
 Man's wide expansion shall at last give way.

Freedom, God, Immortality, the three  
 Are one and shall be realised at length;  
 Love, Wisdom, Justice, Joy and utter Strength  
 Gather into a pure felicity.

It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,  
 What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,  
 Vision and vain imagination deemed,  
 The City of Delight, the Age of Gold.

The Iron Age is ended. Only now  
 The last fierce spasm of the dying past  
 Shall shake the nations, and when that has passed,  
 Earth washed of ills shall raise a fairer brow.

This is man's progress; for the Iron Age  
 Prepares the Age of Gold. What we call sin,  
 Is but man's leavings as from deep within  
 The Pilot guides him in his pilgrimage.

He leaves behind the ill with strife and pain,  
 Because it clings and constantly returns,  
 And in the fire of suffering fiercely burns  
 More sweetness to deserve, more strength to gain.

He rises to the good with Titan wings:  
 And this the reason of his high unease,  
 Because he came from the infinities  
 To build immortally with mortal things;

The body with increasing soul to fill,  
 Extend Heaven's claim upon the toiling earth  
 And climb from death to a diviner birth  
 Grasped and supported by immortal Will.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 55-61)*

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCIENTIST AND THE YOGI

THE climax of the ordinary consciousness is Science. For Science, what is upon the earth is true, simply because it is there. What it calls Nature is for it the final reality, and its aim is to build up a theory to explain the workings of it. So it climbs as high as the physical mind can go and tries to find out the causes of what it assumes to be the true, the real world. But in fact it adapts “causes” to “effects”, for it has already taken that which is for the true, the real, and seeks only to explain it mentally. For the yogic consciousness, however, this world is not the final reality. Rising above the mind into the Overmind and then into the Supermind, it enters the divine world of first truths, and looking down from there sees what has happened to those truths here. How distorted they have become, how completely falsified! So the so-called world of fact is for the Yogi a falsehood and not at all the only true reality. It is not what it ought to be, it is almost the very opposite; whereas for the scientist it is absolutely fundamental.

Our aim is to change things. The scientist says that whatever is, is natural and cannot be changed at heart. But, really speaking, the laws of which he usually speaks are of his own mental making; and because he accepts Nature as it is as the very basis, things do not and cannot change for him in any complete sense. But, according to us, all this can be changed, because we know that there is something above, a divine truth seeking manifestation. There are no fixed laws here; even Science in its undogmatic moments recognises that the laws are mere mental constructions. There are only cases, and if the mind could apply itself to all the circumstances it would find that no two cases are similar. Laws are for the mind’s convenience, but the process of the supramental manifestation is different, we may even say it is the reverse of the mind. In the supramental realisation, each thing will carry in itself a truth which will manifest at each instant without being bound by what has been or what will follow. That elaborate linking of the past with the present, which gives things in Nature such an air of unchangeable determinism is altogether the mind’s way of conceiving, and is no proof that all that exists is inevitable and cannot be otherwise.

The knowledge possessed by the Yogi is also an answer to the terrible theory that all that takes place is God’s direct working. For once you rise to the Supermind you immediately perceive that the world is false and distorted. The supramental truth has not at all found manifestation. How then can the world be a genuine expression of the Divine? Only when the Supermind is established and rules here, then alone the Supreme Will may be said to have authentically manifested. At the same time, we must steer clear of the dangerous exaggeration of the sense of the falsehood of the world, which comes to those who have risen to the higher consciousness. What happened with Shankara and others like him was that they had a glimpse of the true consciousness, which threw the falsehood of this world into such sharp contrast that they declared the universe to be not only false but also a really non-existent illusion

which should be entirely abandoned. We, on the other hand, see its falsehood, but realise also that it has to be replaced and not abandoned as an illusion. Only, the truth has got mistranslated, something has stepped in to pervert the divine reality, but the world is in fact meant to express it. And to express it is indeed our Yoga.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1929-31*, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 161-62)

*Once more the world was made a wonder-web,  
A magic's process in a magical space,  
An unintelligible miracle's depths  
Whose source is lost in the Ineffable.  
Once more we face the blank Unknowable.  
In a crash of values, in a huge doom-crack,  
In the sputter and scatter of her breaking work  
She lost her clear conserved constructed world.  
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.  
Ideals, ethics, systems had no base  
And soon collapsed or without sanction lived;  
All grew a chaos, a heave and clash and strife.*

(*Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 254-55)



## ‘THERE IS ONLY ONE’

The whole universe explains everything at every moment and a particular thing happens because the whole universe is what it is. The Mother (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 28)

*How does the universe explain at every moment the universe?*

THAT is not what I have said. If you want an explanation of something, it is the universe that explains this something. And each thing is explained by everything; and you can explain nothing except by the whole universe and the entire universe is explained by everything.... Just see: if you read all the explanations given in all the sciences, all the branches of human knowledge, always one thing is explained by another, and if you want to explain this other you explain it by yet another and if you want to explain this other one too, you explain it by yet another. So you continue in this way and go round the universe in order to explain one thing. Only, usually people get tired after a time, they accept the last explanation and stick to it. Otherwise, if they continued to find an explanation, they would have to make the full round of all things and would come back always to the same point. Things are so because they are so, because they had to be so, otherwise they would not be. Things are so, because they are as they are. There’s no doubt about it. And that indeed is supreme wisdom.

*Is there not a physical law that is able to explain everything in the universe?*

Find it out, I shall be very glad.

*Can it be found by science?*

Yes, if it moves in a very definite direction, if it progresses sufficiently, if it does not stop on the way, scientists will find the same thing the mystics have found, and all religious people, everybody, because there is only one thing to find, there are no two. There is only one. So one can go a long way, one can turn round and round and round, and if one turns and turns long enough without stopping, one is bound to come to the same spot. Once there, one feels as though there is nothing at all to find. As I have just told you, there is nothing to find. It is That, the Power.<sup>1</sup> It is That, that is all. It is so. Still another question?

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM, Vol. 5, pp. 80-81)*

1. Later on, a disciple asked Mother what she meant by, “It is That, the Power.” Mother answered, “Yes, they will find the same thing the mystics have found and—religious people have found, as everybody has found—it is That, the Power. What one finds is the Power. And to That, essentially, you can give neither a name nor a definition.... That is now the big quarrel about Auroville: in the ‘Charter’ I put the ‘Divine Consciousness’ (to live in Auroville one must be a ‘willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness’, so they say: it makes you think of God. I said (*laughing*), as for me, it does not make me think of God! So some translate it as ‘the highest consciousness’, others put other things. I agreed with the Russians to put ‘Perfect Consciousness’, but that is an approximation.... And it is That—which you can neither name nor define—which is the supreme Power. It is Power that one finds. And the supreme Power is only an aspect: the aspect concerning the creation.”

See *Notes on the Way* (13 and 16 March 1968).

## 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 August 2005)*

### 90. "India is Free"

*Sweet Mother, how can one say that a fact is "already accomplished" where it has not yet been manifested—for instance, that the Divine has chosen an instrument, when nothing is yet apparent?*

Yes, within, in the world which is not yet manifested, the decision is there, it is taken there; but then it must come to the surface.

It corresponds exactly to what I have already told you so often about the freedom of India. After going to a certain plane, I said to Sri Aurobindo, "India is free." I didn't say, "She *will* be free"; I said, "She *is* free." Well, between that moment when it was an accomplished fact and the time when it was translated into the material world on earth, how many years were necessary? It was in 1915, and liberation came in 1947, that is, thirty-two years later. There you are, that is the exact picture of the resistance.

So, for the individual it is the same thing; sometimes it takes as long as that, sometimes it goes faster.

*You say you saw India free...*

No, I did not see: I knew.

*You said to Sri Aurobindo: "India is free." Was India free as one whole or cut into two as it is at present?*

I meant specially what happened in 1947, that is, the withdrawal of foreign domination, that's all. Nothing but that, not her moral or spiritual freedom, I did not speak of that at all. I simply said she was free from foreign domination, because, even to a question Sri Aurobindo put to me, I answered from the same plane, "There will be no violence, this will come about without a revolution, it will be the English who will decide to go away of their own accord, for things will become too hot for them owing to certain world circumstances." So that was the only point, there was no spiritual question here.

And that's how things happened. And I had told Sri Aurobindo this in 1915, exactly. It was all there, it was there—I guessed nothing nor prophesied anything: it was a fact.

And so, that gives you the exact picture of the length of time necessary between the established fact and the inner realisation. And for the individual it is the same thing: he is chosen, he has chosen; and he has chosen the Divine and he is chosen; and it is something which has been decided; and it will be realised inevitably, one can't escape even if one tries. Only, it may take a very long time.

*Mother, I was asking... (laughter) You said that India was free in 1915, but was she free as she is free now? Because India is not free as one whole. She is broken up.*

Oh! Oh! that's what you wanted to know.

That... the details were not there. No, there must have been a possibility of its being otherwise, for, when Sri Aurobindo told them to do a certain thing, sent them his message,<sup>1</sup> he knew very well that it was possible to avoid what happened later. If they had listened to him at that time, there would have been no division. Consequently, the division was not decreed, it was a human deformation. It is beyond question a human deformation.

\* \* \*

1. In 1942, at the time of the proposals offered by the British through Sir Stafford Cripps, not yet granting independence to India but leading towards it, Sri Aurobindo took the trouble of sending a special messenger to Delhi to convince certain responsible persons that the proposals *must be* accepted. They did not understand. Had the proposals been accepted, the partition of India and its accompanying atrocities would most probably have been avoided.

(M 8: 30-32)

## 91. Supermind

*What do you mean by a "divine way of life"?*

We always call "Divine" all that we are not but wish to be. All that seems to us infinitely superior, not only to all that we have done, but to all that we feel we can do; all that surpasses both our conception and our present possibilities, we call "Divine".

I say this, not as a joke, but because I am quite convinced that if we go back some thousands of years, when men spoke of the Divine—if ever they did speak of the Divine, as I believe—they spoke perhaps of a state like that of the godheads of the Overmind; and now this mode of being of the Overmind godheads who, obviously, have governed the earth and formed many things on earth for a very long time, seems

to us far inferior to what we conceive the Supermind to be. And this Supermind, which is, precisely, what we now call the Divine and try to bring down on earth, will probably strike us in the same way a few thousand or million years hence as the Overmind does today.

And I am sure that in the manifestation, that is, in His self-expression, the Divine is progressive. Outside the manifestation He is something we cannot conceive; but as soon as He manifests in this kind of perpetual becoming, well, He manifests more and more of Himself, as though He were reserving for the end the most beautiful things in His Being.

As the world progresses, what He expresses in the world becomes what we might call more and more divine.

So Sri Aurobindo has used the word Supermind to explain to those who are in the outer and evolutionary consciousness and who have some idea of the way in which the earth has developed—to explain to them that this something which is going to be beyond all this, and superior to human creation, to man, whom he always calls the mental being—this something which is going to come will be greater and better than man; and so he calls it supramental in order to make himself understood. But we could just as well say that it is something more divine than what has been manifested before.

And this he himself says, in what I read today, that it is infinite, that it has no limits.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, there will always be a growing perfection; and what now seems to us imperfect must have been the perfection for which certain ages in earth's history aspired.

There is no reason why this should stop. If it stopped, it would be finished. It would be a new Pralaya.

\* \* \*

1. "In a certain sense it may be an error to speak of a goal anywhere in a progression which may well be infinite."

Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 83

(M 8: 33-34)

## 92. Surrender—The First Absolute Condition

And now, surrender. In English the word is "surrender", there is no French word which gives exactly that sense. But Sri Aurobindo has said—I think we have read this—that surrender is the first and absolute condition for doing the yoga. So, if we follow what he has said, this is not just one of the necessary qualities: it is the first attitude indispensable for beginning the yoga. If one has not decided to make a total surrender, one cannot begin.

(M 8: 41)

### 93. The Problem

I say that by any path whatever and by eliminating all that is not of this path, it is possible for each one to be perfectly identified with the Divine, that is to say, to become the Divine—but at only one point, the point he has chosen. But this point is perfect in itself. I don't say it contains everything, I say it is perfect in itself, that is, the identification is perfect—but it is not total.

*They have the full bliss?*

Perfect bliss—perfect bliss, eternity, infinity, everything.

*Then what's the difference?*

The difference exists only in the manifestation. By this identification, whatever it may be, one automatically goes out of the manifestation, except at the point where one is identified. And if, in the path one has followed, the aim is to go out, as for instance with those who seek Nirvana, if it is a going out of the manifestation, well, one goes out of the manifestation, it's the end. And once one goes out of the manifestation, there is no longer any difference or any hierarchy, it is finished, one has gone out of the manifestation. That is it, you understand, everything depends on the goal one pursues. If one goes out of the manifestation, one goes out of the manifestation, then there is no longer a possibility of any hierarchy at all. But as soon as one enters the manifestation, there is a hierarchy. That is to say—if we take the realisation of the supramental world—everybody will not be on the same level and made in the same pattern, and with the same capacity and possibility. It's always this illusion, isn't it, of a sort of indefinite repetition of something which always resembles itself—it is not that. In the realisation, the manifestation, there is a hierarchy of capacity and action, and of manifestation. But if the aim is to go out of the manifestation, then quite naturally, at whatever point you go out, you go out.

It all depends on the ideal one puts before oneself. And while you go out because you have chosen to do so, to enter into Pralaya, there is all the rest of the universe which continues.... But that's totally immaterial to you. As your aim was to get out of it, you get out of it. But that doesn't mean that the rest also go out! You are the only one to go out, or those who have followed the same aim and the same path as you.

*(Long silence)*

That is precisely the problem which faced Sri Aurobindo here and me in France: should one limit one's path and reach the goal first, and later take up all the rest and begin the work of integral transformation; or should one go step by step, not leaving

anything aside, not eliminating anything on the path, taking in all the possibilities at the same time and progressing at all points at the same time? That is to say, should one retire from life and action until one reaches one's goal, becomes conscious of the Supermind and realises it in oneself; or should one embrace the entire creation and with this entire creation gradually go forward towards the Supermind?

(Silence)

One can understand that things get done by stages: you go forward, reach one stage, and so, as a consequence, take all the rest forward; and then at the same time, in a simultaneous movement, you reach another stage and again take others forward—and so on.

That gives the impression that you are not moving. But everything is on the move in this way.

(M 8: 48-50)

## 94. The Teaching of the Gita

*“Nature as Prakriti is an inertly active Force,—for she works out a movement imposed upon her; but within her is One that knows....”*

*“The individual soul or the conscious being in a form may identify itself with this experiencing Purusha or with this active Prakriti. If it identifies itself with Prakriti, it is not master, enjoyer and knower....”*

*The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 91*

*If Nature is led by the Power which is self-aware and if she does exactly what is imposed upon her, how is it that there are all these distortions? How can Nature distort things?*

Yes, I was expecting that.

I tell you this is the theory of the Gita, it's not the whole Truth.

I heard this when I was in France; there are people who explain the Gita, saying there is no flame without smoke—which is not true. And starting from that they say, “Life is like that and you can't change it, it's like that. All you can do is to pass over to the side of the Purusha, become the governing force instead of being the force that is governed.” That's all. But, as Sri Aurobindo says at the end, it is the theory of the Gita, it's not the whole truth; it is only a partial way of seeing things—useful, practical, convenient, but not wholly true.

*If that is so, how is it that some of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo preach the message of the Gita for the salvation of the world?*

That's their business. If that makes them happy, it's all the same to me.

*But it has no connection with Sri Aurobindo's yoga?*

One can't say no connection; but it's narrow-mindedness, that's all. They have caught hold of a small bit and make it the whole. But that happens to everybody. Who is capable of grasping the whole, I would like to know? Everyone grasps his bit and makes it his whole.

*But Sri Aurobindo has explained...*

Oh! but you are a propagandist! Why do you want to convince them? If they are content with that, leave them in their contentment.... If they come and tell you, "This is Sri Aurobindo's theory", you have the right to tell them, "No, you are mistaken, that is the traditional theory, this is not the theory of Sri Aurobindo." That's all. But you can't tell them, "You must change yours." If it pleases them, let them keep it.

It's very convenient. I saw this in France, in Paris, before coming to India, and I saw how very practical it was. First, it allows you to grasp a very profound and extremely useful truth, as I said; and then it shields you from all necessity of changing your outer nature.

It's so convenient, isn't it? You say, "I am like that, what can I do about it? I separate myself from Nature, I let her do whatever she likes, I am not this Nature, I am the Purusha. Ah! let her go her own way; after all, I can't change her." This is extremely convenient. And that is why people adopt it; for they imagine they are in the Purusha, but at the least scratch they fall right back into Prakriti, and then they fly into a temper or are in despair or fall ill. And that's that.

I heard someone who had, however, realised precisely this kind of identification with the Purusha and radiated a very remarkable atmosphere; but he called dangerous revolutionaries all those who wanted to change something in the earth-Nature, all who wanted things on earth to change—wanted, for example, that suffering might be abolished or ultimately the necessity of death might be done away with, that there might be an evolution, a luminous progress requiring no destruction: "Ah! those who think like that are dangerous revolutionaries. If need be, they should be put in prison!"

But if one wants to be wise even without becoming a great yogi, one must be able to look at all these things with a smile, and not be affected by them. You have your own experience; try to make it as true and complete as possible, but leave each one to his own experience. Unless they come seeking you as a guru and tell you, "Now, lead me to the Light and the Truth"; then, there your responsibility begins—

but not before. (*Looking at a disciple*) He is longing to speak!

*Sri Aurobindo has said, "The Gita... pauses at the borders of the highest spiritual mind and does not cross them into the splendours of the supramental Light."*

*The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 87*

*By following the Gita, why doesn't one catch the central truth and come to the path of the supramental Yoga?*

I don't know what you mean. But there are also many people who believe they are following the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and who don't reach the supramental truth.

It does not depend so much on the path one follows; it depends on the capacity one has.

*But I am asking: the central truth of the Gita is surrender to the Lord—why doesn't one grasp that?... "Its highest mystery of absolute surrender to the Divine Guide, Lord and Inhabitant of our nature, is the central secret."*

*The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 87*

But of course, this is what is written in the Gita, that you must give yourself entirely. You know, in the Gita, Krishna is the Guide and inner Master, and you must give yourself entirely to Him, make a total surrender—so? I tell you, people profess one teaching or another, but they are not always able to follow it; they come to a certain point and stop.

I don't understand your difficulty. You mean that those who are convinced of the truth of the teaching of the Gita do not realise this teaching?

*The teaching of surrender.*

Yes, anyway the teaching contained in the Gita—and this surprises you? But there are countless people throughout the world who are convinced of the truth of a teaching, but that doesn't make them capable of realising it. For instance, all Buddhists, the millions of Buddhists in the world who profess that Buddhism is the truth—does this enable them to become like a Buddha? Certainly not. So, what is so surprising about that?

I told you why there are people who accept this even after having read and studied Sri Aurobindo: why they accept it, hold fast to it, cling to this teaching of the Gita; it is because it's comfortable, one doesn't need to make any effort to change one's nature: one's nature is unchangeable, so you don't at all need to think of changing it; you simply let it go its own way, you look at it from the top of your ivory tower and let it do whatever it likes, saying, "This is not I, I am not that."



This is very convenient, it may be done very rapidly—at least one could claim that it's done. As I said, in practice one is rarely consistent with one's theory; if you have a bad throat or a headache or have grazed your foot, you begin to cry out or complain, to groan, and so you are not detached, you are altogether attached and tightly bound. This is a very human fact.

Or else, when someone says something unpleasant to you, you get quite upset. It is like that—because you are closely attached to your nature, although you have declared you are not. That's all.

(M 8: 61-65)

## 95. The Gita: The Knot of the Ego

*Sweet Mother, it is written here: "In the path of works action is the knot we have first to loosen."*

*The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 94*

*Why is action a knot?*

Because one is attached to action. The knot is the knot of the ego. You act because of desire. Sri Aurobindo says this, doesn't he? The ordinary way of acting is tied to desire in one form or another—a desire, a need—so that is the knot. If you act only to satisfy desire—a desire which you call a need or a necessity or anything else, but in truth, if you go to the very root of the thing, you see that it is the impulse of a desire which makes you act—well, if you act only under the effect of the impulse of desire, you will no longer be able to act when you eliminate the desire.

And this is the first answer people give you. When they are told, "Act without being attached to the result of action, have this consciousness that it is not you who are acting, it is the Divine who is acting", the reply which ninety-nine and a half per cent give is, "But if I feel like that, I don't move any longer! I don't do anything any more; it is always a need, a desire, a personal impulse which makes me act in one way or another." So Sri Aurobindo says, if you want to realise this teaching of the Gita, the first thing to do is to loosen this knot, the knot binding action to desire—so firmly tied are they that if you take away one you take away the other. He says the knot must be loosened in order to be able to remove desire and yet continue to act.

And this is a fact, this is what must be done. The knot must be loosened. It is a small inner operation which you can very easily perform; and when it has been performed, you realise that you act absolutely without any personal motive, but moved by a Force higher than your egoistic force, and also more powerful. And then you act, but the consequences of action no longer return upon you.

This is a wonderful phenomenon of consciousness, and quite concrete. In life you do something—whatever you do, good, bad, indifferent, it doesn't matter—whatever it may be, it immediately has a series of consequences. In fact you do it to obtain a certain result, that is why you act, with an eye to the result. For example, if I stretch out my hand like this to take the mike, I am looking for the result, you see, to make sounds in the mike. And there is always a consequence, always. But if you loosen the knot and let a Force coming from above—or elsewhere—act through you and make you do things, though there are consequences of your action, they don't come to you any longer, for it was not you who initiated the action, it was the Force from above. And the consequences pass above, or else they are guided, willed, directed, controlled by the Force which made you act. And you feel *absolutely* free, nothing comes back to you of the result of what you have done.

There are people who have had this experience—but these things come first in a flash, for a moment, and then withdraw; it is only when one is quite ready for the transformation that this comes and is established—well, some people have had this experience once, perhaps for a few seconds in their lives, they have had the experience; and then the movement has been withdrawn, the state of consciousness has withdrawn; but the memory remains. And they imitate that. And if by chance they happen to be people who know how to make speeches, like certain gurus who have disciples to whom they teach the path, they tell them this, “When it is the Divine who acts through you and when you have loosened the knot of desire, you no longer suffer any moral or other consequences of what you do. And you can do anything whatever: you can kill your neighbour, you can violate a woman, you can do everything the Divine wants in you—and you will never suffer any consequences.”

And indeed they do it! Yes, they take the experience as a cloak to cover all their excesses.... This is just by the way, to put you on your guard against people who pretend to be what they are not.

But, as a matter of fact, the result is very simple, for immediately they suffer the consequences of their pretences—they say they don't, but they suffer them.... I knew of a very striking case of a sannyasin who was furious with someone who did not want to be his disciple—already this proved that he was far from having realised this state—and who wished to take revenge. And indeed he had some powers, he had made a very powerful formation to kill this person who had refused to be his disciple. It so happened that this person was in contact with Sri Aurobindo. He told him his story and Sri Aurobindo told it to me. And the result was that the formation made by that man, who was acting with his so-called divine Will, fell back on him in such a way that it was he who died!

And it was simply the fact of re-establishing the truth. There was nothing else to do.

So the moral of the story is that one must not pretend, one must be; that one must be absolutely sincere and not cover up one's desires with fine theories.

I have met many people who claimed they had perfect equality of soul and perfect freedom, and hid themselves behind these theories: "All is the divine Will", and who, in fact, in their thought, were substituting their own will for the divine Will, and were very far from realising what they claimed. They were idlers who didn't want to make any effort and preferred keeping their nature as it was, rather than working to transform it. *Voilà!*

(M 8: 70-72)

## 96. Oneness in Matter

...Sri Aurobindo says there is a oneness in Matter, a oneness in the manifestation, a oneness in substance, and that there is necessarily an interchange.

In fact, this is what we have said more than fifty thousand times: that all is the Divine and that consequently all is *One*; that it is only your consciousness which is separated and in a state of unconsciousness because it is separated; but that if you remove this unconsciousness and this sense of separation, you become divine.

(M 8: 78-79)

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*(To be continued)*

*Apart he lived in his mind's solitude,  
A demigod shaping the lives of men:  
One soul's ambition lifted up the race;  
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.  
The universal strengths were linked with his;  
Filling earth's smallness with their boundless breadths,  
He drew the energies that transmute an age.  
Immeasurable by the common look,  
He made great dreams a mould for coming things  
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.  
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.  
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's.*

*(Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 44-45)*

## 2005: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PHYSICS

### A NOTE

1666

THIS was the year when Newton laid the foundations of his calculus, his theory of colours and his theory of gravitation. The world had not seen a scientific genius of this magnitude till then.

In 1666, John Dryden wrote a poem called *Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666*, celebrating the English naval victory over the Dutch as well as London's survival of the Great Fire. Subsequently, the term *annus mirabilis* was applied to the year 1666, to celebrate certain scientific events which also took place in that year.

In 1905, another star shone on the firmament of Physics whose brilliance equalled that of Isaac Newton. He was Albert Einstein. This was the year that saw the publication of five seminal papers in the journal *Annalen der Physik* by Einstein, papers which would change the course of Physics and establish Einstein as Newton's worthy successor. Aptly, the term *annus mirabilis* was reinvoked to describe the extraordinary year 1905.

What did Einstein achieve in this period? About the first four papers he wrote to a close friend, "I promise you four papers..., the first of which I could send you soon, since I will soon receive the free reprints. The paper deals with radiation and the energetic properties of light and is very revolutionary, as you will see.... The second paper is a determination of the true sizes of atoms from the diffusion and viscosity of dilute solutions of neutral substances. The third proves that, on the assumption of the molecular [kinetic] theory of heat, bodies of the order of magnitude of 1/1000 mm, suspended in liquids, must already perform an observable random movement that is produced by thermal motion; in fact, physiologists have observed motions of suspended small, inanimate bodies, which they call 'Brownian molecular motions.' The fourth paper is only a rough draft at this point, and is an electrodynamics of moving bodies, which employs a modification of the theory of space and time; the purely kinematical part of this paper will surely interest you."

He describes the fifth paper as follows: "One more consequence of the paper on electrodynamics has also occurred to me. The principle of relativity, in conjunction with Maxwell's equations, requires that mass be a direct measure of the energy contained in a body; light carries mass with it. A noticeable decrease of mass should occur in the case of radium. The argument is amusing and seductive; but for all I know, the Lord might be laughing over it and leading me around by the nose."

In 1901 Einstein had declared, "The real goal of my research has always been the simplification and unification of the system of theoretical physics." Sir Roger Penrose, an eminent relativist of our own day, remarks that of the two revolutions

that took place in Physics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely the advent of Quantum Mechanics and Relativity, Einstein had “laid the foundation stones of both these revolutions in the *single year* of 1905.”

This year, 2005 marks the hundredth anniversary of that miracle year 1905, and has been designated the “International Year of Physics”. But for Einstein’s discoveries in that year, theoretical advances in quantum optics and quantum field theory would have been impossible. Neither would we have had masers, lasers, klystrons and synchrotrons—nor atomic or hydrogen bombs or the peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

This and the next three issues of *Mother India* will carry some articles on Physics and on Science as a way of observing the “International Year of Physics”.

*(Based on the book Einstein’s Miraculous Year—Five Papers that Changed the Face of Physics, edited and introduced by John Stachel and with a foreword by Roger Penrose, published by Princeton University Press, U.S.A., 1988, and the Indian edition, published by Scientia, New Delhi, 2001.)*

*Humanity has every reason to place the proclaimers of high moral standards and values above the discoverers of objective truth. What humanity owes to personalities like Buddha, Moses and Jesus ranks for me higher than all the achievements of the enquiring constructive mind.*

*Albert Einstein*

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*The Eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility.... The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle.*

*Albert Einstein*

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*That is simple, my friend: because politics is more difficult than physics.*

*Albert Einstein*

*(When asked why people could discover atoms but not the means to control them.)*

## TOWARDS A NEW SPIRITUAL POETRY

### SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF ASCENDING "PLANES" OF POETIC EXPRESSION

*(Continued from the issue of July 2005)*

#### 3

SHAKESPEARE should open our eyes and ears to more than the distinction between verses and poetry. He should help us also most eminently to differentiate both Dryden and Chaucer from the Elizabethan Age in the matter of the very plane from which the work is done. The quotation from Dryden is not representative of him at his best, but it illustrates well enough the movement of what Sri Aurobindo has called "the creative or dynamic intelligence", the imaginative thought-power—the mental plane—as compared to the performance, on the one hand, of the subtle-physical and, on the other, of the vital, the plane of the Life Force. A vibrant energy is in Lear's desperate cry—

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life  
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!

which is missing in Chaucer no less than in Dryden. Poetically, although Chaucer has in his passage something equally good, the quiver of the nerves of sensation is absent. And this quiver will be realised by us all the more if, beside Chaucer's lines on the emptiness and transience of the world, we set the opening of Macbeth's celebrated soliloquy—with again a repetition, a triumphant triple one, at the very start:

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death....

This kind of vigorous passionate language was beyond Chaucer. Here a complexity of expression is present, yet it is not mere complexity that marks out the Shakespearian voice from the Chaucerian: the complexity is not a quiet one, it is a surge of wide waves, each wave leaping with a sharp zest and pushing its fellow and mixing with it to create a further movement; the imagery is dynamic and multiple. If Shakespeare is like the sea, Chaucer is like *terra firma*, solid earth: a certain suavity of temper carries him on. His numbers have a smooth charm but with rather an obviousness about it,

as when he speaks of the noble deeds of the “very gentle parfit knight”:

At mortal batailles hadde bene fiftene  
 And foughten for our faith at Tremissene  
 In listes thryës, and ay slain his fo....

Put beside these lines Othello’s account of his military life:

Of moving accidents by flood and field;  
 Of hair-breadth ’scapes i’ the imminent deadly breach;  
 Of being taken by the insolent foe....

Chaucer’s eye looks a little below the surface of things and his words give us a just and pleasing expression. Shakespeare’s words, as Sri Aurobindo<sup>3</sup> points out, “with quite as simple a thing to say and a perfect force of directness in saying it,” get, as we might put it, “into the entrails of vision and do not stop short at the clear measure of the thing seen, but evoke their very quality and give us immediately the inmost vital fibre and thrill of the life they describe and interpret”. No doubt, a greater poetic capacity is at work in Shakespeare than in Chaucer, at least on the whole. But the difference we are out to mark is not so much between the poetic geniuses of the two writers as between the planes from which they write.

From his own subtle-physical plane, Chaucer too can produce extreme effects. Let us quote what seem to be the most pathetic lines a lover ever gave vent to, pathetic by a heart-breaking homeliness verging on *naïveté*. Cressida, the Greek girl, has sworn fidelity to the young Trojan Troilus who had given her a brooch as a sign of his love. Once he catches sight of it on the coat of Diomedes. Shocked he says to her:

Through which I see that clene out of your minde  
 You han me cast, and I ne can nor may,  
 For all the worlde, within my herte finde  
 T’unloven you a quarter of a day.

Now listen to Othello expressing his love. He thinks Desdemona has been false to him because he finds with Cassio a handkerchief he had presented to her. Her falsity seems proved but he cannot change his heart—though ultimately it does drive him to kill her in the name of the ideal of fidelity. Here he is giving tongue to his desperate attachment to Desdemona’s beauty:

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,  
 But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,  
 Chaos is come again.

Observe the dynamic thrust of the language, the grandiose passion in the words. The same thrust, though a little less emphatic and also a little less verbally grandiose but in a more imaginative vein, we face in another speech of the Moor—

Had she been true,  
If heaven would make me such another world  
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,  
I'd not have sold her for it.

Perhaps a less rhetorical passage will set off more effectively the change of plane, the shift to the imaginatively excited Life Force, if I cite a quieter yet no less imaginatively excited speech of Shakespeare's Troilus, weaving together a complex crowd of words and bodying forth a multiple vision beyond the power of Chaucer. We shall see later that Shakespeare is not incapable of breaking into that rare accent, the "Overhead", but his distinction lies in a sovereign stir of the vital self in man and not even in a genuinely intellectual response to the various turns of earthly existence.

Although there are lines that have a philosophical air about them, scattered through the plays, the typical movement of the sheer mind does not mould the rhythmic form. We may have the impression that Macbeth is philosophising when he plunges into that passionate soliloquy which has become almost proverbial:

Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
Who struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

Sri Aurobindo<sup>4</sup> comments: "That is a 'thought', a judgment on life, so would naturally be assigned to the intellect, but as a matter of fact it is a throw-up from Macbeth's vital, an emotional or sensational, not an intellectual judgment and its whole turn and rhythm are vital." At another place Sri Aurobindo compares this passage "and Shelley's voicing of a kindred idea of transience"—

The One remains, the Many change and pass,  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments....

Sri Aurobindo<sup>5</sup> remarks on the two passages: "The one has the colour of an intuition



of the life-soul in one of its intense moods and we not only think the thought but seem to feel it even in our nerves of mental sensation, the other is the thought-mind itself uttering in a moved, inspired and illuminative language an idea of the pure intelligence.”

Perhaps we shall be asked: “Is not Hamlet an arch-intellectual? Surely, Shakespeare has created an embodiment of sheer mind in the famous Prince of Denmark ever cogitating?” Sri Aurobindo would not deny that Hamlet is an intellectual, yet Shakespeare’s expression of his intellectuality in both word and action is not typical of the sheer mind. Despite planning with an acute perception of circumstances, Hamlet acts on impulse, tangling up consequences, and when he talks it is really from an intellectualised Life Force. To realise his characteristic note we have only to compare his observation—

Who would fardels bear  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life?—

with Wordsworth’s vision:

The heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world.

Wordsworth is speaking, as it were, from the grey cells: they are changing the urgencies of an oppressed existence to philosophical values. Shakespeare is speaking from his guts: they stir the brain only to render coherent the being’s instinctive shout of recoil and rebellion. Again, Hamlet talks of passing away from the turmoil of life:

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil...

A quiver of the entrails is felt in the midst of the idea. Quite dissimilar is the accent of Keats talking of dying with the nightingale’s song a final music falling on deaf ears:

To thy high requiem become a sod.

Once more take Hamlet on release from the obstructive tangibilities of earth-existence by a dissolution of the body:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Respond now to Shelley’s utterance of the thought of reaching safety from life’s ravage:

From the world's bitter wind  
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.

Perhaps we can mark the most sustained distinction between the creative Life Force and the creative Intelligence in their intensities of reflection if we first tune in to a soliloquy from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and then get the wave-length of a passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There is the vivid speech of Claudio on death and after-life:

Aye, but to die and go we know not where!  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world.

Equally vivid yet quite unlike are the typical verbal turns and rhythmic vibrations in the oration of Belial, one of Satan's followers:

Our final hope  
Is flat despair: we must exasperate  
The Almighty Victor to spend all his rage;  
And that must end us; that must be our cure,  
To be no more. Sad cure! for who would lose,  
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,  
Those thoughts that wander through Eternity,  
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost  
In the wide womb of uncreated Night,  
Devoid of sense and motion?

#### 4

The passage from Milton illustrates in brief the psychological shift of plane he represents in English poetry. Sri Aurobindo<sup>6</sup> touches clearly on this shift when he tells us about the author of *Paradise Lost*:

"...he has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending in the least on any of the formal aids of

poetic expression except those which are always essential and indispensable, a speech which is in its very grain poetry and in its very grain intellectual thought-utterance. This is always the aim of the classical poet in his style and movement, and Milton has fulfilled it, adding at the same time that peculiar grandeur in both the soul and manner of the utterance and in both the soul and the gait of the rhythm which belongs to him alone of poets.”

In passing, we may hint at Sri Aurobindo’s distinction between the “classical poet” and the poet who is “romantic”. He<sup>7</sup> writes: “The poetry of the time of Wordsworth and Shelley is sometimes called romantic poetry, but it was not so in its essence, but only in certain of its moods and motives.” According to Sri Aurobindo,<sup>8</sup> “the pure and genuine romanticism” is of “the life-spirit which cares nothing for thought except as it enriches its own being”. In England this romanticism he traces to the Renaissance in France and Italy. “The Renaissance”, he<sup>9</sup> says, “meant many things and it meant too different things in different countries, but one thing above all everywhere, the discovery of beauty and joy in every energy of life. The Middle Ages had lived strongly and with a sort of deep and sombre force, but, as it were, always under the shadow of death and under the burden of an obligation to aspire through suffering to a beyond; their life is bordered on one side by the cross and on the other by the sword. The Renaissance brings in the sense of a liberation from the burden and the obligation; it looks at life and loves it in excess; it is carried away by the beauty of the body and the senses and the intellect, the beauty of sensation and action and speech and thought,—of thought hardly at all for its own sake, but thought as a power of life. It is Hellenism returning with its strong sense of humanity and things human, *nihil humani alienum*,\* but at first a barbarised Hellenism, unbridled and extravagant, riotous in its vitalistic energy, too much overjoyed for restraint and measure.

“Elizabethan poetry is an expression of this energy, passion and wonder of life,...”

To go back to its romanticism was no longer possible for the English mind at the time of the so-called “Romantic Revival”. It was then on the threshold of modern intellectualism which is full of a teeming many-sided ideation and takes up physical and vitalistic motives “not for their own sake, but to make them food for the poetic intelligence, blends the classical and romantic motives, adds to them the realistic, aesthetic, impressionist, idealistic ways of seeing and thinking, makes many experiments and combinations, passes through many phases”.<sup>10</sup> Around the beginning of the nineteenth century in England the modern-souled poetic intelligence received a sudden strange self-exceeding impulse, “a spirit or Daemon who does not seem to trouble at all with his voice or his oestrus the contemporary poets of continental Europe”.<sup>11</sup> The poetry born of it is not distinguished by any mood, romantic or classical, caught from the past. As Sri Aurobindo<sup>12</sup> points out, “It lives really by its greater and more characteristic element, by its half spiritual turn, by Wordsworth’s force of ethical

\* Nothing human is alien to me.

thought and communion with Nature, by Shelley's imaginative transcendentalism, Keats' worship of Beauty, Byron's Titanism and force of personality, Coleridge's supernaturalism or, as it should more properly be called, his eye for other nature, Blake's command of the inner psychic realms."

Sri Aurobindo calls these five instruments of a new poetic intelligence "the Poets of the Dawn"—the dawn of this intelligence rising beyond itself at times into a spiritual revelation but a dawn which was cut short and never widened into a full day. The reason was that they came at a time "not ready for work of this kind, not prepared for it by any past development, not fitted for it by anything in the common atmosphere of the age".<sup>13</sup> What accounted for the dawn was an extraordinary upsurge of one out of the strains constituting the English genius. There is the Anglo-Saxon which in its independence would lead us to "expect... a strong objective poetry, a powerful presentation of the forms of external life, action and character in action, the pleasant or the melancholy outsides of Nature, the robust play of the will and the passions, a vigorous vital and physical verse".<sup>14</sup> And "This side of the national mind would prepare us for English poetry as it was until Chaucer and beyond, the ground-type of the Elizabethan drama, the work of Dryden and Pope, the whole mass of eighteenth-century verse, Cowper, Scott, Wordsworth in his more outward moments, Byron without his Titanism and unrest, the poetry of Browning."<sup>15</sup> But there is also the Celtic strain, submerged in the general English temperament yet effective in the English poetic drive. "It comes up in a blaze of colour, light, emotion and imaginative magic; in a hungering for beauty in its more subtle and delicately sensuous forms, for the ideal which escapes definition and yet has to be seized in forms; in a subtler romance; in a lyrical intoxication. It casts into the mould a higher urge of thought, not the fine, calm and measured poetical thinking of the Greeks and the Latin races which deals sovereignly with life within the limits of the intellect and the inspired reason, but an excitement of thought seeking for something beyond itself and behind life through the intensities of poetical sight.... It awakens rare outbreaks of mysticism,..."<sup>16</sup> The Celtic element which often alchemizes the Anglo-Saxon while drawing from it an earth-clasping power is responsible for the marvellous phenomenon of Shakespeare with his myriad intuitive poignancies and sublimities on the vital plane. We feel it in the complex and radiant ingenuities of the poets known as the Metaphysicals and it is its striking presence in the "Dawn" poets that makes them in Sri Aurobindo's eyes the forerunners of the "Future Poetry" which would be pre-eminently the rhythmic speech proper to the planes above the mental no less than the vital and the subtle-physical.

I say "pre-eminently" and not "exclusively". For the Future Poetry would bring into more frequent expression the native cry of the inmost being in us which Sri Aurobindo calls "the psychic being" or else it would disclose fully and more often the inner worlds that may be labelled as "occult". We can gather from Sri Aurobindo the characteristics of these "things to come". According to him<sup>17</sup> "... the turn of the

psychic is different from that of the overhead planes—it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception, an intimate language.... The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful audacity, strength and space.... I suppose it would not be easy to find a more perfect example of psychic inspiration in English literature than Shelley's well-known lines,

I can give not what men call love;  
 But wilt thou accept not  
 The worship the heart lifts above  
 And the Heavens reject not,—  
 The desire of the moth for the star,  
 Of the night for the morrow,  
 The devotion to something afar  
 From the sphere of our sorrow?"

*(To be concluded)*

K. D. SETHNA  
 (AMAL KIRAN)

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5. *The Future Poetry...*, p. 278.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
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9. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
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13. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
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16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 364-65.

# THE MOTHER TAKES CHARGE OF THE ASHRAM

## —A Presentation of Documents—

(1)

### Letters of Sri Aurobindo

My Yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart; those around me knew I was a Sadhak but they knew little more as I kept all that went on in me to myself. It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpara publicly about my spiritual experiences. Until I went to Pondicherry I took no disciples; with those who accompanied me or joined me in Pondicherry I had at first the relation of friends and companions rather than of a Guru and disciples; it was on the ground of politics that I had come to know them and not on the spiritual ground. Afterwards only there was a gradual development of spiritual relations until the Mother came back from Japan and the Ashram was founded or rather founded itself in 1926.

*(On Himself, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 68)*

\* \* \*

There was no Ashram at first, only a few people came to live near Sri Aurobindo and practise Yoga. It was only some time after the Mother came from Japan that it took the form of the Ashram, more from the wish of the Sadhaks who desired to entrust their whole inner and outer life to the Mother than from any intention or plan of hers or of Sri Aurobindo.

*(Ibid., p. 479)*

\* \* \*

The facts are: In the meantime, the Mother, after a long stay in France and Japan, returned to Pondicherry on the 24th April, 1920. The number of disciples then showed a tendency to increase rather rapidly. When the Ashram began to develop, it fell to the Mother to organise it; Sri Aurobindo soon retired into seclusion and the whole material and spiritual charge of it devolved on her.

*(Ibid.)*

\* \* \*

*On what date in 1926 did Mother take up the 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.

*(Ibid.)*

(2)

**Extracts From Haradhan Bakshi's Diary<sup>1</sup>**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August when I came out of your 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.

*(Diary entry dated 24.09.1926)*

\* \* \*

Consciousness and power descended and penetrated the whole Adhara. For some time the mind is aware of some new thing coming down. The preparation was going on in a concentrated process from the day of the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1926. These few days one has the feeling that it is on the point of having come. The mind has not sufficient light about what it is and what it means. So there was a tremendous resistance from the mind to the descent. I pray for more light and knowledge on the subject.

*(Diary entry dated 07.11.1926)*

\* \* \*

**Haradhan:** Is it not yet time for me to get Mirra Devi's direct help?

**Shri Aurobindo:** Before you get that direct help you will have to fulfil certain conditions. Her help is for transformation. It may be that there are people around her who are allowed for other purposes—they may feel something great and some great joy—but [*it is*] only when you are open and ready that she can help you. And again, you will have to establish a personal relation with her (*smiles*). All right, I will tell her about it. Not that she has not an eye on you....

**Haradhan:** On the contrary, I am aware that she is aware of my existence and I am also open to her. But I am not the proper judge about time and things.

**Shri Aurobindo:** Yes, when the time comes she will call you. All the same I will refer the matter to her, for in these things she knows more than me, having the immediate hold over the thing. But, before that, that vital personality you refer to must consent to go.

**Haradhan:** It has begun to open; it is no more my central existence; it is completely

1. The diary of a disciple of Sri Aurobindo who first came to Pondicherry in 1916 and eventually settled at the Ashram in 1925. For more information on his life, read *Among the Not So Great* by Prabhakar (Batti). In the following excerpts of his conversations with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the name "Haradhan" has been provided by the compiler. The names "Shri Aurobindo" and "Devi" for Mother, were used by Haradhan himself in his diary notation.

exteriorised. Only I was thinking whether I should go to her after it is cleared up or now.

**Shri Aurobindo:** I will tell her and she will decide.

**Haradhan:** Kindly tell her about this and let me know when my time is come.

*(Diary entry dated 08.11.1926)*

\* \* \*

**Shri Aurobindo:** Mirra asked me to tell you that she will first see you on Thursday. After her meditation with the ladies, that day is fixed for Barin; he goes after them. And when Barin comes down, you will go. There you will have to meditate for 10 or 15 minutes—not a mental meditation—but remain calm and passive, so that she may see what is there and what help she has to give you. It is one thing seeing from a distance and another from near at hand. Afterwards she will tell you what you are to do etc.

*(Diary entry dated 14.11.1926)*

\* \* \*

**Shri Aurobindo:** What did you feel when you were meditating near her?

**Haradhan:** I felt that she was looking into my mental and vital consciousness.

**Shri Aurobindo:** Nothing more?

**Haradhan:** No, nothing more.

**Shri Aurobindo:** But it was much more than looking into the mental and the vital. The first time as she looked at you there was a strong rush of forces. Then there was an opening into the past, where she saw that in one of your past lives you had been an occultist, somewhere in Europe probably,—not that such a thing may not happen here—but it is probably in Europe. You had vital powers—there you might have misused them and got that obstacle in the vital, that has given you so much trouble in past life and also in this life. Then she wanted to see what it was. It was behind the heart so she could not see it properly or catch hold of it. Then she went into the psychic being and followed the obstacle down to its roots—and its roots were stuck fast in the physical. She wanted to uproot it, but it was too strong for her. She called the power of Shiva, but it could not be uprooted. She called the power of Vishnu and then only she could uproot it and destroy it, in the essence, in the psychic being. A scar was seen at the place from [where] it was uprooted. Then she looked into your mind, she found that there was no obstacle and that it was an ordered mind and she felt the wideness that is necessary for receiving the knowledge. In the heart also there was no difficulty. In the lower vital where consciousness has only begun to infiltrate, it was hard, so she did not go in. Next you will have to open the lower vital



and the physical and get rid of the impressions that might be left by the being in any part of your life.

*(Diary entry dated 19.11.1926 referring to 18.11.1926)*

\* \* \*

**Haradhan:** You [*addressing Sri Aurobindo*] told me lately that I have to find out my personal relation with the Mother. As I have not any knowledge of the planes above where only the true relations manifest, I waited for some indication. As it comes to me now I think that as You are my Father and Truth, so She is my Mother, and for me She is the manifestation of Love, Knowledge, Power and Mastery. So far as I can see and understand, I think that Mahalakshmi and Krishna, the One Lord in all His Aiswaryam, are likely to manifest here. And Their seat, in me particularly, is in the centre of light on the head.

What did my Mother tell you about me?

When may I see Her again?

Can I come to bow down to Her every morning?

*(Diary entry dated 19.11.1926)*

\* \* \*

2 to 2.30 p.m. I meditated at the feet of Shri Mirra Devi.

After the meditation, she said, "We are going to have meditation in the evening. If you like you can join."

**Haradhan:** I shall be very glad to join if you permit me.

**Devi:** Yes you may come at 7.30.

**Haradhan:** Can I come to bow down to you in the morning?

**Devi:** Yes but the time is short. If you come only to see and then go.

**Haradhan:** That's all I want. Simply bow down and go away with your blessings. Can I join the afternoon meditation?

**Devi:** I shall let you know tomorrow morning. Come this evening and also tomorrow morning.

*(Diary entry dated 25.11.1926)*

#### *Compiler's Notes*

*The excerpts from Haradhan Bakshi's diary show chronologically how he gradually accepted the Mother as his spiritual guide and guru. In the first two entries, he*

remembers “something psychic working in and through [his] mind” after he bows down to Mirra Devi on **15 August 1926**. From that day, he later notes retrospectively, “the preparation was going on in a concentrated process”. There is no record of him bowing down to the Mother prior to this date in his diary which begins in **May 1926**. On **24 September 1926**, Haradhan uses the name “Mother” for the first time in his diary. Until then he had referred to her as “Mirra” or “Mirra Devi”. He would also call her “Shri Mirra Devi” from the Siddhi Day onwards. By the **beginning of 1927** he would mostly refer to her as “Mother”, though he would also use the name “Mirra” with other variants until the **end of 1928**. On **8 November 1926**, he asks Sri Aurobindo for “Mirra Devi’s direct help” and gets an appointment to meditate with her on Thursday, **18 November 1926**. During the meditation, Mother looks into his past lives. In one of them, he was an occultist in Europe who had probably misused his powers because of which he has an obstacle in his vital. Mother finds out that the roots of the obstacle were “stuck fast in the physical” and uproots it. Though Haradhan is hardly aware of what happens during the meditation, he is somewhere deeply touched. The following day, he tells Sri Aurobindo, “I think that as You are my Father and Truth, so She is my Mother, and for me She is the manifestation of Love, Knowledge, Power and Mastery.” Haradhan wants to know when he could see “Her” again and whether he could bow down to “Her” every morning. Sri Aurobindo permits him to come every Thursday for individual meditation with the Mother. The next Thursday, on **25 November 1926**, he has his second individual meditation with her, after which, he is allowed to join collective meditation with her every evening. He renews his plea for bowing down to her every morning to which Mother consents in spite of the shortage of time.

RAMAN REDDY

(To be continued)

Some Answers from Sri Aurobindo:

*Q: Is the Mother’s Grace only general?*

A: Both general and special.

\*

*Q: How to receive what she grants in general?*

A: You have only to keep yourself open and whatever you need and can receive at the moment will come.

(The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 125)

## THE CHANGED SCIENTIFIC OUTLOOK

THERE is, of course, more than one line of scientific outlook at the present day. It is well known that continental scientists generally and Marxist scientists in particular belong to a different category from Jeans and Eddington. But the important point is this: a considerable body of scientists frankly hold the “idealist” view, and these come from the very front rank *qua* scientists. Discussion arises when it is seriously put forward that Eddington and Jeans are not authorities in science equalling any other great names; as if it is contended that because a scientist holds the idealist view, *ergo*, he is a pseudo-scientist, a third-degree luminary, a back-bencher, a mediaevalist. The Marxists also declare, we may recall in this connection, that the bourgeois cannot be a true poet, in order to be a poet one must be a proletarian.

There is a scientific obscurantism, which is not less obscure because it is scientific, and one must guard against it with double care and watchfulness. It is the mentality of the no-changer whose motto seems to be: *plus ça change, plus ça reste le même*. Let me explain. The scientist who prefers still to be called a materialist must remember that the (material) ground under his feet has shifted considerably since the time he first propounded his materialistic position: he does not stand in the same place (or plane?) as he did even twenty years ago. The change has been basic and fundamental—fundamental, because the very definitions and postulates with which we once started have been called in question, thrown overboard or into the melting-pot.

Shall we elucidate a little? We were once upon a time materialists, that is to say, we had very definite and fixed notions about Matter: to Matter we gave certain invariable characteristics, inalienable properties. How many of them stand today unscathed on their legs? Take the very first, the crucial property ascribed to Matter: “Matter is that which has extension.” Well, an electric charge, a unit energy of it, the ultimate constituent of Matter as discovered by Science today, can it be said to occupy space? In the early days of Science, one Boscovich advanced a theory according to which the ultimate material particle (a molecule, in his time) does not occupy space, it is a mere mathematical point toward or from which certain forces act. The theory, naturally, was laughed out of consideration; but today we have come perilously near it. Again, another postulate describing Matter’s dharma was: “two material particles cannot occupy the same place at the same time.” Now what do you say of the neutron and proton that coalesce and form the unit of a modern atomic nucleus? Once more, the notion of the indestructibility of Matter has been considerably modified in view of the phenomenon of an electric particle (electron) being wholly transmuted (“dematerialised” as the scientists themselves say) into a light particle (photon). Lastly, the idea of the constancy of *mass*—a bed-rock of old-world physics—is considered today to be a superstition, an illusion. If after all these changes in the idea of Matter, a man still maintains that he is a materialist, as of old, well, I can only exclaim in the Shakespearean phrase: “Bottom, thou art translated”! What I want to say is that the changes that modern physics proposes to execute in its body are not mere amendments

and emendations, but they mean a radical transfiguration, a subversion and a mutation. And more than the actual changes effected, the possibilities, the tendencies that have opened out, the lines along which further developments are proceeding do point not merely to a reformation, but a revolution.

Does this mean that Science after all *is* veering to the Idealist position? Because we have modified the meaning and connotation of Matter does it follow that we have perforce arrived at spirituality? Not quite so. As Jeans says, the correct scientific position would be to withhold one's judgment about the ultimate nature of matter, whether it is material or mental (spiritual, we would prefer to say): it is an attitude of *non possumus*. But such neutrality, is it truly possible and is it so very correct? We do see scientists lean on one side or the other, according to the vision or predisposition that one carries.

From our standpoint, as we view the modern scientific developments, what we see is not that Matter has been spiritualised, but that it has been considerably dematerialised, even immaterialised, that it is in the process of further dematerialisation or immaterialisation. That opens a long and large vista. We say Science by itself cannot arrive at the spiritual, for there is a frontier bar which has to be overleaped, negotiated by something like a somersault. For the scientific view is after all limited by one scope and range of the physical eye. Still, this eye has begun to see things and in a manner to which it was not normally accustomed; it has been trained and educated, made keen and supple so that it seems to be getting more and more attuned even to other vibrations of light beyond and outside the normal sevenfold spectrum.

Science has not spiritualised (or idealised or mentalised) the world; it has not spiritualised itself. Agreed. But what it has done is remarkable. First, with its new outlook it has cut away the ground from where it was wont to give battle to religion and spirituality, it has abjured its cast-iron strait-jacket mentality which considered that senses and syllogism encompass all knowledge and objects of knowledge. It has learnt humility and admits of the possibility of more things there being in heaven and earth which are not amenable to its fixed co-ordinates. Secondly, it has gone at times even beyond this attitude of benevolent neutrality. For certain of its conclusions, certain ways of formulation seem to echo other truths, other manners. That is to say, if Science by itself is unable to reach or envisage the spiritual outlook, yet the position it has reached, the vistas it envisages seem to be not perhaps exactly one with, but in line with what our vision (of the scientific world) would be like if once we possess the spiritual eye. Matter, Science says today, is energy and forms of matter, objects, are various vibrations of this one energy. What is this energy? According to science, it is electrical, radiant, ethereal (Einstein replaces "ether" by "field")—biological science would venture to call it life energy. You have only to move one step farther and arrive at the greater and deeper generalisation—Matter is a mode of the energy of consciousness, all forms of Matter are vibrations of consciousness.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 1, pp. 332-35)

## THE FORGOTTEN SEPTEMBER 11

ON September 11, 1893, the world's first Parliament of Religions opened in Chicago. Representatives of such a variety of religious and spiritual traditions had never before been assembled in one place. Delegates from every part of the globe read speeches before a huge audience at the inaugural session. Thirty-first on the list was a young, unknown Hindu. When his turn came, he rose to say the words the spirit would move him to speak. "Sisters and Brothers of America," Swami Vivekananda began. What happened next was later described by a woman who was present that day. "I was at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893," she recalled. "When that young man got up and said, 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' seven thousand people rose to their feet as a tribute to something they knew not what."<sup>1</sup>

It was two or three minutes before the applause subsided and Vivekananda could continue. His short speech on that historic occasion concluded with these words: "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence.... I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."<sup>2</sup> Again a long and thunderous ovation.

### West Meets East

Vivekananda saved the deeper substance of his message for later sessions of the seventeen-day convention. In his "Paper on Hinduism" on the 19<sup>th</sup>, he spoke of "the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes". He dwelt on the essence of Hinduism, which consists "not in believing, but in being and becoming". He went beyond the notion of mutual tolerance between religions to see them as parts of a single divinely guided evolutionary process. "Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man," he declared, "and the same God is the inspirer of all of them."<sup>3</sup>

What Swami Vivekananda said was important and remains so, but more important was that he lived what he said. This is what those who heard him evidently felt even in such simple words as "Sisters and Brothers of America", when those words came from a consciousness that saw itself in all and recognised no divisions.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau, the poetry of Whitman and the founding of the Theosophical Society had prepared the American mind for a message such as Vivekananda delivered. But before 1893, no one had spoken straight from the heart and soul of India. In retrospect, if we wish to assign a date to the first passionate meeting and embrace of the wisdom of the East and the vitality of the West in a world where the old separations are

rapidly disappearing, the obvious choice is September 11, 1893. Until that day, there had been nothing like the sudden collapse of religious and cultural barriers that marked this first momentous, though now nearly forgotten “9/11”.

### **108 Years Later**

In the century after Vivekananda’s impassioned call for spiritual unity, the world changed visibly in many ways. The year after the Swami’s short life on earth came to an end, for example, the Wright brothers flew the first airplane. This was one of many inventions which progressively annulled the distances that once made it possible for different cultures to develop almost in isolation from each other. Meanwhile, it looked as if the advancing steamroller of science might soon solve the problem of fanaticism and religious discord by making religion out-of-date and irrelevant, if it does not become extinct in a secular, materialistic civilisation governed by economic and political forces. Citizens of the “developed” parts of the world could reasonably strike off religion, for all practical purposes, from the list of factors that might be expected to have a significant impact on the future.

This illusion was abruptly dissolved in the surrealistic nightmare of September 11, 2001, when the mightiest nation on earth reeled under blows delivered to it in the name of Allah. The scientific advances of the last century merely supplied the technology that made the attack so devastating. The old-fashioned zealotry that motivated the terrorists, though mixed with political grievances of a more modern kind, illustrated Vivekananda’s paradoxical observation: “The intensest love that humanity has ever known has come from religion, and the most diabolical hatred that humanity has known has also come from religion.”<sup>74</sup> Not only were the issues that had been addressed at the Parliament of Religions on the same date so many years earlier shown to be still dangerously unresolved, but it was dramatically demonstrated that religious animosities can now wreak havoc on a scale undreamed of in the past.

### **Just a Coincidence?**

Is the startling coincidence of the dates of these two “9/11”s, separated by exactly 108 years (a mystical number in the Indian tradition), trying to tell us something? What are we to make of the juxtaposition of two diametrically opposite events, the one an outburst of the sense of unity, the other an eruption of all that contradicts that sense, and both in the name of religion?

Even without indulging in “magical thinking”, we are free to find here the symbolism we choose, preferably the one that helps us to confront this crisis most creatively. Taken at face value, the September 11 coincidence looks like a rude reminder of the unfinished agenda left over from the long-forgotten Parliament of Religions. The prospect of a world free from sectarianism and its violent offshoots

seems as distant as ever, and the consequences of religious divisions are not becoming less serious. Stated in the most general terms, the obvious message is that religion is not a secondary issue that can be left aside or given perfunctory attention until the practical problems of life have been solved.

If religion is not going away any time soon, the question is whether it is going to unite us or divide us, to be an agent of progress or regression. The word “religion” should be understood in the broadest sense of humanity’s ways of approaching a higher unseen reality, with all the implications that has for our attitudes and actions. Religion according to this definition is essentially an attempt to come into contact with a consciousness beyond our limited minds. It points to our evolutionary future and ought to be the most transformative and unifying force in our individual and collective lives. The first September 11 gave a brief glimpse of this potential. Unfortunately, religions have tended in practice to work for separation more than unity and have been too preoccupied with sanctifying and perpetuating the past to take a leap towards the future. Worse still, they have been used all too often as an excuse for the most destructive impulses in human nature to go on the rampage. The recent September 11 was an extreme instance.

Focusing on religion does not mean underestimating the need to recognise and deal with other factors in our global predicament, such as economic disparities and political imbalances that are not only wrong in themselves but contribute to resentments that may motivate acts of violence. A worldwide spiritual advance would hardly be possible without breakthroughs in other areas. Coming from a country suffering under foreign rule and exploitation, Vivekananda was acutely aware of this. At the Parliament of Religions he announced one day: “I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people.” He added, “it is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion.”<sup>5</sup> To those who were not starving, however, he spoke of religion and philosophy as means of inducing the human family to begin to work together at last to create a more harmonious world.

### **Nonduality**

In an article on the deeper causes of terrorism, Harvard psychiatrist John Mack speaks of “the dualistic, dichotomizing, or polarizing habit of mind” that “divides the world into conflicting polarities—good and evil, God and the Devil, for or against, friend or enemy, deserving or undeserving.” He contends that “it is expressions of dualistic thinking... that have given rise to the present dangerous crisis.”<sup>6</sup> This underscores the direct relevance of the message of September 11, 1893 to what Mack describes as the “race to the future between the forces of destruction and creation” which we are now witnessing.<sup>7</sup> For what Vivekananda brought to the shores of the New World was the philosophy and practice of nonduality, known in India as Advaita. This is the consciousness of one Self, one indivisible Reality manifesting itself in the endless



multiplicity of the universe. This seemingly abstract concept could turn out to have far-reaching consequences if it takes hold of the human mind and inspires the growth of a living sense of that unity in diversity which is our hope for the future.

Explaining the idea of nonduality from a modern standpoint, Vivekananda argued in his “Paper on Hinduism”:

Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul.

Vivekananda saw all science as “nothing but the finding of unity.”<sup>8</sup> Having reached a monism of matter, leaving out consciousness, science cannot stop there; it must go on to arrive at a monism of consciousness.

This knowledge, arrived at by methods no less rigorous in their own way than those of the physical sciences, can be found at the mystical core of all the great religions. In India, it has been preserved from ancient times by an unbroken tradition of living, constantly renewed experience. But it has long been possessed only by individuals pursuing liberation, while the rest of society was allowed to stagnate in an unprogressive groove. Vivekananda wanted not only to bring India’s spiritual knowledge to the West, but to take back with him to his own country the Western insistence on applying knowledge to life.

### **Sectarianism, Bigotry and Fanaticism**

The opening of the Parliament of Religions in 1893 was signalled when a replica of the Liberty Bell tolled ten times, once for each of the major religions represented. This was the bell Swami Vivekananda referred to when he said, “I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions....”<sup>9</sup> Fanaticism and persecution sum up two sides of what has gone most conspicuously wrong with religion in the course of its long and sometimes bloody history. Vivekananda’s repeated, emphatic references to fanaticism in his speech on September 11 ring with a new urgency and seem eerily prophetic, now that an anniversary of that date has been marked by the most horrendous act of fanaticism of all time.

“Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth,” he had lamented. This series of words for degrees of intolerance is worth noting, for it suggests a possible approach to dealing with the problem.

These three terms—sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism—define a scale of religious narrowness from its mildest form to its most unreasonable and belligerent. Under normal circumstances only the violent fanatic poses a direct danger to society,



and even fanatics are not usually violent. But the moderate degrees of religious exclusiveness lead to the more extreme, and a climate of sectarianism is needed for bigotry and fanaticism to flourish. If fanaticism is to disappear—and it now seems clear enough that there can be no peace in the world until it does—sectarianism and bigotry must also go. To bring this about, the most effective strategy might be to start with sectarianism in its most moderate, respectable, subtle and pervasive manifestations—perhaps even in our own minds.

### **The Universal Mind**

For we are contributing to the problem even if we do no more than to indulge in “uncharitable feelings”, as Vivekananda put it, towards “persons wending their way to the same goal”. States of consciousness are contagious, for better or worse. This is exemplified by the otherwise inexplicable thrill that ran through the audience at the Parliament of Religions when Vivekananda had spoken only a few words. As he once said:

The mind is universal. Your mind, my mind, all these little minds, are fragments of that universal mind, little waves in the ocean; and on account of this continuity, we can convey our thoughts directly to one another.... Part of our energy is used up in the preservation of our own bodies. Beyond that, every particle of our energy is day and night being used in influencing others.<sup>10</sup>

Vivekananda’s call to widen our minds and hearts was not just an appeal for intellectual broadmindedness and humanistic sympathy. It was not a compromise with rationalism, an imposition of secular values on the religious mentality. His aim was to uplift and purify the religious spirit from within. For sectarianism in thought, word or act undermines the deepest purpose of religion, which is to bring our limited human consciousness into relation with a consciousness that is divine and illimitable.

It is not a question of watering down the strength of our convictions or wavering in the pursuit of our chosen path. On the contrary, it is a matter of living what we believe, while recognising at the same time that the Infinite can and must be approached by and revealed to finite minds in many ways, religious or otherwise, each true as far as it goes without excluding the truth of the others. Diversity of views is essential for the vitality of our existence as thinking beings. The variety of mythologies and rituals found in the world’s religions is a component of the rich cultural life of the human race. But as Vivekananda said in Chicago: “It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours.”<sup>11</sup> The same idea was expressed by Ibn’ Arabi as far back as the thirteenth century: “If the believer understood the meaning of the saying ‘the colour of the water is the colour of the receptacle’, he would admit the validity of all beliefs and he would recognise God in every form and every object of faith.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Real Jihad**

Religious fervour diverted from its legitimate function of seeking for God, put at the service of sectarian rigidity and usually mixed with other quite irreligious motives, makes up the poisonous concoction we call fanaticism. The fanatic fights blindly for the letter of his creed as he interprets it, while making a travesty of its spirit. He assumes that the enemy is outside and does not notice that he has fallen into the trap of the enemy within.

Yet a “fanatical” zeal turned in the right direction, to the true jihad to convert the element in us that betrays our higher self, might lead to a very different result. Sri Aurobindo went so far as to write in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

The ideal sadhaka should be able to say in the Biblical phrase, “My zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.” It is this zeal for the Lord... that devours the ego and breaks up the limitations of its petty and narrow mould for the full and wide reception of that which it seeks, that which, being universal, exceeds and, being transcendent, surpasses even the largest and highest individual self and nature.<sup>13</sup>

This is the state of consciousness referred to by Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions when he said that “to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go.”<sup>14</sup>

### **The Future of Religion**

If Vivekananda had gone to Chicago merely to call for an end to the obvious vices of religious narrow-mindedness and intolerance, it might have seemed a waste of time and energy for such a yogi to travel so far to say what any sensible person could have said, adding only the charisma of his undoubtedly remarkable personality. But his real work was to bridge the gap between oriental and occidental civilisations and to plant the seed of a vision of our spiritual possibilities that has had a steadily growing influence since his time and has the potential to change the world.

Three aspects of the vision which he unveiled to the West at the convention in 1893 deserve special mention. The first is the perception that scientific investigation and spiritual seeking are complementary, not antagonistic. The key to harmonising them lies in the second aspect. This is a feature of the ancient yogic tradition of India: an insistence on experiencing and not merely believing in the truths that religion offers to us. The third aspect, a corollary of the first with far-reaching implications only hinted at by Vivekananda himself, is the synthesis of the modern discovery of biological evolution with the spiritual truth of the evolution of the soul towards divinity.

The increasing pressure of these ideas on religious thought, with or without an acknowledgment of Vivekananda’s pioneering role in articulating them, is contributing

to the reduction of sectarian exclusiveness and dogmatism and a reorientation away from clinging to the past towards the vistas of the future. It is conceivable that religions in the doctrinal forms in which we now know them may eventually disappear with the extension of knowledge and the evolution of consciousness. But alongside the spread of psychological and spiritual disciplines not connected with any religion, the distinctive genius of each religion is likely to survive in some form because of the eternal truth it represents.

Religion has strongly reinforced human disunity and the dualistic thinking that jeopardises our collective ability to solve the unprecedented problems of a global civilisation. Yet it may also hold the key to the transcendence of such thinking. This potential could be fulfilled if religion becomes able, in Vivekananda's words, to "recognise divinity in every man and woman" and to find its "whole scope, [its] whole force... in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature."<sup>15</sup>

### **India's Ambassador**

Vivekananda was uniquely equipped to be India's first spiritual ambassador to the West, as he has been called. His brilliant intellect, inspired eloquence, spiritual depth and compelling force of personality were matched by his disarming humility. He claimed no personal credit for his achievements, but ascribed them to the greatness of the living spiritual tradition of India, of which he was a spokesman. Once, talking about the ancient Indian science of the powers of the mind, Raja-Yoga, he spoke of the years of hard struggle it had taken him to master it: "Sometimes I worked at it twenty hours during the twenty-four.... And yet I know little or nothing; I have barely touched the hem of the garment of this science. But I can understand that it is true and vast and wonderful."<sup>16</sup>

There were two ingredients in the magic of September 11, 1893. One was the presence of Vivekananda himself, who embodied India's spirituality rising to meet the challenges of the modern world. He was the instrument of a force about which he said not long before he left India, "I feel such a tremendous power and energy, it is as though I should burst."<sup>17</sup> The other ingredient was the openness, enthusiasm and generosity of the American people who spontaneously recognised the authenticity of one who greeted them as his sisters and brothers.

"In America is the place, the people, the opportunity for everything",<sup>18</sup> Vivekananda once remarked. His biographer Swami Nikhilananda observed: "It is one of the outstanding traits of Americans to draw out the latent greatness of other people. America discovered Vivekananda and made a gift of him to India and the world."<sup>19</sup> What happened in Chicago in 1893 not only flooded the American consciousness for the first time with the light from the East. It also stimulated a renaissance in India itself by restoring self-confidence to a great subjugated people, and it had repercussions around the globe.

After leaping to sudden fame at the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda worked intensively and untiringly for a spiritual awakening in America and England and in his own country, which was overwhelmed by foreign rule, social stagnation and a heart-rending poverty whose eradication was among the Swami's first priorities. He exhausted himself physically, leading to his early departure from the body on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1902, at the age of 39.

### **This Beautiful Earth**

Swami Vivekananda wanted to see this beautiful earth of ours freed from the "demons" that have long possessed it in the name of religion. These demons are still with us; let us hope that at last "their time is come," as he told a spellbound audience at the Parliament of Religions. But he wanted this change to be the result, not of diluting or abandoning the spirit of religion, but of enlarging and heightening it.

The spontaneous clasp of civilisations that occurred on September 11, 1893, was far less spectacular than the cataclysmic events of its 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Yet it may prove to have more enduring long-term consequences. It visibly marked the beginning of a movement towards the spiritual unity of the human race, transcending religious and cultural divisions without abrogating religious and cultural diversity. In spite of all setbacks, this has been gathering momentum ever since then. What began one day long ago in Chicago will be fulfilled only when religion ceases to be a divisive force and becomes—each religion in its own way and adapting itself to the needs of each individual—a means of realising a consciousness where boundaries and barriers vanish, a consciousness often associated with a sense of the universal divine Presence of which Vivekananda spoke:

He is here in the heart of our hearts. Bodies and minds change; misery, happiness, good and evil come and go; days and years roll on; life comes and goes; but He dies not. The same voice, "I am, I am," is eternal, unchangeable. In Him and through Him we know everything. In Him and through Him we see everything. In Him and through Him we sense, we think, we live, and we are. And that "I", which we mistake to be a little "I", limited, is not only my "I", but yours, the "I" of everyone, of the animals, of the angels, of the lowest of the low. That "I am" is the same in the murderer as in the saint, the same in the rich as in the poor, the same in man as in woman, the same in man as in animals. From the lowest amoeba to the highest angel, He resides in every soul, and eternally declares, "I am He, I am He."<sup>20</sup>

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*Notes and References*

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 418.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 4.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 13, 18.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 375.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 20.
6. John Mack, "Deeper Causes: Exploring the Role of Consciousness in Terrorism", *IONS Review*, June-August 2003.
7. The Mother had spoken of this race between destructive and creative forces as early as 19 March 1958, when she said: "This struggle, this conflict between the constructive forces of the ascending evolution of a more and more perfect and divine realisation, and the more and more destructive, powerfully destructive forces—forces that are mad beyond all control—is more and more obvious, marked, visible, and it is a kind of race or struggle as to which will reach the goal first." (*Collected Works of the Mother*, vol. 9, p. 297)
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 14.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 13.
11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 18.
12. Ibn' Arabi, *Fusûs al-Hikam*. Information about the life and works of Ibn' Arabi (1165-1240), can be found on the website [www.ibnarabisociety.org](http://www.ibnarabisociety.org), which tells us that he was born "into the Moorish culture of Andalusian Spain, the center of an extraordinary flourishing and cross-fertilization of Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought" and that his "extensive writings provide a beautiful exposition of the Unity of Being, the single and indivisible reality which simultaneously transcends and is manifested in all the images of the world. Ibn' Arabi shows how Man, in perfection, is the complete image of this reality and how those who truly know their essential self, know God."
13. *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 23, p. 58.
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## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of July 2005)

In the next three chapters, Sri Aurobindo has dealt *seriatim* with the need of military unification, economic unity and administrative unity. We shall go over the three points briefly. In the course of national centralisation, “military necessity has played at the beginning the largest overt part”. The necessity was twofold—first, against attack from without—second, against internal disruptions and disorders. In the growth of a World-State, too, military necessity has begun, however vaguely it be, to play the same important part. A certain loose unity has appeared in the affairs of the world. No nation can stand alone today. “Each already feels subtly or directly its separate life overshadowed by the life of the whole.” The possibility of a great war has become a source of anxiety to the entire fabric of man’s life, after the dire suffering of the last four decades. The necessity of preventing a major clash is exercising the mind of man generally. It is felt that a means should be devised whereby the evil can, at least, be minimised. Hence the establishment, first of the League and now of the U.N.O. We have referred already to the former’s failure to do real good and the difficulties facing the latter. The main difficulty is not in being able to decide equitably but in enforcing the decision. How is a major power going to be forced, if it is recalcitrant? As things are, it is difficult to leave the fate of the world to be decided by an assembly which has not yet established its supreme authority. Certain democratic nations are at the back of the U.N.O. today. But democracy in itself is no guarantee against war. In any case, the existence of strong concentrated military power would be for a long time the primary condition of a country’s safety. One does not see as yet any likelihood of the nations of the world consenting to their own disarmament. Yet such a disarmament would be essential to a permanent State of peace. “National armies,” says Sri Aurobindo, “must become like the old baronial armies a memory of past and dead ages.”

With regard to military unification, the position is thus clear. National armies must disappear; this disappearance would mark definitely the creation of a World-State. “Diffused, force... is the servant of... discord and struggle; concentrated, it becomes the guarantee of organisation and the bond of order.” Military necessity, pressure of war, the need for preventing war—all this will in the long run drive mankind towards some sort of world-union. But there is another necessity—the commercial, the industrial, the economic—which is very strong in the modern mind. Modern, because in the present stage of man’s development economic interests occupy the pre-eminent position in his thoughts and gives the whole turn to his social life. In former days, the economic man (the Vaishya, merchant) occupied only a third place in the community. The two first places went to the thinker and the warrior (the Brahmin

and the Kshatriya) who constituted the political portion of a society. In those days, the political consciousness and the political motive were all-important and the exponents of these occupied a dominant position. Everything is changed today. With the decline of the two upper classes, the commercial and industrial Vaishyas and Sudras have risen to the top and there is a conflict between them. The stamp of commercialism is on everything today. "Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others," says Sri Aurobindo. The economic man looks upon all these things from a narrow decorative and utilitarian point of view. His attitude is much the same as that of the philistine of the nineteenth century, described by Sri Aurobindo in his *Human Cycle*. We have touched upon it in an earlier portion of this review. Politics and government of the State are passing into the hands of the bourgeois capitalist and are slowly opening a channel for economic socialism. "Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life." There is no prospect of a turn in a new direction in the near future, and the present trend is affecting international relations profoundly.

How is this disease going to be cured? Sri Aurobindo says, "The end of commercialism can only come about either by some unexpected development of commercialism itself or through a reawakening of spirituality in the race," and he remarks that there are signs that seem to point in this direction. These signs are a revival of the religious spirit and an idealistic trend in man's secular thought. They are still too slight and superficial to raise any definite hope in our minds. The propelling impulsion is still towards industrialism and its many variations. The substitution of Labour for capital as the dominant factor in the society is not likely to usher in Utopia. In the meantime, the democrat, the imperialist, the socialist, the communist—all seem to be drifting towards military efficiency and military organisation to the detriment of everything else. In the past, commercialism has served, at times, to tend towards the unity of nations. But the tendency was only superficial. While peace was necessary for the normal activities of trade and manufacture, there was so much of rivalry and utter selfishness in the various nation-units that commercial dealings were bound ultimately to bring about war. For a time these feelings would find expression in the erection of tariff walls, the race for fields of exploitation, the struggle to capture markets, but sooner or later they are bound to lead to acts of political hostility. Sri Aurobindo shows how the Franco-Prussian war was the last war on political grounds and how since then political motive has been merely a cover for the commercial. Anyhow, one thing is clear, prohibition tariffs, blockades, etc. can be terrible weapons in the hands of one nation against another, and as long as there is freedom to use these weapons, mere military precautions will not prevent war. Sri Aurobindo says, "Since industry and trade are now five-sixths of social life and the economic principle



the governing principle of society, a World-State which did not control human life in its chief principle and largest activity would exist only in name." The League of Nations, at one stage, did take up the question of international trade relations but its activities were only platonic and advisory. Still it is something that the need of an economic understanding was already felt and indicated.

Military and economic unification without administrative unity can lead us nowhere. Any central authority that is established will go on assuming greater powers or fall to pieces. Our immediate objective is a well-knit World-State with the nations for its provinces. A central body devoting itself at first to the limitation of armaments and settlement of economic disputes would steadily develop into an international legislature and a standing executive. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "...it would tend increasingly to stretch its hand to all or most matters that could be viewed as having an international effect and importance. Before long it would invade and occupy even those fields in which the nations are now jealous of their own rights and power. And eventually it would permeate the whole system of the national life and subject it to international control" for the co-ordination of human life in all its activities. The obstacle to such extreme development is the strong group-egoism of the nations. But if the ideal of human unity goes on gaining strength, the nations and States would have to subordinate their interests to the larger interests of humanity,—as the classes and tribes and cities in the past gave up their authority to the nation. The international idea, the idea of a single undivided race, has to develop before nationalism disappears as an active force. But we must never forget that nationalism is a very powerful sentiment, much stronger than the older clan feelings. Still there are certain forces, favourable to internationalism, at work even now, which may push forward the ideal of human unity unexpectedly. The World-State would probably form in the same manner that the Nation-State did in the past. "There will be a centralisation of all control, military and police, administrative, judicial, legislative, economic, social and cultural in the one international authority. The spirit of the centralisation will be a strong unitarian idea...." "...there will be an effort at co-ordination such as we now see in a well-organised modern State, of which the complete idea is a thorough-going State socialism..." In a new footnote, Sri Aurobindo tells us that this State socialism is being realised rapidly in three of the greatest nations of late.

We have seen already that all military power must vest in a common authority in a World-State, and that it would then mean an armed international police force. Similarly the final decision of all economic questions must in the end rest in the hands of the central government. At present, there is, on the one hand, a feeling of mutual dependence in matters of commerce—on the other, feelings of national egoism and jealousy. Between the two, things are adjusted somehow and go on in a haphazard fashion, till war overtakes us and things are in the melting pot again. An efficient central authority would be compelled, more and more to intervene and put an end to the present anomalous position. It will set in action the common will of



mankind through the State government. Not only would an administrative unity be essential, but a greater centralisation and uniformity must come about than what we have known in the Nation-States. International crime and international disorder are both likely to increase under future conditions. A more stringent system, a closer supervision, must replace the present crude and imperfect methods, if we are to prevent crime. The breeding ground of the bacillus of crime must receive our constant attention. Crime must be dealt within its inception, at its roots. Education and moral training must be organised, eugenic and scientific methods must be studied and developed, the gaol system and judicial method must be revised. All this has to be done by standardising the new methods by a common legislative and centralised control.

In the working out of such a programme uniformity and centralisation would seem to be inevitable. But it might also be desirable to leave to the component nations freedom to follow their own ideals and tendencies—to allow them to enjoy a healthy freedom. It is quite possible that it would take some time to induce the nations to give up the pursuit of their own propensities. But in the era to come the principle of political non-interference is likely to be much less stressed than now. Things have happened, of late, which seem to indicate that the interests of humanity at large have guided the conduct of nations. Sri Aurobindo has cited some examples—the action of America in Cuba and the Philippines, the action of the Powers in Spain during the civil war, etc. We may add the international intervention in Korea. Sri Aurobindo says, “This idea of the common interest of the race in the internal affairs of a nation is bound to increase as the life of humanity becomes more unified.”

*(To be continued)*

C. C. DUTT

*The progress of humanity proceeds by a series of imaginations which the will in the race turns into accomplished facts and a train of illusions which contain each of them an inevitable truth. The truth is there in the secret Will and Knowledge that are conducting our affairs for us and it reflects itself in the soul of mankind; the illusion is in the shape we give to that reflection, the veil of arbitrary fixations of time, place and circumstance which that deceptive organ of knowledge, the human intellect, weaves over the face of the Truth.*

*(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 606)*

# EINSTEIN AND THE SPECIAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY

## 1. Introduction

THE year 2005 has been designated as the ‘International Year of Physics’ by the world scientific community as well as by the United Nations for the centenary celebration of ‘The Special Theory of Relativity’. The year 1905 was a miraculous year for physics because of three major articles published by Einstein—on the Special Theory of Relativity, the Light-Quantum Hypothesis and on Brownian Motion—while he held the post of a patent examiner in the Swiss patent office at Bern. His work on relativity revolutionised the concepts of space and time, and gave the famous relationship between mass and energy via  $E = mc^2$ . The second paper brought in the concept of the light-quantum, that is light acting like a particle (now known as the photon) carrying a parcel of energy that knocks out electrons from metal sheets, the phenomenon known as the photoelectric effect; this work fetched Einstein the Nobel Prize in Physics for 1921. His third work was on the molecular theory of the motion of suspended particles (typical size: less than  $10^{-3}$  mm) in a fluid, the phenomena noted first in 1827 by the botanist Robert Brown who reported the continuous random motion of various kinds of fine particles suspended in water; Einstein showed that the motion is due to the bombardment of the suspended particles by randomly moving molecules in the fluid. All this work was carried out by Einstein when he was only 26 years old and with no academic connections whatsoever. One often calls the Volume 17 of *Annalen der Physik*, 1905, the ‘Einstein volume’ containing five of his papers.

It may be mentioned here that there are two theories of relativity. The first one is the Special Theory of Relativity, which we are going to discuss, and the second is the General Theory of Relativity published in 1915 by Einstein. The latter theory is an extension of the Special Theory and includes the law of gravitation.

## 2. Biographical note

Albert Einstein was born on March 14, 1879, in Ulm, Germany, to Hermann and Pauline Einstein. In 1880 Hermann and his family moved to Munich where their daughter Maria was born in 1881. The child Albert took an unusually long time before he could speak. He joined public school at the age of six. Albert remained a quiet child but his report card in the school was very good. He preferred to sit in the back row of his class. In his school years he was extremely good in mathematics and in Latin. In 1894 the family moved to Milan and then to Pavia, Italy, as his father’s business was not doing well; Albert stayed behind to finish school. But Albert missed his family and disliked the school, and so within a year he decided to join his parents in Italy. He then joined the cantonal school in Aarau, Switzerland, and passed the

Matura, the high school diploma. During the end of 1896 he joined the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich, as a student and graduated in 1900. He also qualified as a *Fachlehrer*, a specialised teacher, in mathematics and physics. But Einstein could not find a university position. In the meanwhile he became a Swiss citizen on February 21, 1901, and finally in 1902 he got the position of a technical expert at the patent office in Bern where he stayed for the next seven years. He wrote his first scientific paper on intermolecular forces in 1901, which was published in *Annalen der Physik*. He wrote a total of five papers between 1901 and 1904, and then came the epoch-making series of papers in 1905 (in all five dealing with three major topics as mentioned in the beginning). His Ph.D. thesis work was based on 'A new determination of molecular dimensions' submitted to the University of Zurich in 1905. The publication of relativity papers took Einstein out from his isolation at the patent office to the scientific circles; he was honoured with the first honorary doctorate by the University of Geneva in 1909 (Marie Curie was also the recipient of this honorary degree). He got his first academic position as associate professor at the University of Zurich in October 1909, and then in 1911 he moved to Prague as a full professor. In 1912 Einstein joined ETH, Zurich, and then the University of Berlin in early 1914 where he remained till 1932. Because of the unfavourable political situation in Germany, Einstein left Berlin in December 1932 and accepted a professorship at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, where he spent the last twenty-three years of his life.

### 3. Galilean vs Lorentz transformations

Let us now see what existed about relativity before Einstein.

We start with Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who proved by the use of the telescope, in the early part of the seventeenth century, the correctness of the Copernican system in which the earth and other planets move around the sun. At that time people thought that this idea violated common sense as we do not feel the immense speed of the earth (30 km/sec) moving around the sun.

Galileo reasoned that in a ship moving at a uniform speed (i.e., without acceleration), all experiments performed inside the cabin of the ship—like dropping a ball, taking part in an opera or making any kind of physics experiments—will appear the same as if the ship was stationary (provided that one does not look outside). This is the meaning of the principle of relativity, that is, one could not distinguish between the situation in which the ship is in motion and the sea is at rest, and the situation in which the ship is at rest and the sea is in motion. (It is important to emphasise here that it is the uniform motion in a straight line that one cannot perceive, but if the system is rotating one would certainly know it because centrifugal effects would throw everything to the wall.) Isaac Newton (1643-1727) advocated a preferred frame of reference, say one attached to the 'fixed' stars in which all the laws of mechanics

were to hold good and thus he concluded that there is an absolute space and an absolute time. Besides, space and time were considered as two completely independent entities.

Now, the physical space in which we live is three dimensional, and it is described conveniently by a coordinate system with three mutually perpendicular directions with a given origin. Thus a point or location in space can be indicated by three coordinates:  $(x, y, z)$  with respect to some origin (which may be a railway station). Let us approach it through an example: the location of Mr. A's flat which is 20 metres toward the east ( $x = 20$ ), 30 metres north ( $y = 30$ ) with respect to the railway station, and then up on the fifth floor, the height of each floor being 4 metres ( $z = 5 \times 4 = 20$ ). Our next question is how to relate a coordinate system which is moving at a constant speed (like a moving train) with respect to another system which is stationary (like a railway station). This is given by Galilean transformations, named in honour of Galileo, the founder of mechanics. Let us suppose that Mr. A is travelling in a train moving with a uniform velocity  $v$  and going towards the east (in the  $x$ -direction). We define a coordinate system for the moving train by primed quantities with Mr. A as the origin. Now, Mr. A measures the position of the engine as  $(x', y', z')$  with respect to himself. We designate the coordinate system of Mr. B, who is at rest in the railway station, by non-primed quantities and he measures the position of the engine from his frame of reference as  $(x, y, z)$ . Let us assume that at time  $t = 0$  the train of Mr. A was in the station, i.e., the two systems coincided with each other meaning:  $x' = x$ ,  $y' = y$ ,  $z' = z$  and  $t' = t = 0$ . Now after time  $t$ , Mr. A's origin has moved by a distance  $vt$  along the  $x$ -direction and consequently we get the transformation equations as:  $x' = x - vt$ ,  $y' = y$ ,  $z' = z$ ,  $t' = t$ . The  $y$  and  $z$  coordinates remain unchanged because the train was moving along the  $x$ -direction. This set of equations is known as Galilean transformation. If we use this set of transformation equations with Newton's laws (for example the Second law is: force = mass  $\times$  acceleration), we find that the Newton's laws have exactly the same expression in the primed system as well, i.e., the laws of Newton hold equally well in a moving as well as in a stationary system (an acceleration is defined as the rate of change of velocity).

For over two hundred years the laws of Newton and the Galilean transformations were believed to describe nature correctly. Historically, mechanics is the foundation of physics, but there are other branches, like optics, electricity and magnetism which are also connected with the problem of space. The light of the sun and stars reaches us after its passage through space. In the nineteenth century there were extensive experimental studies pioneered by Faraday, Oersted, Ampere and others into the phenomena of electricity, magnetism and light, which led the genius of Maxwell in 1861 to proclaim electromagnetic force as one force describing both electricity and magnetism, and he predicted the existence of electromagnetic waves propagating with the speed of light. Maxwell was also able to conclude that light waves are not different from electromagnetic waves. The experimental verification of the electro-

magnetic wave was made in 1887 by Heinrich Hertz. This was a great achievement of physics of the nineteenth century. As is well known in Science, success is always followed by new problems, and in this case it was realised soon that Maxwell's equations describing electricity, magnetism and light did not seem to obey the principle of relativity, which was proven without doubt in mechanics. This means that if we transform Maxwell's equations using Galilean transformation equations, their form does not remain the same. This implies that in a moving spaceship the electrical and optical phenomena will be different from those in a stationary ship. While scientists were pondering over how to handle the new problem created by Maxwell's equations of electrodynamics, H. A. Lorentz noticed a very remarkable thing—that when he used the following set of transformation equations:  $x' = \gamma(x - vt)$ ,  $y' = y$ ,  $z' = z$ , and  $t' = \gamma(t - vx / c^2)$ , where  $\gamma = 1 / \sqrt{(1 - v^2 / c^2)}$ , instead of the Galilean ones, Maxwell's equations remained in the same form. Hereafter, the velocity  $v$  of the moving system is assumed not to exceed  $c$  the speed of light ( $v < c$ ). These equations are now known as Lorentz transformations, and they occupy an important place in the Special Theory of Relativity. Does it mean that we should have two sets of transformation equations, one for the laws of mechanics and the other for the laws of electrodynamics?

#### 4. Propagation of light and aether hypothesis

Before we try to understand the above problem, let us look at another scenario dealing with the propagation of electromagnetic waves through space. It was believed since the end of the seventeenth century that our space is not empty but is filled with fine imponderable substance of negligible density, named aether (or ether), which acts as the carrier or medium for light rays—just as air acts as the carrier for sound waves—and it also allows the earth and the planets to travel through it as if it were not there. It was also conjectured that the aether is at rest in absolute space. The speed of light was expected to have a fixed value relative to the aether, just as the speed of sound has a characteristic value relative to the rest frame of the air, and its value was also expected to depend on the observer's motion relative to the aether.

There were signs of discrepancies by the end of the nineteenth century in the idea of the all-pervading aether. Classical physics tells us that if an observer 'A' is travelling in a train 'A' with a speed  $V_a$ , and there is another train 'B' moving in the same direction and parallel to 'A' with speed  $V_b$ , then our observer 'A' would measure the speed of the train 'B' as equal to  $(V_b - V_a)$ ; and similarly if the train 'B' is moving toward the train 'A' from the opposite direction, then our observer 'A' would measure the speed of the train 'B' as equal to  $(V_b + V_a)$ . Thus, if there is a light signal and  $c$  is the speed of light with respect to the aether at rest, then an observer in a fast travelling spaceship with speed  $v$  would find the speed of light to be  $(c + v)$  if the spaceship is moving toward the light, and  $(c - v)$  if it is moving in the same direction as the light. A precise and ingenious experiment using an optical interferometer was carried out

by Michelson and Morley in 1887 in the laboratory to measure the above change in the speed of light. If this aether frame existed then our spinning and orbiting earth, moving with an immense speed of 30 km/sec around the sun, should be moving through the aether as well. And since the apparatus of Michelson and Morley was placed on the surface of the earth, the 'aether wind' would be blowing through it, just as a motorist in a fast moving car feels the wind blowing into his face though the weather may be perfectly calm. Michelson and Morley compared the speed of light using two light beams at right angles to each other, while keeping one beam along the orbit of the earth. To their utter surprise they found no difference in the speed between the two beams of light, i.e., the velocity of the earth through the aether could not be detected. They repeated their experiment several times to see if there were any daily or yearly differences. Their null result was the death-blow to the aether hypothesis.

Attempts were made to understand the null result of the Michelson-Morley experiment in the aether framework by several people and the most notable among them was Hendrik Lorentz, who in 1904 wrote down a set of transformation equations, known as Lorentz transformations, which have already been introduced above in connection with the understanding of Maxwell's equations. One of the equations implies that a body moving with a velocity  $v$  with respect to the aether contracts in the direction of motion:  $L_v = L_o (1 - v^2/c^2)$ , where  $L_o$  is the length when the body is at rest,  $L_v$  is the length when it moves with speed  $v$  parallel to its length and  $c$  ( $= 300,000$  km/sec) is the speed of light. However this contraction in length was believed to be dynamic and molecular in origin. Here is a rough numerical estimate of the contraction. Let us take the velocity  $v$  of the apparatus of Michelson-Morley to be 30 km/sec with respect to the aether, then:  $(v^2/c^2) = (30/300,000)^2 = 10^{-8}$  } = 0.00000001. Now for a very small value of  $(v^2/c^2)$ , one can write  $\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2} \approx 1 - (1/2) (v^2/c^2)$ , and thus  $L_v/L_o = 1 - 5 \times 10^{-9} = 1 - 0.000000005$ . Therefore the expected difference in length is only one half-millionth of a percent. But it is sufficiently large to be detected by a sensitive optical instrument like the interferometer. So, if the apparatus shrinks in the way it is described, the Michelson-Morley experiment would give no effect.

Although the Lorentz contraction hypothesis successfully explained the negative result of the experiment, it was clear that it was invented purely for that purpose and not a general result arrived at from basic theoretical considerations. Therefore the argument was not compelling enough to replace the old Galilean transformation, which looks well founded for the laws of mechanics, between the coordinates and time, by the new one, i.e., the Lorentz transformation which looks peculiar. What Einstein did was to look into the basic concepts of space and time.

*(To be continued)*

S. N. GANGULI



## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of July 2005)

### Waiting for the Mother

*I wait for you, O Lord,  
With eyes wide awake but see you not,  
But this very waiting for you  
With so much joy is fraught!*

In the evening when I used to go to the Mother, She would open the door in front of the staircase around eight. A handful of us girls received from the Mother Her flower-blessings. We used to go and sit on the staircase in the evening and wait for the Mother. Sometimes we waited beyond eight, nine or even ten o'clock. The Mother had not yet come. We had not eaten and very often we had to wait in that condition. Then She would open the door and hurriedly hand us the flowers. Sometimes She was so deeply absorbed in meditation that She would not open the door. We used to sit there for the Mother and wait for hours—and we loved this wonderful waiting. Like our grandmothers and other elderly members of the family in this country who do their daily evening adoration, we too would remain seated and think of Her quietly. We never felt in the least tired or impatient but always had the feeling that we were sitting close to the Mother. That is why I say:

*I wait for you, O Lord,  
With eyes wide awake but see you not,  
But this very waiting for you  
With so much joy is fraught!*

One day an elderly woman amongst us became restless while waiting for the Mother and suddenly got up. She took her plate of flowers, opened the door slightly and tried to place it on a cupboard. I requested her repeatedly to wait a little longer for the Mother.

“You will leave and the Mother might just then open the door.”

She did not listen to me and, in fact, got angry. Just as she was going down the Mother opened the door! We all stood up quite stunned with disbelief. What kind of test was this? One after the other we took our flower-blessings from Her and went down. I was the last to go to the Mother. I had hardly got into the room when the Mother asked me gravely:

“Who has left this plate of flowers?”

I do not know why but I kept quiet. The Mother Herself then continued:

“I know who has kept these flowers. I know each one’s flower-plate.” (Many used to offer their flowers in a plate or flower-basket and the Mother filled their plate/flower-basket with garlands or different kinds of flowers.)

The Mother went on very sadly:

“You are most amazing, really! You cannot wait for me even for a little while and get all impatient? You know even gods and goddesses wait eagerly to get a glimpse of me. Great sages and rishis consider themselves eternally grateful if they get even an instant’s vision of me. You have got me so easily that you do not place any value on it.”

Hearing these words from the Mother I was somehow filled with pain. I told the Mother:

“Gods and goddesses or sages and rishis know You as the Eternal Divine Shakti but You are our Mother, You are our Friend. It is true we see You also as the Eternal Shakti but it is more as our Mother and our Friend that we really know You. That is why we make such demands on You and even get upset with You. When we stand or sit under the shade of a tree do we think ‘Ah, how lovely is the shade of this tree’? You are our Friend, our Mother!”

Saying this I felt somewhat burdened within. On behalf of everybody I started asking for forgiveness to the Mother within. Is there no forgiveness for the conduct of unknowing foolish children?

The Mother became strangely silent. From Her eyes soft gentle love began to radiate like moonlight. The Mother responded to my call, “You are our Mother.” I felt as if the Mother was forgiving us all our ignorance and our impudence. Isn’t She forgiving us all the time? She held me close to Her bosom. My body still remembers that hug of love and feels it with gratitude.

The Mother told Champaklal-ji:

“You see me in my human form. That is all that your eyes can comprehend. You behave with me as if I were really a human being and nothing else!”

Nirod-da has written:

“Sri Aurobindo told his attendants: ‘I have come down so close to you and yet you cannot understand me, cannot know me, cannot reach me.’ ”

A line from sadhak Ramprasad comes to mind:

“Who can know you if you do not let yourself be known?”

Nolini-da has written:

“How effortlessly we got a touch of Their body—there was no effort or striving of any kind on our part—but as a result we lost the real value of all the treasures that were proffered on us. How many times They alluded to this with some sadness—like spoiled children of a rich man, we are wasting away all the wealth.”

When Sri Aurobindo announced that this Mother was the same as the Divine Mother and He Himself then retired into intense sadhana, a few old sadhaks did not readily accept Her as the “Mother”, some of them even revolted.



Sometimes in the evenings, Nolini-da used to read out from his own writings to a few of us in his outer room. When the number of persons wanting to attend these readings increased the class was shifted to the Meditation Hall. We would all sit facing Nolini-da. During one such class Nolini-da told us:

“You have all known the Mother as ‘Mother’ so very effortlessly. However we were not as fortunate. We had to overcome a lot of resistance in order to accept the Mother as ‘Mother’.”

Madhuri was sitting just next to me. We both looked at each other. Madhuri burst out laughing and I too could not control myself. Madhuri looked at me and said:

“Just look at them!”

The way Madhuri said this made me laugh as well. The whole class in fact began laughing. Even Nolini-da joined in and enjoyed this fountain of laughter immensely...

But the gods can't stand our impudence. After all they too are the Mother's children. They punish our human arrogance. Let me recount to you one incident here. It happened long ago. At that time the local population of Pondicherry was quite hostile to the Ashram.

One of the Ashram boys was walking by the sea. All of a sudden he noticed at a distance that a group of locals was desecrating a photograph of the Mother. The Ashram boy ran and jumped down from the pier putting his life at risk. He managed to snatch away the Mother's picture from that whole group of people. The Mother was told about this incident and She forgave them. However the gods avenged this act of foolishness. After this incident it stopped raining in Pondicherry. For several years it did not rain a drop! You cannot imagine the terrible time we went through without water. Water for houses was brought in 'vandis' from great distances. Those were very bad days indeed! Then the Mother herself interceded with Indra, the god of rain, in order to relieve us of our misery. She gave to the smaller children of the "Red Group" a prayer to learn. She drew a symbol of water on the ground and the little ones went over this water symbol reciting this prayer in French over and over again:

*Pluie, Pluie, Pluie, nous voulons la Pluie*  
*Pluie, Pluie, Pluie, nous demandons la Pluie*  
*Pluie, Pluie, Pluie, nous avons besoin de la Pluie*  
*Pluie, Pluie, Pluie, nous prions pour la Pluie.*

(Rain, Rain, Rain, we want the Rain  
 Rain, Rain, Rain, we ask for Rain  
 Rain, Rain, Rain, we need the Rain  
 Rain, Rain, Rain, we pray for Rain.)

All of us who were in the Playground at that time were quite nonplussed by the Mother's wondrous ways. The Playground had been turned into a seat of prayer and *yagna*. We looked on quite mesmerised and wondering: So all this is true after all! As a child I used to hear from my grandmothers that when the gods were angry or displeased pestilence and famine and other such inauspicious events took place and entire villages and towns were devastated. I would sneer in disbelief then. How many *yagnas* and austerities were necessary to bring the gods back onto our side! We have read about so many *yagnas* in Puranic stories or in the *Mahabharata* and heard so many stories from the elders ever since our childhood. But it is only after seeing the Mother make arrangements for invoking the god Indra through prayer that I understood that all those stories heard from the elders were not simply stories or imagination. And even today in our country, in this modern age, whenever there is famine or any other inauspicious event, *yagnas* are performed in order to appease the gods.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

*It is by the constant remembrance that the being is prepared for the full opening. By the opening of the heart the Mother's presence begins to be felt and, by the opening to her Power above, the Force of the higher consciousness comes down into the body and works there to change the whole nature.*

\*

*If an adverse Force comes, one has not to accept and welcome its suggestions, but to turn to the Mother and to refuse to turn away from her. Whether one can open or not, one has to be loyal and faithful. Loyalty and fidelity are not qualities for which one has to do Yoga. They are very simple things which any man or woman who aspires to the Truth ought to be able to accomplish.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 127, 129)

## IN THE SEA OF BECOMING

Knock at the gates of beauty  
And at the doors of delight  
No grief can enter there  
No sorrow mar our sight.

Bathe in the sea of becoming  
Leave memory behind,  
Sail on the wave of the future  
That beckons to mankind.

Break the bars of inconstancy  
In the prison of limiting mind  
Cling to the truth of your being  
All ignorance rescind.

Attend to the voice that is calling  
Afar yet deep within,  
The presence of peace descending  
Accept that you may begin

The work of interior cleansing,  
The labour of love in the fire  
That burns without pain, all consuming  
And the soul shall rise higher, yet higher.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

# PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

2

*(Continued from the issue of July 2005)*

## Shantiniketan—1

LIKE most Hindu artists of the time, Krishnalal also chose subjects from the Puranas. Already, he had earned a name as an artist and his paintings were exhibited, sold and printed in journals. “Once the sale of some paintings brought a decent amount and I took off to Nandababu’s, at Shantiniketan. There I found an exhilarating atmosphere and sufficient nourishment; the obstructing walls began to collapse, my vision widened and deepened. Inadequate funds and lack of time forced me to return in six months, but the breaking out of old grooves and the opening up of inner vision were an enormous gain.” Abanindranath in his Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy says, “...let me also make this little request... especially of my friends and pupils, my fellow-pilgrims in the quest for that realisation which is the fulfilment of all art, that they may not take these aesthetic canons and form-analyses of our art treatises, with all the rigours of their standards and their demonstrations, as representing absolute and inviolable laws, nor deprive their art-endeavours of the sustaining breath of freedom, by confining themselves and their works within the limits of Shastric demonstrations.”<sup>1</sup>

“I met Krishnalal in 1932-33 at Shantiniketan,” says Sri Keshubhai Valia, a close friend of the family. “Those were the days of national awakening and government schools and colleges were boycotted.... After Gujarat Vidyapith was taken over by Government, many Gujarati students used to go to Vishwabharati. When Krishnalal joined Shantiniketan, Nandalal Bose was the Acharya of its Kalabhavan. Among the well-known artists who taught there was Shri Masoji. Jayantilal Parekh too was there and Krishnalal’s friendship with him began there. My impression of Krishnalal was one of a gentle, well-behaved young man of few words. Although he was already a prominent artist in Gujarat, here he kept himself in the background, concentrating entirely on imbibing as deeply as he could, for his finances did not permit a prolonged stay and as the eldest son he bore a responsibility towards his family. Being an introvert, he rarely mixed with other students but his behaviour with all was modest and simple. He was most often found with Jayantilal and sometimes with Prabodh Mehta of Bombay, who was in another section of the University.”

Jayantilal went there in the early or mid-1932. Born in 1913 near Surat, he had grown up in Bombay and studied in a co-educational high school (“perhaps the first of its kind in India”) staffed by followers of J. Krishnamurti, “some of whom were also connected with the freedom movement”. The school invited well-known artists,

one of whom, the Bengali artist Pulin Behari Das, had taken a special interest in the young man and coached him even after school hours. Some of Jayantilal's paintings were published in a Bombay journal and sold even before he passed Matriculation. After a year at an architecture school ("the only one in India in those days"), his father sent him to Shantiniketan, where he studied until 1935. "There were very few students then; in the art classes, I don't think we were more than 20 to 25 students." "There I met one of the finest artists and the finest teacher of art India had produced, Nandalal Bose. In those days Shantiniketan was a small community.... There were only about 250 people at that time.... Tagore used to read out his plays and poems at night.... Because of his fame many great men used to come there, scholars, poets, musicians and all. And they used to speak, recite or play music. Thus we acquired an excellent cultural background and a broad view of life. Shantiniketan is in the midst of nature and so, the contact with nature became for us living and intimate. We were awakened to the beauty of nature, changes of seasons, charm of flowers, the sky and the meadows. Tagore's poetry reflected all these several moods of nature, and the teachers also opened our eyes to this grand book of nature."<sup>2</sup>

Krishnalal's Shantiniketan notebook contains seven items. Five of which—"Guidance from Nandababu", "In the company of Srijut Nandababu", "Notes on Italian Frescoes", and "An interview with Nandababu in Baroda on 23.10.1940"—are written in Gujarati; and "Notes on Teaching Drawing" and "On Jaipur Frescoes" in English. It must be especially remembered by readers that Nandalal's words reproduced here, in addition to having been noted by Krishnalal from memory and translated into his own succinct style for personal use, have undergone another translation by a different mind with its own verbal preferences. The quotation marks, it will be seen, have mostly been omitted.

### **"Guidance from Nandababu"**

[21 July 1932 was Krishnalal's first day at Shantiniketan and 12 January 1933 the last. On the first page he wrote this quote which it seems safe to assume to be Nandalal's words:

*Technique is like the path of a Bird.*  
(The path without any mark.)]

21.7.32, Thursday: The day of admission to Kalabhavan. Nandababu asked me to start a drawing. He drew a rough sketch in pencil and asked me to complete it. "Hold the pencil further up; it reduces the pressure."

*How to get over the difficulties in drawing hands and feet and the folds in clothes?*

Copy pictures where hands and feet are well done. Sketch from Nature. Don't make small sketches, make them life-size so that you can grasp the details. It is not difficult to do the creases; they start from where the limbs rise, they seem to be

radiating from there. He drew a picture to show this; and lifting an end of my shirt showed how the folds were made. Then he explained *Navatāla* measurements of male and female idols.<sup>2</sup>

28.7.32, Thursday: Nandababu had gone to Calcutta for a few days. After his return, he came today and saw my work. I showed him the drawings of the hand that I had done from memory in his absence. “Do also some of someone sitting for you. But not just sitting doing nothing, but lifting, writing, drawing—doing something.” Yesterday there was a lecture at Gurudev’s. I showed him the portrait-sketches of Gurudev that I had done then. They were not bad, but Nandababu pointed to the depths, “It is difficult. You must be able to draw the intelligence; for instance, if you are doing Mahatma Gandhi’s picture his intelligence must be seen. Your portrait is authentic only when along with a man’s outer appearance you have drawn his inner being (along with the accurate outlines of his eyes, nose, hair, beard, the inner man).” Then I showed him the landscape I had done on a card. Thereupon, drawing the same scene on another card he explained, “Showing the grades—lighter or darker—depends on distances and relations; in the same way, there would be a difference in things that are near or far; colours too would change; details of distant things would diminish. Trees far away seem as if done in a single wash; in the ones closer, the details—branches, leaves, clusters—are clearer. The same with colouring: the further a thing is the paler the shade of blue,—from a distance green trees would appear bluish, the redder ones would seem purplish.”

30.7.32, Saturday: Sri Masoji showed some of his early paintings. In the ensuing conversation, he described the changes that had taken place in Shantiniketan since he came here in 1921. When he left the Bombay School of Art and came here this was an institution called Brahmacharya-ashram under the directorship of Shri Rabindranath Tagore. Nearby, where Gurudev lived, there was the Kalabhavan where music classes were held. Everything was immersed in a family ambience. The new songs or stories that Gurudev wrote, he would read out to the students, sing and make them sing. Nandababu could give his full attention as he had only five students. As Indian Art was then very much in the air, Nandababu and others were rather averse towards Masoji’s oil paintings. Even leafing through books of Western Art was looked down upon. Masoji was made to forget all he had learned. Later Brahmacharya-ashram changed to Shantiniketan and Vishwabharati and gradually grew into the large official department it is today. Family feeling is still there, but much less than before. Later, girls began to join and the atmosphere began to change.

Today, there was discussion between Nandababu and an American who is here as a guest. When it turned to education, Nandababu said, “The teacher works with the students. Giving them some task, he too works in the same place. After getting students to begin, one must guide them only when they stop or falter. When introducing them, I don’t say ‘my students’ but ‘artists working here’.”

31.7.32, Sunday: Nandababu made some suggestions to Jayantilal on sketching. “If you want to sketch from Nature don’t sit in front of it and copy everything. Observe it as long as you want and then sketch from memory. If you begin sketching straightaway the mind gets into details and the central thing you want to show will not get full power.... Keep experimenting in your pictures.”

16.8.32, Tuesday: After many days, an occasion to meet Nandababu. Yesterday evening, when I had shown him some of my cards, he asked me to see him this morning. Now, taking some cards of Western art he compared them with mine. Mine follow the Western and Japanese styles. Selecting a few of that type, he pointed out the richness/depth of their colours and explained the relation between things near and distant. My cards didn’t stick to the same technique. In the same card in some places I had used a wash, in others lines and dots— he asked me to correct that.

It seemed to him that I had worked on it as if it were going to be printed. “The same thing is found in Kanu’s and Jayantilal’s work. But we here work for the sake of the art; if the Press can reproduce that, let it do it, we don’t work as per their demands.” And then he added emphatically, “The Press should come to you; you should not go to it.”

After a pause, he gave me this advice, “Never cheat in your work. Because it is just a card, one can take it easy, make do with a slapdash job, only when it is a full-blown painting need one give it all one’s effort—that is a wrong attitude. It is like a cow refusing to let her milk pass when we try to milk her, and letting it flow only when her calf suckled her. Realise the value and dignity of your brush. Don’t use it properly in one work and carelessly in another. If you do that you will be lowering your own value. On how sacred your brush is to you, will depend your own worth.”

22.8.32: While discussing details of anatomy in a student’s painting Nandababu spoke on the place of anatomy in Indian Art:

Indian art observes all the rules of anatomy. The painters of *baag-anjara* (sic) and other forms of art had a perfect knowledge of anatomy. In Indian art one must know all such subjects; one does not, as do western artists, make models sit for us; one must remember everything; anatomy is quite easy. If you can memorise the alphabets and compound words of several languages, it ought to be easy to memorise the 200 odd shapes of anatomy. But you ought not to memorise all that in the very beginning; one must learn them as one proceeds and their knowledge is required. If you are offered some dish when you are not hungry it will prove tasteless; but if you get it when you need it, you are ready for it and absorb it more easily. If your picture is lacking in anatomy, then it would certainly be a fault of Indian art.

*Then should one pour out all one’s knowledge of anatomy and other things in one’s pictures?*

Certainly not. We are not drawing in order to display our knowledge! But it



should be evident in our pictures to the extent required. If you want to show a running dog, use its anatomy only to show the movement, the speed. But if the object is to describe a dog, you must give the details of all its parts. When one sees a beautiful tree, we are not fully aware of the things all around it, so when you draw that tree, after bringing out its full beauty, draw the other things only to fill in the whole. If you are attracted by a beautiful colour, shape, curve, or just speed, give that point your full attention and leave the rest vague; what is to be left vague will come to you only with experience. And that which is to be focussed on must be slightly exaggerated.

25 August, Thursday: The Decorative style: Someone had tried a picture in the decorative style. Taking that as an example Nandababu explained that style:

In the decorative style, one must make an exhaustive study of Nature; one must put the subject, not in the way it is in Nature, but in more beautiful shapes. Make some sketches, then try to rearrange everything in a more decorative pattern. It is very difficult; as your study will progress your understanding too will increase. To do it without proper study will make your work cheap and absurd. Taking a picture in the old style from an issue of *Rupam*, Nandababu copied out a part and demonstrated the speed, simplicity and purity with which it could be redone from the point of view of anatomy and in the decorative style. Those painters did not sketch directly from Nature, but observed it closely and exhaustively and only then started their work. Their decorative style is not the result of just one painter's efforts but the knowledge of centuries. Those pictures must be copied in order to understand their style. But we must not try to make our own paintings like theirs. For instance, the Santals (folks in nearby villages) sing their own songs, live very simply; we can learn their simplicity or enjoy their songs, but if we try to live and sing like them we would only be making fools of ourselves. We ought to accept good things but must not try to stop being ourselves and become others.

28.8.32, Sunday: Nandababu was explaining how to draw a tree:

From its trunk it has a squarish not a round shape; it grows as if it has been twisted. It has, as it were, a back on one side, and a front or chest on the other. The bark of one side is like the backs of crocodiles, lizards and tortoises, while the other is as smooth as their bellies, the branches come out on the rougher side and the trunk and the branches contort as they all rise higher, thus spreading in all directions.

Then he explained the differences in the way art is taught in government art schools and some principles of the ancient Indian art schools. In the western method, some years are given to perspective, some years to anatomy, some to colouring and modelling and only finally to creative works. But that is a wrong way. Because eating and exercising complement each other, therefore to only eat for four days and to only exercise another four days is silly. To keep teaching only one part for years becomes boring and useless.

Ordinarily there is in each one a certain creative power and it ought not to be



blocked until he has been taught the other subjects. It must be allowed free expression, only where an error creeps in it has to be corrected. When a child starts to draw a tree—when he is eager to draw it—that is when he must be taught the characteristics of trees; he will grasp them quickly. When he tries to draw humans, give him a simple idea of anatomy, he will understand and use it immediately. But to block his creativity and, as with arithmetic make him learn abstract rules, will only suppress his productive capacities; after all arithmetic is not that difficult to pick up. From this point of view, students of Indian art may seem to be deficient in anatomy, but they are much more creative; so while giving a free rein to creativity, anatomy can be added. It does not matter if they take years to master it.

In art, the straight path is original creation, that must always be kept as one's goal. On the way, wherever necessary one can stop for a study of anatomy, colours, technique, etc., then return to one's path, not get oneself entangled in any of them. It is not necessary to keep constantly at technique, you can learn it as you work.

*What are the characteristics of good paintings?*

Different people will like different paintings. One may like this and another may like some other. One's choice depends on one's culture; it is that which helps us understand the depth of the painting.

Simplicity: The first thing one notices in a good painting is its simplicity, its naturalness. As if it was done effortlessly, in no time at all. But only when one sits to copy it does one realise how difficult it is. It is only after years of experience that the artist has achieved that naturalness. Beginners must always take great pains to complete their picture.

Detachment: That is the second. A certain girl may appear extremely lovable; she may have a beautiful face. But nothing will come about if you keep trying to draw just that facial beauty. It is only if you have felt her inner feelings and can bring them out even at the risk of not making a perfect face that you may create something worthwhile.

Freshness: When you see a good painting, it should be as a fresh flower, as fragrant and energising. If a painting charms you at first sight, but after a time loses that charm, it is lacking in 'freshness'.

Universal element: When a painting can convey its rhythm to anyone from any country or culture, one may say it has that universal element. We may appreciate a painting of a Santal girl playing a flute because it is something that we have ourselves commonly witnessed, but not until someone from another country or culture can appreciate it with the same fervour can it be said to have that universal element. Hindus would naturally love the statue of Nataraj, because they worship it and understand the philosophy and significance behind it; but it is when foreigners too are absorbed in it, that we can say it has the universal element.

Inspiration: The *bhava* which, bringing an inner joy, establishes itself in you, is fed and increases and demands manifestation, that is called inspiration. Whenever

we visit some new place, we sit down to sketch everything, that is merely curiosity. The more familiar one becomes with the place, the less occupied do we become with sketches. But if after leaving the place the things we had seen keep recurring in our mind's eye that is when we can say we are inspired.

Peacefulness: The subject of a great painting must be such that even a mind in turmoil is quietened and happy after seeing it.

Culture: One does not obtain all this by effort alone. One also needs will and faith, and one needs to be sincere; then gradually it grows.

Respect: One must have a complete regard for his work. If a finished painting is found carelessly dumped in a corner of one's room, it betrays a tendency to disregard the ideal of preserving our art-work at a sustained height. It may not be of the highest rank, whether a card or a large canvas, one must have equal respect, regard, for all his creations. You must bestow the same care on them as you would on the tiniest present you receive from Gandhiji. In art, as in any other field, one needs a natural aptitude. Some believe that one may get that with sheer hard work; but that would never be true art. If you plant a sour mango seed your tree is bound to produce sour fruits.

1.9.32: Yesterday we had been on a picnic. Showed Nandababu the sketches I had done there. There is a great difference in the sketching methods practised here. In my sketches the method is to begin by making blocks, but here the method is to try and catch the movement and the turns, bends, contortions, twists, etc. of the object. Nandababu drew some sketches in my notebook to explain this. We had passed through a village where a few villagers were standing around in beautiful postures which, he said, showed that the influence of the city's artificial atmosphere and fashions had not yet entered here, thus preserving the natural beauty of their deportment.

3.9.32, Saturday, 8 pm: We went to meet Nandababu. This time was suitable for informal discussions. At first the talk was about indigenous colours. Assorted soils of different parts of our country can be collected and ground to make various colours. It seems impossible to get a good blue; but for whites chunam (lime) and for blacks kohl are quite good. The black soil in Gujarat can also produce Vandyke brown. Indigo also is made indigenously but it is not a fast colour as it fades out. The gruel obtained by boiling rice-grains till they are thoroughly cooked gives a good brown, and also, it obviates the need to add any glue. Indigenous colours are manufactured in Jaipur but they are not so good because they are using machines for grinding and sand in which gravel gets mixed making the colours quite coarse. If you make a colour for yourself, use a mortar to grind it properly.

How to teach art: Children can begin to learn from the age of three. They should be allowed to draw whatever they please. Keep copies of good paintings before them and let them observe. They will study them in their own way and create what they feel. The power of reasoning grows in them around the age of ten. Until then they go

on drawing independently and believe everything they create is good and are quite satisfied with it. They can come up with very interesting compositions and colourings; unfortunately once they learn to reason, they start using their discrimination, which impairs their creativity. That is when they start asking endless questions. When they ask you a question you must give an answer, you must try to explain, but never be in a hurry to teach them on your own account. Teach them as and when they are hungry to learn. At that age you need only teach them drawing, colouring and shading. Never correct their drawings on the original, but on a separate sheet of paper. When you correct on someone else's work, it becomes yours.

Inspiration: A work done without inspiration is dry. Nature is the first great source of inspiration—a beautiful scene creates a deep impression in us and from that is born a drawing. Another powerful source is the inner feeling or experience—when one's feelings are deeply shocked or tormented, or when one has an ecstatic or exuberant experience, that too leads to the creation of a drawing. However even in the best artists these inspirations may not produce, in an entire lifetime, more than eight or ten masterpieces; beside these the rest of their creations may look like mere experiments. Such great inspirations demand great sadhana—one needs to put in all one's consciousness, maintain the purity of one's art, cultivate a deep love for it, then alone can one expect great inspirations. You can't, of course, sit waiting for the inspiration; continue to draw whatever impressions you have already received. Else you may get into the habit of sitting and just thinking about the work.

Technique: It is not necessary to learn all the techniques. The ones you know ought to suffice. Of course without knowing any of them one cannot express one's art properly. But, I think, the real work at present is to develop the sense of art in the public,—for very few really understand it. In the absence of a true understanding of art, their current enthusiasm for Indian art might lead to the acceptance of any sort of work, true or false, as true Indian art and it becomes a fashion, that can do much harm. It is better they remain totally ignorant about Indian art than adopt any fashionable pretensions regarding it.

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

### Notes

1. *Some Notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy and Shadanga or the Six Limbs of Painting* by Abanindranath Tagore (1914 edition reprinted in 1968), p. 1.
2. From an unpublished source and *Mother India*, March 2005, p. 232.
3. A *tāla*, in Indian iconography, is 12 finger-widths or three fists of the artist. Tradition recognises five classes of images: Nara, Krura, Asura, Bala, and Kumara; the scales and proportions prescribed for these are respectively 10 *tālas*, 12 *tālas*, 16 *tālas*, 5 *tālas*, and 6 *tālas*. Among the other measures current in Indian sculpture, continues Abanindranath, is the one known as *Uttama Navatāla*. "In this type of images, the whole figure is divided into nine equal parts which are called *tālas*." (*Some Notes...*, pp. 4-5)

## THE VEDANTA OF TOMORROW\*

It is indeed an honour to be invited to address a distinguished assembly here at the Institute of World Culture, especially in the memory of the distinguished scholar, the late Professor Nikam, who devoted himself to the cause of Philosophy in this country of eternal Wisdom. To remember him is to flash back towards my insignificant associations with his dynamic role in the Indian Philosophical Congress and its sessions in various universities. That has its own refreshing effect, and I thank the organisers of this Endowment Address for giving me an opportunity to come here in commemoration, and to offer certain ideas as my oblation to the Fire of Knowledge we might invoke on such occasions.

The theme offered to be taken up is “The Vedanta of Tomorrow”. This phrase, however, may appear to be rather un-Vedantic to the traditional intellect, perhaps somewhat stylish, somewhat intriguing. For, the established notion about the *Vedānta* is that it is the most ancient system of philosophy, having its roots in the *Veda* and the *Upaniṣads*, its developments through the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Gītā*, and perhaps its finished forms in the definitive commentaries of the great Acharyas. As such, reference to the *Vedānta* is a thing of the past, and “Tomorrow’s Vedanta” has a confusing note.

But the Vedantic tradition itself invites attention to the truth that even though the *Veda* and the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā* etc. are ancient texts, their Wisdom is not time-bound; the *Vedānta* is the culmination of Knowledge, *veda-anta*, the Eternal Truth is eternally true, and the past-present-future-temporality has no meaning there; the *Vedānta* is ever valid; its timeless Wisdom was and is and will be absolutely true. The essential and the intrinsic *Vedānta* is not subject to this or that formulation; the Truth is what it always is, ever the same, even though variously stated, *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*.

In view of the essential Truth of the *Vedānta*, then, one might feel justified in using the phrase the “Vedanta of Tomorrow”. But one must ask oneself: “What is the sense of ‘Tomorrow’ if the *Vedānta* is eternal Wisdom, transcending time, irrespective of yesterday and today and tomorrow?” Turning to the essential Truth of the *Vedānta*, even the terms *Veda*, *Upaniṣad*, *Gītā* carry their etymological significances and are to be treated as no mere captions of texts of old; the *Śruti* is to be understood as impersonal spiritual audience, *apauruṣeya*, the *Gītā* is to be regarded as eternal *Brahma-vidyā* and immutable *Yoga, yogamavyayam*. There would then be no history, no chronology, no time-reference about the true *Vedānta*. The term “tomorrow” with the *Vedānta* may not be confusing, but it would simply be redundant, hence meaningless.

Not only this, the irrelevance of the “Vedanta of Tomorrow” increases hundred-

\* Prof. N. A. Nikam Endowment Address, Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, September 19, 1981.

fold if the metaphysical bias leans towards an absolutistic extreme in which the *Vedānta* turns into pure ontology bereft of all epistemic significance. In that extreme case Absolute Brahman is the alpha and omega of the *Vedānta*, human terms of knowledge and attainment by knowledge become ultimately meaningless. The absolute Reality is utterly absolute, even the expression “alpha and omega” used for It is inapplicable since it suggests some kind of relativity. Brahman or Parabrahman would be its singular term, even the term *Brahma-vidyā* would stand cancelled in its absoluteness, unless its significance is raised or reduced by conceptual genius to eternal Self-awareness, *Cidbhāva* inherent in the absolute Reality of Brahman implied in the Upanishadic terms *Satyam Jñānam Anantam*, terms that are implicit in the ultimate and absolute Reality in Its eternal Status. In such an absolute eternity all gnostic terms, all epistemic implications, all human relevance, all temporal movements stand automatically falsified. The “Vedanta of Tomorrow” would become a meaningless phrase.

But in this absolutistic ontology, even the term *Vedānta* stands threatened, not to speak of the “Vedanta of Tomorrow”; for, *Veda* as Knowledge and its acme, the *anta*, literally and essentially signify a gnostic movement, they cannot be held in an utterly fixed ontological status. Thus there is a challenge to the students of the *Vedānta*: Either relinquish the term *Vedānta* altogether since it is impossible because of the pure status of the Brahman, or admit gnostic and epistemic terms, signifying movement of consciousness, with the eternal Truth of Brahman. To meet this challenge one needs to make a review of the *Vedānta* in its familiar terms, since it has been and continues to be a philosophic as well as a spiritual discipline with us, and neither its historicity nor its value can be cancelled by anyone, whatever the extremities of this or that statement.

We are familiar with the developmental stages of the *Vedānta*, notwithstanding its essential eternity, and it is common knowledge that the Vedantic Truths commenced from the revelatory intimations in the *Veda* which served as buds for blossoming realisations in the *Upaniṣads*, arranged beautifully by reason in the *Brahmasūtras* and refreshed by the Divine Breath in the *Bhagavad Gītā* for the Yoga of divine life. Our scriptural study bears out that the original *Vedānta* is no mere philosophy; it is revelatory, experiential, intuitive. Even in its communication it is the passage of wisdom from seeing visions to spiritual hearing, *Śruti*, the verbal forms being symbols, suggestive parables, exhortations, compact pregnant aphorisms laden with subtle spiritual speculations. There is hardly any argumentative logic, any propositional formulation for this or that thesis to be defended; the dialogues amongst masters and disciples carry no atmosphere of the present day seminarian discussions, much less of pedantic debates. Between the Vedic visions and the Upanishadic realisations there is hardly any demarcation; they represent one continuity of the original *Vedānta*.

Turning to the next stage of the Vedantic development one observes the same continuity of its Truths, moving from seeing and intuitive consciousness to Reason and its keen and convincing logic, expressed in aphoristic brevity of language, sharp

formulations with coherence of thought and argument, alert and alive to alternative standpoints, critical of their weakness and insufficiency, reaffirming the original theses with greater assurance and conclusive certainty. The whole movement is that of sound intellectuality in service of the Vedantic Truths handed over by the seers of the *Śruti*, frequent reference to which is of great significance in that the logic of Reason finds its justification in turning to truths revealed in spiritual experience and in upholding those truths against all possible objections raised by mere mental consciousness.

One might ask: Is it a development in the *Vedānta* that the intuitive and spiritual Truths of the *Upaniṣads* undergo a rational treatment in the *Brahmasūtras*? Is it not rather a decline of Thought? The very fact that the *Brahmasūtras* quote the authority of the *Śruti* for final judgment and validity of a doctrine shows the superiority of spiritual experience and revelatory Word over reason. And still it deserves to be considered a development of the *Vedānta* if spiritual Truths realisable at the intuitive level of consciousness move down to illumine the rational faculty of the mind and enrich its capacity to open itself upwards to spiritual heights in satisfying receptivity of the Wisdom which would otherwise remain always beyond mental comprehension, *acintya*. Moving from height to greater height is a development of gnosis one notices in certain places in the *Upaniṣads*. Moving down from spiritual heights to rational and mental levels of consciousness may also be looked upon as another line of development in which the higher truths descend onto the lower regions of our being and raise up the mind's understanding to spiritual thought. We might call it the illumination of the mind with spiritual light. In terms of gnosis this movement may not be upwards, but certainly it is an uplifting of the lower faculties to the light of the higher Knowledge.

The Vedantic tradition regards the *Gītā* as one of the sources of its Wisdom and Thought after the other two, viz., the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras*. There too one finds a developmental movement of the *Vedānta*. The entire Wisdom of Spiritual Thought and Divine Principles is revealed in it by the Divine Master for effective solution of the human problems of life in its social, emotional and ethical phases. The *Gītā* is *Brahma-vidyā* and *Yogā-śāstra* while being also a dialogue between Arjuna the disciple and Sri Krishna the Divine Teacher. The remarkably unique feature of this scripture is that it does not commence with any spiritual inquiry, any search of a spiritual seeker into the nature of the ultimate Reality, the supreme Truth for *mokṣa*. It commences with a psychological and ethical crisis of an Aryan fighter whose hitherto standards of social conduct are in self-conflict and hence utterly failing. His moral being is in revolt against its own norms, he sees no good in the very act he is supposed to perform as his ideal duty. The consequences are that his normal being almost gives way, his mind is not helping, his senses are in trouble, his nerves have lost their strength, his physical body is now a weak frame. It is in this state that he seeks for a sustaining solution, a rehabilitating tone of advice, a guiding principle for the highest good. This is his urgent need for the best ideal to orient and conduct his active life, the *Śreya* that is definitive and sure.



What follows in the *Gītā* is the divine teaching of Sri Krishna who is the Lord of the Universe and the Master of Yoga. His teaching proceeds in the most psychological and educative manner, solving each one of the problems of Arjuna. It is in that teaching that *Sankhya* and *Yoga* and *Vedānta* emerge as not only philosophical doctrines but as spiritual disciplines, not mere metaphysical systems but realisable truths for a divine life, transcending the limitations of the psychological, social and ethical standards of man without at all cancelling their proper relevance and value. The movement of thought and discipline in the *Gītā* rises to the greatest heights of the *Vedānta* in which the human consciousness, struggling with problems at its normal levels, is helped to rise to greater and greater truths of life and existence, and in which the lower truth is not cancelled by the higher but rather transformed and reviewed and made worthy for a grand spiritual synthesis.

The truths of the Sankhya system, its *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* with all the details of *traiguṇya* and multiple evolution are there in the *Gītā* and yet this Sankhya is woven with the Vedantic principles in a language which invites the keenest attention of a student of philosophy. Sri Krishna speaks of the *prakṛti* as *his prakṛti*, *me prakṛti*, in its twofold reality, lower, *aparā* and higher, *parā*. He also speaks of *puruṣa* in its triplicity, the *kṣara*, the *akṣara* and the *uttama*. Characterising the *parā prakṛti* as *jivabhūta*, becoming herself the individual soul, and using the epithet *kṣara* for *puruṣa* to suggest that the mutable too is verily the spiritual principle, are sure indications that the Divine Teacher is revealing to his disciple that Wisdom as *Vedānta* which is integral, 'samagram', inclusive of the essential truths as well as the comprehensive truths, 'jñānam vijñāna sahitam'. We have to bear in mind that the Divine Teacher of the *Gītā* is not a system builder, not an interpreter of this or that scripture, not a dialectician; he is the Purushottama Himself, the Supreme Reality, the Master of the universe, the Divine Avatara, the *Yogeshwara*.

The *Vedānta* that has developed in the *Gītā* is at once a supreme Knowledge and a supreme Realisation in *Yoga*, *Brahma-vidyā* and *Yoga-śāstra*. This *Vedānta*, while maintaining the transcendental heights of the supreme Truth of the absolute Reality, embraces all that is relative and phenomenal, not only tolerating the ephemeral facts of life in its indifferent Eternity, but even supporting all processes, all events, all change and becoming, the entire universal movement. The *Brahma-vidyā* in this *Vedānta* of the *Gītā* is at once the *Viśva-rūpa-darśanam*. And, further, this *Vedānta* is not only a statement of the Eternal and the Cosmic Reality including the individual being, it is also the effective realisation of the essential truths in and through the practical life, growing in union with that Reality. The *Vedānta* here is at once *Yoga*.

The *Yoga* of the *Gītā*, like its *Brahma-vidyā*, is remarkably comprehensive and synthetic. It recognises the value of every Yogic discipline and yet is not confined to any set practices of this or that system. It starts with the discipline of Sankhya, discerning the imperishable self behind the mutations of the body, and developing through the equality of the spiritual consciousness, moves high and wide into comprehen-

sive oneness with the Divine, dynamic oneness through works, enlightened oneness through understanding and knowledge and loving oneness through the heart of adoration with all its feelings, *sarvabhāvena*.

The *Vedānta* of the *Gītā* is so comprehensive, so universal and so synthetic that all the Acharyas who interpreted the original *Vedānta* in their commentaries on the *Prasthānatraya* found their justification and support in it, and founded their own schools of *Vedānta* that have been maintained by their followers for centuries. Claiming absolute faithfulness to the *Śruti* and the *Gītā*, these schools are so divergent in their metaphysical doctrines and also their emphasis on spiritual disciplines, and quite often so critical of one another that a sincere student of the *Vedānta* feels rather baffled. One might ask whether the *Vedānta* has found a development at the hands of the great interpreters, and whether the supreme heights of the *Upaniṣads* with their profundities and the comprehensive wideness of the *Gītā* have not really found a diminution at their hands. The battling debates between one school and another could hardly give spiritual assurance to sincere seekers of Truth. And yet, the historical fact is that these schools have stood for centuries and still hold their important positions. This they could not have done without a sustaining appeal to the human mind.

Thus the appeal that each school has invites attention to the importance that every interpretation carries in the tradition of the *Vedānta*. A thorough comparative study of the great Acharyas, Shankara and Ramanuja and Madhva and Vallabha and others, is beyond our present scope. But it could be pointed out that certain spiritual experiences and chosen intellectual standpoints could form sufficient bases for various interpretations of the same *Śruti*, of the same *Gītā*, since the logic of the mind is capable of organising ideas according to its own preference, its own bias. Every interpretation can find its own justification which deserves to be valued for the mental attainment of the truth represented in it. It is of a lasting value in the tradition of philosophical culture, particularly since in India our ways of living have always been so much influenced by these Vedantic doctrines held by various schools, presenting the eternal Truths to the believing mentality in well formulated terms.

And yet, each school has recognised the limitations of the philosophising mind, even though somehow every school has claimed its singular fidelity to the Truths of the original *Vedānta*, ruthlessly criticising the standpoint of other schools. Thus while one school maintains absolute non-Dualism as the metaphysical Truth of the *Vedānta*, the other school lays all emphasis on qualifying the non-Dual Reality and the third school makes every attempt to cancel non-Dualism in favour of the Dual Reality. And this process of establishing one's position by demolishing another has been going on for at least a few centuries. That, however, is not the entire story. Truth-loving sight has not been altogether blurred by human idiosyncrasy. Despite battling debates on metaphysical issues, it has always been recognised that the mind and its logic are inadequate instruments for determining the nature of the supreme Reality.



There have been sincere attempts, particularly by saints, to reconcile the divergent schools in their sadhana.

Could we not say that the spiritual Truths invited the interpretative mind which made its sincere effort to seize at them by this or that formulation and yet know its own limitations to be ready for its own correction and enhancement?

H. MAHESHWARI

*...such a divine soul would live simultaneously in the two terms of the eternal existence of Sachchidananda, the two inseparable poles of the self-unfolding of the Absolute which we call the One and the Many. All being does really so live; but to our divided self-awareness there is an incompatibility, a gulf between the two driving us towards a choice, to dwell either in the multiplicity exiled from the direct and entire consciousness of the One or in the unity repellent of the consciousness of the Many. But the divine soul would not be enslaved to this divorce and duality. It would be aware in itself at once of the infinite self-concentration and the infinite self-extension and diffusion. It would be aware simultaneously of the One in its unitarian consciousness holding the innumerable multiplicity in itself as if potential, unexpressed and therefore to our mental experience of that state non-existent and of the One in its extended consciousness holding the multiplicity thrown out and active as the play of its own conscious being, will and delight. It would equally be aware of the Many ever drawing down to themselves the One that is the eternal source and reality of their existence and of the Many ever mounting up attracted to the One that is the eternal culmination and blissful justification of all their play of difference. This vast view of things is the mould of the Truth-Consciousness, the foundation of the large Truth and Right hymned by the Vedic seers; this unity of all these terms of opposition is the real Adwaita, the supreme comprehending word of the knowledge of the Unknowable.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 152-53)*

# THE HUMAN CYCLE AND THE MODERN AGE

*(Continued from the issue of July 2005)*

## 3. SATTWIC INFLUENCES OF THE MODERN AGE

OUR modern era is predominantly the rajasic age, ruled by the rajasic ego. Most of the gains we have discussed so far are predominantly rajasic gains. But as we have explained earlier Nature uses sattwa to enlighten and restrain rajas. In our modern age, Nature has brought in many sattwic influences to enlighten the reigning rajasic ego.

The scientific quest is essentially sattwic; because it is in essence the intellectual quest for the truth of physical Nature and the outer world. But unfortunately Modern Science, except for a few discerning voices of individual scientists and the voice of ecology and environmental sciences, was almost totally subjugated by the rajasic ego and made into a servant for the fulfilment of its rajasic motives of power, wealth and enjoyment. It has been so with most of the organised religions in the West. Religion, like science, is in essence sattwic; it is the spiritual quest for the deepest and highest truth of our inner nature and the supreme source of our own being and the world. But most of the semitic religions were corrupted by the rajasic motive of power and conquest over the world and as a result lost their sattwic and spiritual element.

However, there are three sattwic movements which are able to remain relatively free from the powerful influence of the rajasic ego and therefore were able to exert on it a certain amount of enlighteneing influence. They are first, in philosophy, humanism; second, in science and social movements, ecology, environmental sciences and the Green Movement; third, in religion, the reawakening of eastern religions and spirituality, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, and the flowing out of their moral and spiritual message into the modern West.

### **Secular Humanism:**

The philosophy of modern humanism was a product of the Renaissance and the eighteenth century French thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau. It is an important sattwic movement of the modern age with a considerable positive impact in exerting a reforming influence on the rajasic ego and the mass-consciousness of the age. Its ideals and values like liberty, equality, fraternity, unity of mankind, dignity of the human essence and dignity of labour had awakened the masses and the leaders of the age to some higher ideals beyond their mundane and earthly needs and the turbulent desires and ambitions of their egos.

The philosophy of humanism gave the inspiring impulse for many modern reformist ideals and movements which championed the cause of the poor, the

oppressed and the downtrodden and worked for creating a free, equitable, peaceful, harmonious and a humane world-order. Some of these movements, for example feminism and the labour movement, produced tangible results in the awakening and empowerment of these oppressed sections of the society. Sri Aurobindo, writing on the contributions of humanism to the progress of humanity, says:

It, to some degree, humanised society, humanised law and punishment, humanised the outlook of man on man, abolished legalised torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised those who were depressed and fallen, gave large hopes to humanity, stimulated philanthropy and charity and the service of mankind, encouraged everywhere the desire of freedom, put a curb on oppression and greatly minimised its more brutal expressions.<sup>1</sup>

Thus humanism was able to achieve many things which the organised religions of the past or present are not able to do. There are two main reasons for the better results achieved by humanism. The Idea of humanism was not organised, and trapped, into a rigid dogma or cult or institution, as in organised religion. So the Idea working more freely and flexibly through individual thinkers, was able to exert a more subtle and silent influence on the thoughts and sentiments of people. The second factor in favour of humanism is that its idea embraced the whole of humanity, rising beyond caste and creed, nationality and religion, race and status; but most of the organised religions of the past confined themselves to the redemption of the believer. The third positive factor behind humanism is that it aspired and worked for the perfection of the earthly life of the human race while the religions of the past tended towards a world-denying other-worldly outlook or inlook, seeking for personal salvation or perfection in a heavenly beyond or in the inner worlds.

Here comes an important contribution of modern secular humanism and materialism to the evolutionary advance of humanity to the integral ideal. The spiritual seeking for the inner perfection in the “kingdom of God within” is probably the right foundation for the perfection of the earthly life. But the kingdom of God within is incomplete if it doesn’t express itself in the outer life creating a kingdom of God without; the inner perfection has to flow out to create a perfect outer world. We believe this is the evolutionary destiny of humanity. The modern secular humanism—and materialism, which was so much despised by most of the religious and spiritual minds,—have helped in the evolutionary progress of humanity, by turning the human consciousness from seeking salvation in the heavenly beyond to the redemption of the earthly life. Without the spiritual effort towards inner perfection, this secular effort for outer perfection may not probably succeed. But an exclusive quest for a salvation in a heavenly beyond, rejecting the world as an illusion, is also not the aim of terrestrial evolution; it may be the spiritual destiny of a few or many individuals but not the destiny of the human race. Nature is moving towards a more integral ideal

and the endeavour of secular humanism is probably a part of the evolutionary work for preparing the human consciousness for the integral ideal.

### **The Green Movement:**

The second important sattvic influence of the modern age is ecology and the environmental movement, the "Green Movement". Pioneered by the naturalist Rachel Carson and her book *Silent Spring*, the Green Movement has brought about a remarkable change in the attitudes and perceptions of the modern mind, especially among scientists, technocrats, businessmen and young people, towards Nature. Before the advent of the environmental movement the general attitude of the modern scientific and pragmatic mind towards Nature was one of exploitation, control and domination or in other words, rajasic. The Green Movement was able to bring a sattvic change in this attitude towards Nature. It has awakened and established in the modern mind the ideal of unity and harmony with Nature. As Carson said in an interview to BBC, "Man is a part of Nature and his war against Nature is a war against himself." Thus the Green Movement has gone one step ahead of humanism in its conception of Man as an integral part of Nature. This means, humanism alone is not sufficient to ensure the well-being and progress of humanity; it has to subordinate itself to an ecological holism. The well-being and progress of man lies in realising a symbiotic unity with Nature.

Thus, humanism and environmentalism were two great sattvic movements with the remarkable achievement of changing the attitudes and perceptions of the masses and the reigning rajasic ego of the modern age. But from a spiritual perspective the major defect of these sattvic movements is that they are able to create only a marginal change in the thought and sentiment of the people effected through the idea and enforced through outer laws. But such a change, though very helpful in giving an evolutionary push to human consciousness, cannot bring about the enduring transformation of the human being. For in most of us, the rajasic emotions, passions and sensations and the rajasic motives like the need for survival, power and enjoyment are much more powerful and concrete than the abstract and mild sattvic idea in the mind. So the change brought about by the sattvic idea and the sentiment can at any moment be veiled or lost when the motives, passions and the pragmatic necessity of the rajasic ego overwhelm the mind and will of man. The sattwa and the sattvic idea can only educate, instruct, enlighten or refine the mind but it cannot transform the human being. For this transformation, the sattvic ideals of the mind have to become as forcefully imperative as the passions of our vital being and as concrete as the experiencing of our body and its needs and sensations. This can happen only in the spiritual consciousness. For only in the spiritual consciousness the ideals of the mind become concrete realities of consciousness, a power and a force felt in the very essence and substance of our being and consciousness, in the same way as we feel the substance of our body.

So humanism and environmentalism, to become more enduringly effective and transformative, have to get spiritualised. They have to discover a discipline by which their ideals can be converted into concrete experiential realities. This is the discipline of eastern spirituality and Yoga.

This brings us to the third sattvic influence: the reawakening of eastern spirituality. But this is much more than a sattvic movement; it is in essence a spiritual movement with far-reaching consequences for the future evolution of humanity.

### **The Spiritual Movements:**

The true significance and magnitude of the awakening of the spiritual East, originating in India and flowing into the West, have not been fully understood by the modern secular thinkers. It has probably, and hopefully, saved our civilisation from extinction. The outer impact of this spiritual movement on society is not the true measure of its influence on human consciousness and life. The impact of a spiritual movement, idea or force is always subtle, unseen, inward and far-reaching. It was in such a silent and subtle way that Indian spiritual thought extended its influence on the human consciousness, life and history and is still doing its work.

This principle applies to a certain extent to all great Ideas, but more particularly to Ideas which are projected from a spiritual consciousness in direct contact with the deepest spiritual truth of life. They are much more powerful than intellectual Ideas because the Idea carries the power of the creative source and origin of life. A spiritual Idea, once it is established in the collective consciousness of humanity, begins to work silently, seeping subconsciously into human consciousness, wherever it finds a point of receptivity, taking many forms, acting through a multitude of human minds. All Ideas have an inherent urge to take form and realise themselves in life and the power of realisation depends on the nature and extent of the force inherent in the Idea. A spiritual Idea has the greatest power of realisation because it comes from the deepest and the highest source of life.

We will not enter into any philosophical discussions on the spiritual Ideas established in the consciousness of modern humanity by the reawakened eastern religions. That will be beyond the scope of our central theme which is history and not philosophy. So we will confine our discussion to the impact of this spiritual movement on the mind and life of modern humanity.

This modern spiritual movement begins with the advent of a great spiritual figure in India, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. To the traditional historian, the advent of Ramakrishna on the Indian religious scene is an insignificant event in world history—another saint in a land of saints and yogis! At the most he might have greatly influenced the religious life in India and nothing more. But to a deeper spiritual vision, the advent of Sri Ramakrishna is an epoch-making spiritual event which saved the soul of a nation “which preserves the knowledge that preserves the world” and initiated a spiritual movement which will hopefully steer humanity towards its

evolutionary destiny. Sri Aurobindo, viewing the advent of Ramakrishna with an inner Yogic vision, wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna gave to India the final message of Hinduism to the world. A new era dates from his birth, an era in which the peoples of the earth will be lifted for a while into communion with God and spirituality become the dominant note of human life.<sup>2</sup>

But what is the justification for giving such an immense historical importance to the teachings of a Hindu saint? The first reason is the importance of the universal spiritual message of Hinduism to mankind as a whole. The central ideas of Hinduism like the essential divinity of Man, the indwelling Divinity in Man, the spiritual Unity of mankind, many paths to the one Divine and the non-dogmatic, scientific and psychological approach to spiritual development through Yoga, belong to the future spiritual destiny of humanity. The second significance of Ramakrishna lies in the fact that he is the modern pioneer who lived and realised in his own consciousness and life the spiritual synthesis of Hinduism and thereby reawakened and re-established these spiritual Ideas of Hinduism in the collective consciousness of modern humanity; not merely as an Idea, but as a living spiritual force which will slowly work itself out in the mind and life of humanity. For, as Sri Aurobindo points out, "In him the spiritual experiences of the millions of saints who had gone before were renewed and united."<sup>3</sup>

The other great spiritual event of the modern age is the speech given by the well-known, dynamic disciple of Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in America. This brought the first spiritual message of the East to the modern West. The work of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was further strengthened, reinforced, extended, and stretched towards its fulfilment in the teachings and realisation of other great Yogis of modern India like Ramana Maharshi.

The other important spiritual movement of the modern age is a similar reawakening in Buddhism, especially the Zen and Mahayana Buddhism and the spreading of its spiritual message in the West. At present Buddhism is one of the major moral and spiritual influences in the West. The thinking and seeking mind in the West, dissatisfied with rationalism and materialism, but at the same time not willing to let go of reason, is very much attracted by the rational philosophy of Buddha and the non-rational methods of Zen!

What are the inner and outer impacts of these spiritual movements on human evolution? We have already indicated the inner results. They have reawakened in the collective consciousness of humanity certain spiritual ideas which belong to the future destiny of humanity. In the outer life, they have awakened the higher mind of the age to the deeper, universal truths of religion, spiritual dimensions of human life and the inadequacy of the materialistic conceptions of life; they are a major influence behind

many new schools and movements in science, philosophy, psychology, medicine and at present even in business. The transcendentalism of Emerson, transpersonal psychology, the search for the philosophical implications of the New Physics, much of the “alternative medicine” movement, the growing interest in meditation and Yoga and the widespread seeking for some form of inner fulfilment, the plethora of New Age cults in the West and the recent “spirituality-at-work” movement in American business, all these are some of the visible outer results of eastern spiritual thought. In brief, we may say that the spiritual movements of the age have kindled a deeper seeking and a higher aspiration in almost every activity of human life.

*(Concluded)*

M. S. SRINIVASAN

*References*

1. *Social and Political Thought*, SABCL, Vol. 15, pp. 543-44.
2. *Bande Mataram*, SABCL, Vol. 1, p. 801.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 800-01.

*It is necessary, therefore, that advancing Knowledge should base herself on a clear, pure and disciplined intellect. It is necessary, too, that she should correct her errors sometimes by a return to the restraint of sensible fact, the concrete realities of the physical world. The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. “Earth is His footing”, says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe. And it is certainly the fact that the wider we extend and the surer we make our knowledge of the physical world, the wider and surer becomes our foundation for the higher knowledge, even for the highest, even for the Brahmavidya.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 11)*



## WHAT IS THIS THING THAT MEN CALL DEATH

What is this thing that men call death?  
A mere cessation of the breath  
With at the last a gasping sigh  
Painful to those still standing by.  
Suddenly for you there is release.  
You step into your birthright, peace.  
You never knew that you were tethered!  
Your cord to Mother Earth is severed.  
Into Life you are reborn  
And from Earth's womb and darkness subtly drawn  
To move in unexpected Light  
To drift out of a perplexing night  
That was a death.  
And now you live, you really live, you are alive.  
Who is that there upon the bed?  
Why you. They say that you are dead.  
It is a you that you have shed.  
A man in white is pounding at his chest  
To rouse the heart at last at rest.  
But you have slipped that mortal net  
And from that hand it feels no threat  
Someone kisses that brow just as a daughter does  
The one who in this life indeed your beloved daughter was.  
You hover for a while to send a message  
Which is received as a faint presage.  
You pause for there is sobbing  
But like a waiting engine throbbing  
You start to lift  
New knowing starts choices to sift  
You cannot stay.  
You are already on your way  
Approached by beings draped in light,  
Bright shapes begin to hove in sight.  
You are taken by the hand  
In silence you are led to understand:  
The meaning of your life is now unravelled  
You're shown with kindness-skill the purpose  
of the road you've travelled,  
The import of each word, each mood, each breath, each gesture—  
All are divested of their outer vesture.  
Your deeds are placed before you without blame.  
For you to gauge them without shame.



It's all been written in a book God's angels keep.  
 Those who record us never, never sleep.  
 They are ourselves who keep the heavenly score  
 That rides upon the ethers evermore.  
 All goes to feed the universal churning  
 To keep its energy of love constantly burning.  
 And now my soul, released even from this,  
 Nestle into the Light. Receive upon your brow its kiss.  
 Enter into your psychic rest.  
 Like each heroic soul who comes to earth  
 You have now passed the final test,  
 And in His great calm Heart have earned repose  
 Until again one day you will unfold like petals of a rose  
 With on your soul the morning dew,  
 And once again take birth  
 And visit once again this earth  
 In the guise of a new you.

Another you with other name.  
 You're here to turn another page,  
 To take part in this cosmic game,  
 To summon in another age.

Another you in other guise  
 You've brought with you karma to burn  
 And in the burning you grow wise  
 But still there're many things to learn.

Whether you come as Ravana or Ram  
 You're here to do His sovereign will.  
 Cradled on His immortal arm  
 Turn this way or that, you're for Him still.

Remember now and without fear before you choose another room  
 To shelter your immortal Self,  
 Another home to enter Time  
 One day again you'll shed that human pelf.  
 Remember too this Light that waits  
 Until the final time around  
 When you regain the sovereignty of your soul:  
 You will be free, you will be whole  
 You shall not wither nor shall you die  
 Already sombre shadows fly.

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of July 2005)

## 21. The Raslila

THE folds of Sri Aurobindo's mystic poem, *Ahana* get gathered in the Raslila which Krishna is said to have danced in Dwapara Yuga. One is never tired of repeating the eternal invitation:

Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster  
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.  
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;  
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.  
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,  
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,  
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,  
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after.

Brindavan today may be dusty, the roads far from clean, the places either too crowded or too forlorn. But the Raslila magic has continued in Kali Yuga as well. Even today we look upon Krishna as the *Prema-svarupa Bhagavan*, presiding over the Vrajabhumi which is an area of about 168 miles in circumference, dancing the Raslila in Seva Kunj at night along with the cowherdresses. Hence people are not allowed to enter the area after sundown. Ghavar Kunj is also associated with Raslila and the Vrajabhumi has Rasa Mandalas where the dance (along with Krishna's other playful exploits) is enacted almost daily with songs and dialogues written in old Vraja dialect.

No portion of India has remained unaffected by the Raslila. In the farthest South, in Kerala, there are amazing wooden sculptures that portray the circular Ras dance. With equal artistic ingenuity the miniature painters of Rajasthan have given us a very realistic presentation of the Vrajabhumi, its people and their dance. The Ras, in particular, has tempted them to expend all their ingenuity in picturing the scene. Here is one in which several pairs of Krishna and Radha are sailing in the skies above lighted up by the full moon of Sharad purnima. With the thick trees as the background, several Gopis are playing instruments with peacocks dancing in the foreground and in the midst of it all eight Krishnas holding the hands of sixteen Gopis whirl around, with Krishna and Radha at the centre of the circle: the painting never fails to elicit in us an indescribable movement of the heart.

The scholarly works on the subject seeking the inner meaning of the Ras dance are also innumerable. Sri Madhudas Mundhra seeks light from the Upanishadic

dictum: *raso vai sah*. This gives us an insight into the nature of the Brahman which is Ananda. The term “Rasa” means “that which gives Ananda”. Of course, it is also defined as “that which is streaming” and indicates the movement of the dance as well as the spread of Ananda. Hailing the *rās pañcādhyāyī* (Cantos 29 to 33 of the *Dashama Skandha*) as the very life of the *Bhagavata*, Sri Mundhra sees it as the spiritual drama of the Jiva and the Brahman in five acts.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly a viable argument for in these five cantos we do come across clearly defined mystic states like the bliss of union, the pangs of separation, the dark night of the soul and the self-transcending, self-transmuting final vision.

Times without end poets have dealt with the Ras as in the powerful evocation by Narayana Bhattathiri in rhythms that keep in step with the anklets of the cowherdresses. There are eleven soulful verses in Bhattathiri’s *Narayaneeyam* and here is one beginning, *vēnunādakrita tādānakala gānarāga gatiyōjanā*:

The keynote set by the loud and clear sound of Thy flute, the sweet singing of the Gopikas in unison with the same, the rhythmic and soft strokes of the feet in consonance with the musical mode, the clapping sound of the hands mingled with the tinkling of the bangles worn on them, the resting of hands by the dancers on each other’s shoulders, and the fluttering of the cloths worn round the waist— on these entrancing majesties of the Rasa dance, let us meditate!<sup>2</sup>

The dance has made poets swirl so even in the English language:

And now the most wonderful of dances—  
the splendid Circular Dance  
sanctified by Yada tradition—  
brilliantly leapt into life.

A moon-lit Dance of the Cowherdresses  
That wholly involved them all,  
The Raasa was a communal sharing  
Of Existential Delight.<sup>3</sup>

Where lies the spirit immortal in this circular dance which has made it the favourite with speakers and singers, dancers and painters, the old and the young?

The earliest information regarding the Raslila comes from the *Vishnu Purana*. When they hear the sounds of Krishna’s flute on an autumnal full moon night, the cowherdresses stream towards the forest groves to meet him, speaking amongst themselves. “Look, I am Krishna, mark my lovely gait”, “No, I am Krishna, listen to me sing”, “Ah, I am Krishna dancing on the evil Kaliya”, “Don’t you be afraid of rains, I shall lift up the Govardhan”, “Now that I have killed Dhenukasura, the cows

are grazing in peace". The Gopis watch the footprints of Krishna marked by the thunderbolt, notice that a lucky lady has accompanied him, discuss the possibilities of his having decorated the lady with choice blossoms, imagine a lovers' quarrel between the two. The cowherdesses tarry at a place and begin to sing when Krishna approaches them. They are ecstatic and angry at the same time. Krishna pacifies them in various ways and presently they form a circle and dance. Since each Gopi wants to hold his hands, he obliges them in his own way. The Raslila begins:

As the dance began, the bangles of the gopis kept the rhythm for the songs which hailed autumn. Krishna began to sing of the moon, the moonlight and the Kumuda grove. But the gopis merely repeated, "Krishna, Krishna"... Krishna was not only in the rasamandala but also in the cowherdesses, the cowherds and all creation as the indwelling universal.

There are many more texts that belong to times earlier than the *Bhagavata* which refer to the Raslila. The hymns of Tamil Alvars refer to Krishna's dancing the *Kuravai Koothu*, and the ancient epic *Silappadhikaram* (circa 5<sup>th</sup> century) devotes one whole canto to the circular dance of the cowherdesses, *aaychiyar kuravai*. When the cowherdess Madari and her friends notice bad omens while churning curds, they decide to have a *Kuravai Koothu* to ward off evil to their settlement. It opens with a line-up of seven girls representing the seven notes of music and seven aspirants for Krishna's wedding garland. During the dance, the girl representing the winner Nappinnai is stationed to the left of Mayavan (Krishna) and is given the honour of garlanding Krishna. The epic poet praises the scene:

Splendid indeed was the *Kuravai* dance danced by Mayavan in the pollen-spattered square with his elder brother and Nappinnai who wore beautiful bangles, taking measured steps in harmony with the jingle of bangles. The flower-wreaths worn in the hair of the cowherdesses participating in the dance dangled over their napes. Yashoda was enchanted by the dance.<sup>4</sup>

One can dimly recognise the meeting space of the ancient Tamil circlet dance by groups in pastoral communities and the Ras dance referred to in the *Vishnu Purana* in the *Bhagavata*. Sri Krishna Chaitanya has made a study of the manner in which a pastoral tradition has come to be aligned to an elitist set-up by bringing in Krishna into the Southern folk traditions:

In assimilating Krishna lore into its own tradition, the cowherd community of the south has integrated it with a custom like bride-winning through bull-fighting, for Pinnai is the bride Mayavan wins thus. This has also helped to align the *Kuravai* dance, in its temper, with the Hallisaka of Bhasa, and not the erotic

and promiscuous Ras of the *Vishnu Purana*. It could be that the *Vishnu Purana* was slightly later than the *Silappadhikaram*; or if earlier it did not reach the south by the time the latter was completed. In that case the question of the Tamil epic being influenced by the Purana does not arise at all. But the point being made is that the pastoral tradition in the south conserved the Krishna story with an idyllic quality although the southern tradition of elitist poetry, as seen in the Sangam corpus, was also loaded with eroticism.<sup>5</sup>

The *Bhagavata* is a text from the south, and perhaps the author tries to disarm critics by projecting a philosophy behind the Ras dance which seems to have found an unshakeable and popular space in the development of the Krishna theme as we notice in the *Vishnu Purana*. The elaboration by the *Bhagavata* poet is certainly tantalising. What is Krishna driving at? What do the Gopis stand for? The Purana does not use the *Silappadhikaram* significations of music given to the dancers, but there are other extensions of the *Kuravai* dance. Did King Parikshita, placed at the very height of the elitist leadership and already facing the tremendous riddle of imminent death feel the Ras did not quite fit in with the projection of an avatar? So the king questions Sage Shuka who is conveying the *Bhagavata* tale. Did the Gopis have but a vital desire for Krishna and not for self-transcendence through him: *krishnam viduh param kāntam na tu brahmatayā muneḥ* (the Gopis considered Krishna only as a beloved, not as Brahman)? Could they ever have had a chance of overcoming ignorance and gain release from embodied existence?

Pat comes the answer from Shuka. When an enemy like Shishupala attained realisation from Krishna, beloved friends like the Gopis would assuredly have achieved self-transcendence. It is thus we have an extended drama regarding Raslila. When the ladies stream towards him on the moonlit night which brought the sounds of the flute to the cowherd settlement, Krishna questions them as to the reason for their coming and even advises them to go back. Night-time is dangerous with animals on the prowl. The relatives of the girls would be worried when they do not find them in their homes. "Please do go back, now that you have seen the pearly moonlight that bathes the banks of Yamuna!"

He also says that it is not a surprise for him to know they love him. All living beings do! *Prīyante mayi jantavaḥ!* Then comes a very pragmatic piece of advice from Krishna which sounds perfect for our century when the unit of family is in danger of extinction. Krishna says:

Wives who seek the esteem of the world should not abandon their husbands, be they ill-mannered, hapless, old, dull-witted, incurably ill, or poverty-stricken. Only if they are absolutely depraved sinners are they justified in deserting them. O devoted wives! To have relation with a paramour is a bar to heaven and a stain on one's reputation. It is worthless, dangerous, and fearful. The devotional

discipline of hearing about me, singing about me, etc., will generate genuine spiritual love in you better than by being by my side. So please go home.

As with every matter concerning Krishna, this speech is tantalising in the extreme. It is not an advice that we expect a seven-year-old boy to tender to a group of adolescent or grown-up women who are already wives. As long as the Gopis are seen as being fond of a little boy of the settlement who seems to be very intelligent and also quite prankish, we are on safe ground. Even if we take Krishna to be a young man in this episode, his words of advice to the Gopis seem more appropriate to an elderly cowherd of the Vrajabhumi. We often wonder whether there were two Krishnas—the cowherd boy and the Yadava prince who became the Pandavan ambassador—who merged as the Krishna that we know. Should we use the same logic and seek to trace the young lover Krishna and the sage guardian of social propriety in the *Bhagavata* presentation?

As far as the subsequent centuries are concerned Krishna's words have come true. Hearing about Krishna and singing about him has generated a "genuine spiritual love" in us. The *Bhagavata* author was no doubt writing from hindsight, for the Raslila's beginnings are lost in the folds of history. But what if? The *Bhagavata* itself celebrates the Raslila. The Gopis are chagrined that their beloved suddenly acts indifferent and tell him that Krishna remains their closest relative (*bandhurātma*). Their reply makes it clear that once a person is drawn away from material life as from a heap of baubles, there is no going back. Again, one wonders whether they are cowherdesses involved in the churning of curds and selling of milk or a group of spiritual aspirants. But Indian religion has never been a compartmentalised affair. This is a land where people *live* a life of spiritual yearnings while fully engaged in day-to-day life. Class and caste and gender have never been hurdles to spiritual life in India. Just as the Rishis of Vedic times were all family men, there were housewives in Upanishadic times who could give a lesson or two to aspirants. The student of the *Bhagavata* is not bothered about the capabilities of the cowherdesses talking high philosophy just as he finds it quite natural that a learned Rishi like Durvasa should be so full of curse-mouthed short temper. One may live the life on the externals but one may rely entirely on the help of the *ātma-bandhu* to cross the sea of *saṁsāra*. Krishna happens to be the *ātma-bandhu* of the Gopis and we hear in this beautiful pleading from them, the voice of the *Jivātman* anxious for union with the *Paramātman*.

The speech of the Gopis could be a summary of the entire corpus of hymns by the Alvars based on bridal mysticism. Nammalwar and others repeatedly refer to the sounds of Krishna's flute and the *divya maṅgala vigraha* of the Lord, the form that is not of the earth, the figure that is totally divine. It is this Image of the All-Auspicious Qualities that has drawn the cowherdesses to Krishna. It is the call of his flute that has brought them to him:

Seeing thy face surrounded by Thy frontal locks, Thy cheeks reflecting the brilliance of Thy earrings, Thy lips dripping honey, Thy glances accompanied by Thy sweet smile, Thy powerful arms that give relief from fear to all suppliants, and Thy chest that provides the sole sporting ground for Sri—attracted by all these have we become Thy handmaids.

What is indicated by the Alwars as a legend of a long time past remembered when worshipping the *archa* (idol) form of the Supreme in various temples, is made into a dramatic present by the *Bhagavata* as an event that is happening *now*. Probably this approach has misled poets and critics to associate the Ras with the worship of Eros. Again, the Ras experience may have been inspired by the Tamil Sangam epics like *Perunkathai* and *Jeevaka Chintamani* which pre-date the Alwars and have descriptions of temples to Kamadeva, Kama worship by girls desiring ideal husbands, and festivals associated with the temple. How do we get through the folds of history to the originating incident of Raslila?

Then, there are the embellishments. The Purana speaks of Krishna vanishing from the midst of Gopis and reappearing later. It would be wise not to get lost in tracing a logic in the evolution of Raslila or the logistics of the manner in which the Ras was danced. Though we have entered the twenty-first century, the Ras has endured as a symbol of the close relationship between the Deity and the devotee. That is all we seem to know and that is all we need to know. At any rate, that seems to be the judgement handed down by the genius of the common man. While we may discuss the Puranas academically, it is their *presence* that matters for the common man in this century. And what is this presence? It could be the Gopishwara Mandir in Brindavan which has a Shiva Lingam installed by Vajranabha millennia ago (so say the faithful, and why should our little minds contradict this statement in the name of myopic history?) to commemorate the manner in which with Krishna's permission Shiva dressed himself as a cowherdess and attended the Ras dance. Shiva in this temple is dressed in a colourful sari and is worshipped as Gopishwara. It is believed that Gopishwara's grace helps us attain the presence of Krishna. This is not unlike the lambent faith with which women today observe the Savitri *vrata* for the longevity of their husbands. I believe, therefore I am! *Credo, ergo sum!*

The belief does not stop with going round a temple and offering flowers and frankincense. One is amazed by the way generations after generations have been enthusiastically re-enacting the Ras. Apart from year-long productions, the season of Gokulashtami when Krishna's birthday is observed on the eighth day of the dark half of the month (*Krishna-paksha*) of Bhadra (August-September) is set apart for the presentation of the Raslila by traditional troupes. These dramas continue to be popular as the dramas are considered part of one's worship of Krishna.

Though there are inscriptions of Mathura going back several centuries which



speak of the enactment of the Ras, the Raslila drama as we know it seems to be less than five hundred years old, traceable to Krishnadeva Kaviraja's *Govinda Lilamruta*. According to Selina Thielemann:

The revival of the rasalila was undertaken by Narayana Bhatta, a Tailanga Brahman who belonged to a family of Madhvaite Vaisnavas from Madurai in Southern Tamil Nadu. Narayana Bhatta came to Vraja in 1545 A.D. and settled in Uncagaon near Barsana. He revitalised the rasalila tradition and established the troupes (*rasa mandalis*) consisting of child actors and musicians, as well as the typical outdoor stage, rasamandala. ...Other saints whose names are closely associated with this revival of rasalila in Vraja are Ghamandi Devacharya, Gopala Bhatta and the celebrated 16<sup>th</sup> century poet-musician Swami Haridasa.<sup>6</sup>

The childish pranks of Krishna form the subject matter of the Raslila performances, and there is plenty of guileless fun and laughter. The songs used by these performers are called *rasias*. They have a rural background in music. The vital centre remains in the Ras dance. There is a sense of ritual purity even about the actors (mostly children) and the musicians of whom the lead singer is the *Svami*. The troupe leaders are aware that presenting the Ras with Krishna, Radha and a number of Gopis is like walking on the razor's edge. A contemporary writer of *rasia*, Svami Fatekrishna Sharma says that he has given up writing poetry because he is not sure whether he can do justice to the spiritual content which has to pass through the material envelope of a sensuous portrayal:

The emotions are there within me, but someone among the audience may misunderstand and fall down according to his own *karma*. The *aṣṭayāma līlā*, too, is not meant to be shown before just anybody. Originally, we used to perform it behind closed doors, in the circle of saints vested with authority over it; apart from them, nobody else was allowed. This is what we Brjavis did in the beginning. Now the scene has opened up and the presentations take place in public, but as far as the underlying sentiments are concerned—I do not know, maybe only ten per cent of the spectators are able to comprehend, and without proper understanding of those emotions one ought not to watch the *līlā*.<sup>7</sup>

One can understand Fatekrishna Sharma's anguish, because it is not merely the religious setting of the Ras going public but the fact that a new garishness totally unrelated to the Indian tradition of focusing on the Lord's avatar tends to dilute the effect of "suspending one's disbelief". In this connection, the mere reading or exposition of the *Bhagavata* has scored very well and has maintained its high seriousness. The *saptāha* (seven days) phenomenon is an all-India presence and one has to listen to expounders of the Purana by devotee-scholars like Sri Purushottam



Goswami (Vrindavan) or Sri Sundar Kumar (Chennai) to realise the extent of involvement the audience brings to the story of Krishna. The continuing marvel is also due to the speaker's contemporaneous approach, relating the Puranic past with the historical present to great effect.

Even environmentally speaking, the Ras is a relevant togetherness of people gathered in friendship to nurture Mother Nature. There is Sri Sewak Saran who lives in Vrindavan waging a battle against the destruction of the groves in the area. To Sri Saran, Krishna is not merely a god, an idea; nor is the place where a Ras dance is performed, a mere area. The Ras is to be taken as the celebration of Nature, Krishna and Radha in the Rasmanadala are truly the presiding deities of the Prakriti Mandala. Speaking of the commendable work of Sri Saran, Swami Krishnananda says in his autobiography, *My Life* (2001):

Over the years Sewakji had studied the Vaishnava texts and developed a deep understanding of Vaishnava theology based around the Vrindavan tradition of devotion to Krishna and his female counterpart, Radharani. Together they are the presiding deities of the twelve forests of Vrindavan. Now he also began a thorough study of ecology and taught himself to be an environmentalist. He now interprets the worship of Radha-Krishna as a profoundly ecological basis for life and has formulated his own unique approach to the environmental problems of Vrindavan, which are similar to the problems faced almost everywhere in India and in much of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Swami Krishnananda then deals in detail with the “forest splendour” nurtured by our ancients as sacred groves to drive home the point that such forests provide the stepping stones, are a help for spiritual living. One is naturally reminded of the Mother's vision in giving prime importance to woods in Auroville, when Swami Krishnananda quotes from Sri Saran:

Sometimes human culture may not be in unison with the surroundings and it may have a harmful effect on nature. These days human beings have gone very much astray and are destroying nature: whenever nature stands in the way of what they want she is pushed aside. Such behaviour which is not in harmony with nature is not really human culture. In our Indian perception, *mānav* is a human being who perfectly respects nature and *dānav* is one who misuses nature. It is not wise to go against nature. History has shown that those cultures which are not respectful to nature do not last long: they bring about their own downfall. Vedic culture, on the other hand, has lasted for many thousands of years and is still visible even now. It is called ‘sanatan dharma’—the way of life which lasts for ever, self-perpetuating and regenerating.

Going back to the *Bhagavata*, we come across the life-giving spring of such

thoughts. The Pauranika takes joy in describing the fraternity of Gopis in Krishna's company as they dance. Krishna is seen to be with each of them, which must be assumed by us, for this is a presence invoked through his yogic power and is not to be confused with the physical and the vital as we encounter them on this earth. We are in the regions above the mind at this moment, pointedly noted by Sage Shuka who refers to Krishna as Yogeswara (*yogēśvareṇa kṛṣṇena*). The diction of music elevates the passage that describes the dance.

Lest the dance leave a big doubt in the minds of all the tomorrows, Parikshita questions the sage again when the Raslila is concluded with water-sports. Krishna is after all the builder of moral codes (*dharma setu*), then why this Ras which seems to transgress the moral code? Shuka's answer covers many points. One should not judge the life of the avatar as if he were an ordinary mortal, nor imitate the person with divine qualities even mentally (*manasāpi*). Can we drink a cup of poison because we have heard that Rudra quaffed the Halahala?

The teachings of great ones are true and fit to be followed by all. This is so in regard to some of their actions too. The intelligent man should follow only such of their actions as are consistent with their teachings. For these supermen, who are without the egoistic impulse 'I do' or 'I do not do', there is no self-interest—there is nothing to gain by right actions, and nothing to suffer from by the contrary.

According to Sage Shuka, the Ras is obviously a lesson in the universal presence of the Supreme for the cowherds never felt the absence of their wives. They found their wives at home all the time. Such is the significance of the term, "soul-togetherness". The call of the Jivatman to the Supreme had been heard and answered. What more need we to know?

The one Spirit that pervades the souls of these Gopis, their husbands and all other beings—that universal Witness has assumed the form of Krishna for the sake of sport. For the all-pervading Being, where is the distinction between one self and another, and how can any good or evil therefore accrue to him?

Earlier the Gopis had assured Krishna that it was not proper for him to speak in terms of human life. Surely he is not the son of Yashoda but the soul of all living beings!

*Na khalu gopikānandano bhūvanākhiladehināmantharātmadṛk.*

Away with all the questionings of the lower mind! Hold tightly the hand of Krishna dancing within us and drink from the springs of ananda-amrita, nectarean

joy! Do as the Pauranika commanded us a millennium ago: simply quaff this nectar of the *Bhagavata*! *Pibata bhāgavataṁ rasamālayam...*

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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### ‘The Way of the Heart’

*It is through a love and adoration of the All-Beautiful and All-Blissful, the All-Good, the True, the spiritual Reality of love, that the approach is made; the aesthetic and emotional parts join together to offer the soul, the life, the whole nature to that which they worship. This approach through adoration can get its full power and impetus only when the mind goes beyond impersonality to the awareness of a supreme Personal Being: then all becomes intense, vivid, concrete; the heart's emotion, feeling, spiritualised sense reach their absolute; an entire self-giving becomes possible, imperative. The nascent spiritual man makes his appearance in the emotional nature as the devotee, the bhakta; if, in addition, he becomes directly aware of his soul and its dictates, unites his emotional with his psychic personality and changes his life and vital parts by purity, God-ecstasy, the love of God and men and all creatures into a thing of spiritual beauty, full of divine light and good, he develops into the saint and reaches the highest inner experience and most considerable change of nature proper to this way of approach to the Divine Being.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 902-03)

# SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of July 2005)

SAVITRI is a creative power and a saving grace. A conscious surrender to the Light is the indispensable condition of progress, for the individual and the human race and she

Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.<sup>1</sup>

There are three protagonists and principal characters in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. The major protagonist is Savitri after whom the book is named. The second is Aswapathy, he personifies an aspiration, he is the father of Savitri and considered as the main character in the first half of the epic. The third protagonist is Satyavan.

In *The Book of the Divine Mother*, M. P. Pandit writes: "In the first part, [Sri Aurobindo] speaks of Aswapathy's Yoga, the Yoga of the King.... Aswapathy in the epic is the representative of the aspiring humanity who prepares and lays the path to the Divine Glory.... Aswapathy stands face to face with the Creatrix of the universe, the supreme Divine Mother, and prays to her fervently to manifest her glories on Earth. The Divine Grace takes birth as Savitri, daughter to King Aswapathy and with the birth of this Flame, things get moving.... Aswapathy has arrived at the overmental levels of existence and he embodies the consciousness of the One, which includes the many.... After describing the overwhelming experience of Aswapathy with the absolute stillness at the gates of the transcendent, the poet observes that that is not the Ultimate."<sup>2</sup>

Who was Aswapathy?

From the legend of the Mahabharata we have learnt that long ago Aswapathy was the king of Madra, a noble king and an ardent follower of Dharma, but he was issueless. He did very hard and arduous tapasya and performed many yajnas. As a result, by the Grace of Goddess Savitri, Savitri was born to queen Malavi. Sri Aurobindo explains that Savitri's birth was due to the world's desire:

A world's desire compelled her mortal birth.<sup>3</sup>

M. P. Pandit has explained the above line: "Savitri is not born, as the rest of us are, due to individual desire, individual initiative; it is a collective aspiration, an intensity of the need of a whole world that has called down Savitri. Implied in the statement is a spiritual truth that by sheer aspiration, by a call, it is possible to evoke the Higher Power to respond to us. Another implication: her *mortal* birth. A divine being like Savitri has many types of births; the birth or manifestation may be on any plane; a divine being can embody itself on the mind-plane and work there, or on the

life-plane and play its part. Mortal birth is a terrestrial birth accepting death, death being a characteristic of earth-life. There is no death on other planes. So that's the key sentence. And now he [Sri Aurobindo] explains how it has come to be."<sup>4</sup>

One in the front of the immemorial quest,  
 Protagonist of the mysterious play  
 In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms  
 And limits his eternity by the hours  
 And the blind Void struggles to live and see,  
 A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,  
 Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.<sup>5</sup>

Aswapathy's character depicted in the epic is not that of the "the sorrow-stricken King of the Mahabharata story, who performs austerities for the sake of having a child. Sri Aurobindo's Aswapathy is a seer-king, a representative and a leader of enlightened humanity."<sup>6</sup>

Sri Aurobindo composed:

A crown of the architecture of the worlds,  
 A mystery of married Earth and Heaven  
 Annexed divinity to the mortal scheme.<sup>7</sup>

He gives us a wonderful picture of man's growth from mental consciousness through various intermediate stages in order to tread the path of "...mystery of married Earth and Heaven"<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo himself has written in one of his letters in the year 1946 as follows:

Aswapathy's Yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as the individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother.<sup>9</sup>

Aswapathy was a protagonist who was "...in the front of the immemorial quest,"<sup>10</sup> but his birth was "a symbol and a sign".<sup>11</sup> "His human self" was "like a translucent cloak".<sup>12</sup> Aswapathy in the Mahabharata was a great king and yogi; in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* he is portrayed as

A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,...<sup>13</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has explained in his *Essays on the Gita* that “The seer of the vision is himself the protagonist, the representative of the battling soul of man who has to strike down tyrant and oppressive powers that stand in the path of his evolution and to establish and enjoy the kingdom of a higher right and nobler law of being.”<sup>14</sup>

Again Sri Aurobindo writes:

His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres  
Into our province of ephemeral sight,  
A colonist from immortality.<sup>15</sup>

Aswapathy felt that he himself was “A colonist from immortality.”<sup>16</sup> It is in his search for higher and spiritual experience “as eternity’s delegate”<sup>17</sup> that he feels that he is free from lower vital desires. He it was who

Brought down to earth’s dumb need her radiant power.<sup>18</sup>

M. P. Pandit says:

He [Aswapathy] was a colonist from immortality: though he came from the realm of immortals, he had chosen to live here, colonise this land of mortals. “A colonist”: One of the phrases which reflects the historical fact that ours has been an age of colonialism. The poet of an epic always captures the spirit and the temper of times, and preserves the terms of thought and key expressions which sum up the characteristic of his age. So when he [Sri Aurobindo] speaks of “A colonist from immortality”, the history of the last two centuries comes before our mind.<sup>19</sup>

Aswapathy is a traveller from one plane to another plane where he witnesses cosmic evolution.

It is worth quoting in this connection a passage from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine*:

...from the point of view of the ascent of consciousness from our mind upwards through a rising series of dynamic powers by which it can sublimate itself, the gradation can be resolved into a stairway of four main ascents, each with its high level of fulfilment. These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuition into Overmind and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis.<sup>20</sup>

We quote a significant passage from *Savitri*, verses referring to these supernal planes:

A vision came of higher realms than ours,  
 A consciousness of brighter fields and skies,  
 Of beings less circumscribed than brief-lived men  
 And subtler bodies than these passing frames,  
 Objects too fine for our material grasp,  
 Acts vibrant with a superhuman light...<sup>21</sup>

Aswapathy “Arrives on the frontiers of eternity.”<sup>22</sup> His heart seems to be smitten by a “beam of the Eternal”<sup>23</sup> and his mind wants to ascend Infinity. When he succeeds in realising his aspiration, then the Divine begins to work in him:

A static Oneness and dynamic Power  
 Descend in him, the integral Godhead’s seals...<sup>24</sup>

Sri Aurobindo gives a harmonising vision of the One in All of the above passage in *The Synthesis of Yoga* where he says this about the One in All:

The one secure and all-reconciling truth which is the very foundation of the universe is this that life is the manifestation of an uncreated Self and Spirit, and the key to life’s hidden secret is the true relation of this Spirit with its own created existences.<sup>25</sup>

Aswapathy found then the whole movement of cosmic vision. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The Craftsman of the magic stuff of self  
 Who labours at his high and difficult plan  
 In the wide workshop of the wonderful world,  
 Modelled in inward Time his rhythmic parts.  
 Then came the abrupt transcendent miracle:  
 The masked Immaculate Grandeur could outline,  
 At travail in the occult womb of life,  
 His dreamed magnificence of things to be.  
 A crown of the architecture of the worlds,  
 A mystery of married Earth and Heaven  
 Annexed divinity to the mortal scheme.  
 A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time.<sup>26</sup>

He saw the vision of divine life on earth and henceforth he became a seer, and he knew that he was here as a “shining Guest of Time” from eternity, whose mind

was “like a fire assailing heaven”.<sup>27</sup> This line is used by seer-poets of Veda to invoke the presence of Agni: “Crown must thou the guest shining with light, the Male of the Sun-world, the Priest of Man’s invocation who makes perfect the Rite of the Path. Crown with your acts of purification the Seer whose speech has its home in the Light, the Carrier of offerings, the Traveller, the Godhead of Fire.”<sup>28</sup>

Then comes Aswapathy’s release:

The island ego joined its continent.<sup>29</sup>

“The liberated eye does not lay undue stress on the perversion and imperfection, but is able to see all with a complete love and charity in the heart, a complete understanding in the intelligence, a complete equality in the spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

Humanity framed his movements less and less;  
A greater being saw a greater world.<sup>31</sup>

He could hear the secret voice. About that voice Sri Aurobindo has explained:

The voice came of a truth submerged, unknown  
That flows beneath the cosmic surfaces,  
Only mid an omniscient silence heard,  
Held by intuitive heart and secret sense.<sup>32</sup>

He heard the secret Voice, the Word that knows,  
And saw the secret face that is our own.  
The inner planes uncovered their crystal doors;  
Strange powers and influences touched his life.<sup>33</sup>

He came in contact with the occult planes of consciousness which are different from the physical consciousness of earth. His consciousness widened out in the cosmic plane and he travelled from plane to plane till he crossed beyond into the world where there is no form. There he found that the whole world became One, he felt everything as a realm of knowledge where the internality of calm can prevail:

While there, one can be wider than the world;  
While there, one is one’s own infinity.<sup>34</sup>

With this experience Aswapathy entered a still consciousness that retains the eternal peace He saw from the height of his spiritual consciousness, a new self-creation where he found that:



A transfiguration in the mystic depths,  
 A happier cosmic working could begin  
 And fashion the world-shape in him anew,  
 God found in Nature, Nature fulfilled in God.<sup>35</sup>

How was Aswapathy released from the Ignorance?

A vision lightened on the viewless heights,  
 A wisdom illumined from the voiceless depths:  
 A deeper interpretation greatened Truth,  
 A grand reversal of the Night and Day;  
 All the world's values changed heightening life's aim,...<sup>36</sup>

An intuitive knowledge came to him. He realised a divine presence and greatness everywhere, "a living movement of the body of God."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, he was released from the ignorance:

Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's.<sup>38</sup>

M. P. Pandit says: "His days are indeed lonely, uncompanioned; for there is none to share his life at his high level. And yet, like the days of the sun who shines from far above, they are glorious, splendid."<sup>39</sup>

In Canto Three Aswapathy ascends to the fields above and has a preliminary view of the realms of the Absolute.

NILIMA DAS

(To be continued)

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## NAVANIT STORIES

### YOGIC LIFE

SHIVJIBHAI, who never stayed anywhere for more than two days, returned to Bombay, after nine months in Pondicherry. Intrigued, his friends came to see him. “Is it true you stayed there so long?”

“Yes.... But those nine months were shorter than nine days!”

“Amazing... incredible.... But what does Sri Aurobindo do there?”

“Oh, that is what you want to know? And you believe *me* to be capable of telling *you* that? Bhogis wanting to possess the inscrutable knowledge of the *chinmaya* activities of the *chidambara svarupa* of Yogis? You realise what you are asking?

“From its dank murky well, a toad is asking a raindrop to describe the infinite, *amritamaya*, flame-burnished Ocean that is Yogeshwara Sri Aurobindo! Neither can it comprehend it nor the raindrop dare attempt it. What can one, stuck in mires of lust, understand of the uninhibited soaring bird? Can those lost in Darkness, imagine the incandescent Supramental Sun, speeding in its boundless Skies of Consciousness? Rejoicing in its petty grain of sand, can a microscopic life-form conceive of a Super-conscious Being in whose breast are established the Eternal and Infinite Existences? Can a heart lost in the ceaseless memory of a Love showering nectar at every breath, describe it to those living in an atmosphere of jealousy and hatred? Would they even believe it? That which is glimpsed only after steadfast service and worship, that realising which, one experiences utter fulfilment, it is an embodiment of that Divine Light, *Aishvarya*, Greatness, you seem to touch when you stand before Sri Aurobindo.

“How ridiculous for bhogis to wish to understand such a Yogi! Yoga can only be understood by doing yoga, not by continuing to dwell in bhoga. Can mud ever know the thousand-petalled lotus that grows out of it? Where stands the lowly dirt of slush, and where *aravinda*, the source of mystic Beauty, overflowing with Nectar, cradling dawns upon dawns on its immaculate petals?

“Can we bhogis ever understand the life of a Yogi? Let me give an illustration:

“A baby goat once went to a pond. Just as it bent its head to drink the water, a fish put its head out. The goat was aghast:

“‘Oh, what are you doing in the water? Quick, jump out before you die; how will you survive in water!’

“‘I am perfectly all right. I was born in water and will continue to live here. But how can you survive out of water? It is you who will die if you don’t jump in with me!’

“Just then a pigeon flew over them. The two creatures were struck dumb. ‘And what are you doing up there? Come down quickly or you will fall down and kill yourself!’ they cried out.

“The pigeon smiled. ‘Don’t worry. Flying is most natural to me.’ The fish asked,

‘What? Is there any water up there?’ And the goat, ‘But how can you place your feet there, I don’t see any ground up there?’

“‘True. There’s no water here, no piece of solid ground. Only pure, life-giving air,’ explained the bird. ‘But you need wings to fly up here, to adventure in this boundless space. And to explore the superskies high above this space one needs wings made of stars....’

“You see now? The life of a yogi is perhaps something like that, way beyond our comprehension. We bhogis are stuck in our petty puddles and holes, our eyes shut, we know only our darknesses. Ever hungry for the fruits of desire we are bound to misfortunes. How shall we understand the Soul living on luminous fruits of Nectar, how shall we know of its activities? One has to become a yogi oneself: live in purity, knowledge, freedom, immortality, then alone can one hope to understand a Yogi’s life.”

PUJALAL

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

*Can a Muthu [the local sweeper] or a sadhak be ever a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised?*

“What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu!”

“...to open to the higher consciousness is what is wanted, not to become a Sri Aurobindo or equal to the Mother.”

Sri Aurobindo

(Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, 1983, pp.139-140)

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*“Everyone who is turned to the Mother is doing my Yoga. It is a great mistake to suppose that one can “do” the Purnayoga, i.e. carry out and fulfil all the sides of the Yoga by one’s own effort. No human being can do that.... It is a mistake also to have the ambition to be a big Purna Yogi or a supramental being and ask oneself how far have I got towards that. The right attitude is to be devoted and given to the Mother and to wish to be whatever she wants you to be. The rest is for the Mother to decide and do in you.”*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Champaklal Speaks*, 2004, p. 334)