

New Race

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New Race

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From the Editor's Desk...

A Reflection on Contemporary Art...

“Art should never degrade itself to the low level of the general public’s use or understanding. It is they who ought to be raised to the level of necessary health and plenitude where art is meant for the wise and the strong.” ... “The future of India will look at the world with the vision of Truth and create anew” said Nandalal Bose, one of the great exponents of Bengal school of Art. Do we actually see his prophetic vision coming true? Have we raised ourselves to the level of Art or have we brought the Art to such a level where everyone calls him/herself an artist without knowing what is expected of him/her. Unlike the Greeks who assigned Art the function of schooling the adults, Indian Art always emphasized on that which would take artist as well as the aesthete a little deeper than the appearance.

It is indeed sad to see the nature of Art that is emerging these days. Anything in the name of abstract Art, anything that does not make sense makes beautiful Art! Perhaps it reflects the inner chaos of the Artist; the inner poverty to see beauty in colour and form. Form may not be required or necessary, but Art, even if abstract, could have a harmonious play of colours. Truly, it is said that Art reflects life. In this age when our lives are almost directionless and our mental, emotional and physical beings most disorganized, the Art thus created could not be expected to be harmonious.

However, this chaos does not lead us to conclude that Art would always remain so disharmonious and dark. Perhaps in its evolutionary curve it would degrade further before it takes a deeper spiritual turn. For even now it is portraying the truth of our present consciousness and when humanity turns more and more spiritual, its expression in Art, Literature and all other forms would reflect his/her inner true self. It is a cyclic movement now in which there is an acute downgrading of everything, later, along with the rise of consciousness in general humanity Art would also rise.

A few evidences of this evolutionary cycle may be seen in the contemporary paintings of Sri Krishna which have transcended the affectation and ornamentation but have captured the soothing and meditating poise of the Lord. Such paintings contain simple lines and curves with minimal use of colours but they convey the inner quietude. They are more suggestive than imposing. Art in future is expected to be more and more subjective and suggestive. It may have to go through the outer paraphernalia of presenting the commercial attitude of the society even towards Art. Yet there is a hope, the lines of which are quite clear that the greater dawn of Art is just across the horizon. It remains with each artist how soon he reaches that zenith and expresses it.

Shruti

TRUTH



He from whom all beings originate, by whom all this universe is pervaded, by worshiping Him by his own work, a man reacheth perfection.

(Bhagvad Gita, 18:46)

THE OBJECT OF OUR YOGA

Sri Aurobindo

The object of our Yoga is self-perfection, not self-annulment. There are two paths set for the feet of the Yogin, withdrawal from the universe and perfection in the Universe; the first comes by asceticism, the second is effected by tapasya; the first receives us when we lose God in Existence, the second is attained when we fulfil existence in God. Let ours be the path of perfection, not of abandonment; let our aim be victory in the battle, not the escape from all conflict.

Buddha and Shankara supposed the world to be radically false and miserable; therefore escape from the world was to them the only wisdom. But this world is Brahman, the world is God, the world is Satyam, the world is Ananda; it is our misreading of the world through mental egoism that is a falsehood and our wrong relation with God in the world that is a misery. There is no other falsity and no other cause of sorrow.

God created the world in Himself through Maya; but the Vedic meaning of Maya is not illusion, it is wisdom, knowledge, capacity, wide extension in consciousness. Prajna prasrita purani. Omnipotent Wisdom created the world, it is not the organised blunder of some Infinite Dreamer; omniscient Power manifests or conceals it in Itself or Its own delight, it is not a bondage imposed by His own ignorance on the free and absolute Brahman.

If the world were Brahman's self-imposed nightmare, to awake from it would be the natural and only goal of our supreme endeavour; or if life in the world were irrevocably bound to misery, a means of escape from this bondage would be the sole secret worth discovering. But perfect truth in world-existence is possible, for God here sees all things with the eye of truth; and perfect bliss in the world is possible, for God enjoys all things with the sense of unalloyed freedom. We also can enjoy this truth and bliss, called by the Veda amritam, Immortality, if by casting away our egoistic existence into perfect unity with His being we consent to receive the divine perception and the divine freedom.

The world is a movement of God in His own being; we are the centres and knots of divine consciousness which sum up and support the processes of His movement. The world is His play with His own self-conscious delight, He who alone exists, infinite, free and perfect; we are the self-multiplications of that conscious delight, thrown out into being to be His playmates. The world is a formula, a rhythm, a symbol-system expressing God to Himself in His own consciousness, it has no material existence but exists only in His consciousness and self-expression; we, like God, are in our inward being That which is expressed, but in our outward being terms of that formula, notes of that rhythm, symbols of that system. Let us lead forward God's movement, play out His play, work out His formula, execute His harmony, express Him through ourselves in His system. This is our joy and our self-fulfilment; to this end we who transcend & exceed the universe, have entered into universe-existence.

Perfection has to be worked out, harmony has to be accomplished. Imperfection, limitation, death, grief, ignorance, matter, are only the first terms of the formula - unintelligible till we have worked out the wider terms and reinterpreted the formula; they are the initial discords of the musician's tuning. Out of imperfection we have to construct perfection, out of limitation to discover infinity, out of death to find immortality, out of grief to recover divine bliss, out of ignorance to rescue divine self-knowledge, out of matter to reveal Spirit. To work out this end for ourselves and for humanity is the object of our Yogic practice.

(CWSA 12: 96)

PREPARING FOR THE NEW CREATION

The Mother

August 30, 1969

I spent a good part of the night (almost the whole night till 3 in the morning) with Sri Aurobindo, and he not only showed me and explained to me, but he himself WAS what he was showing me: he was preparing himself for the new creation. And last night he told me, he showed me how this or that thing would be, how the body would be. I remember that when I woke up, he was lying down on a bed, I was kneeling beside the bed, looking at him, and while he was that new body, he at the same time explained to me how the superman's body would be (the supramental being). And it was so living that even when I woke up, it remained - I can still see it. But the details ... (how can I put it?) the memory doesn't have the precision that enables it to explain (I don't know how to put it). I still have the vision ... it had a color ... it wasn't casting rays of light, not that, but ... and not luminescent like an object, but with a special luminosity which had that light... a little like Auroville's flower (but it wasn't like that, it looked perfectly natural). He was showing me his body; he was lying down, and showing me his body, saying, "Here is how it is." The form was almost the same, with some ... I still have the memory there (*gesture in the atmosphere*), but I don't know how to explain ... Lately, I had been wondering, "It's odd, we don't at all know how it [the new body] will be." And I was saying to myself, "There's no one to tell me." Because this Consciousness that came, it acts through the consciousness, but not so much through the vision. So then, I had that last night. For a long, long time I was with Sri Aurobindo, a long time, for hours. It has entered the consciousness, it will come out again one day. But I kept the memory of the last thing: I saw myself, I was in two places at the same time (and maybe I too wasn't quite as I am, but that didn't interest me: I was looking at him, who was lying down and explaining to me), and it was ... it was the same thing as a luminescent body, but it wasn't luminescent, it was ... if I am not mistaken, it was the color of this sari (*Mother points to Sujata's sari*), something like that.

Orange?

No ... It's a pink with a golden glow, you understand. So the two are seen together, like this (*gesture of fusing together*).

(long silence)

(*Satprem speaks of advising someone to use the inner means of the future to remove old structures*)

Yes, that's right.

Ah, I had an experience like that (I don't know if it was this morning or yesterday morning or in the night, but anyway). For some time, I was in a consciousness in which the separate individuality no longer existed, but the principle ... (how should I put it?) the particular principle of each individual persisted in the universal Consciousness. And then, *mon petit*, everything became so marvelous! .. It lasted maybe for an hour a little more or a little less, I don't know, but anyway long enough to .. (Mother smiles), I mean, to lounge in it. There was no more, NO MORE separation, that had disappeared, but a certain ... (how to explain?), almost like an outlook; each individual's outlook (not just the outlook, but at the same time the stand in action - "stand," that is, the part of the action initiated by that outlook),

that persisted. It persisted in the One - no separation. And then, each tiling has its own place v, h the whole marvelously effective. At the same time I can't say, words are impotent, At the time of the experience, I remembered a sentence of Sri Aurobindo in which he said that in the end, the Lord is only a child at play (you know it, he put it in a certain way, and I understood WHY he used those words, it was t was something... which our language obviously can't formulate, but to LIVE in that, to live that is . you understand, it's the impression of so, so perfect an omnipotence, so harmonious, and at the same time, yes, so harmonious that it's all smiling. ["What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden."] It's inexpressible. Inexpressible. I had the experience, then it went away It got mixed up with the daily work.

And I remember .. It's interesting because while I was in that state, I remembered the question you'd asked me about Pavitra, whether the principle of individuality persists [after death]; so something in me said to you, "Now you see. it's like this!" I remembered your question, I said, "It's like this, there is NO MORE separation, but... but this marvel of complexity remains - the marvel of a complexity." And the impression is that everything, but everything that is has its own place, but when it's in its place, then it's perfectly harmonious.

Oh, it was... it was a real revelation.

I think all those experiences are part of the consciousness of the supermind, the superman (what name will he give himself? We don't know).

It was this morning, after my night with Sri Aurobindo, and it was there (Mother points to her bathroom). I was doing something else, but it doesn't matter in the least - the marvelous thing is that those experiences don't demand that all the rest should stand still! They come, you can go on doing something, and at the same time you see yourself doing it, it's quite funny ... It was this morning (not long ago). I had a beginning of it yesterday, then the night's experience, and then this morning ...

Well, that's worth living.

The impression is, "Yes, this is life! This is something." All the rest is ... All the rest, even the body, constantly feels as if it's knocking against obstacles: lack of understanding, unresponsive things. It constantly feels it's knocking about like that, and then, there you are this (*vast, all-encompassing gesture*).

Well, a being who lives constantly in that state ... And I saw, I told you, I saw: the body was doing something else, that's no hindrance - no hindrance. You see, I was even able to remember something you had said. All of it together.

Maybe that's how the superman will be? ...

(silence)

He will have a power to change life.

(*Mother's Yoga, Volume Two: 160*)

SAVITRI – SOME CLARIFICATIONS

(An Unpublished Letter of Amal Kiran written to a friend)

Amal Kiran

Your letter of 29.5.91 is both practical poetic or rather poetically practical. It says:

“Does any Ashramite suffer from insomnia? Then I have a prescription—let him sing in chorus with Savitri’s Satyavan:

The moonbeams’ silver ecstasy at night

Kissed my dim lids to sleep.....

Let him also repeat in his inmost heart that Mantra from the same poem:

He is silence watching in the stars at night.

A double mystery is evoked here—at the same time far above and near at hand below. Not only are the two locations linked by the in-drawing words “silence” and “sleep”. What is below is also affined to what is above by the image of upward rising earth: “hills”. But the double mystery remains unresolved, unidentified. To whom does the twofold state belong? The first mode of it—

The silence that is in the starry sky— gets a revelatory answer in Sri Aurobindo’s suggestion of a supreme Being in the nocturnal darkness with the lines:

He is silence watching in the stars at night.

Immediately we are led to intuit that the entrancing Anon here of Wordsworth is the same “Presence” who is elsewhere said by him to be “interfused” with all things and

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

Your last letter- 8.9.91- of the old bunch ends with words: “I am going to finish *Savitri*.” Well, can we ever do such thing? There are various senses in which *Savitri* can never be finished. My mind harks back to Sri Aurobindo’s letter to Nirodbaran (29.3.36): “*Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative.” Before this statement we read: “I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint.” I am sure that if Sri Aurobindo had not left his body on December 5, 1950, he would have gone on revising his epic or at least adding to it. Both procedures would have been followed in regard to the part with which you will be finishing your reading of *Savitri*—namely, “Epilogue: The return to Earth.” A good portion of it comes from an early draft. And a few things in it pose problems which I would like to set before you.

But first let me dwell a little on the fact that we are driven by the very nature of *Savitri* to read it again and never getting finished with it. Sri Aurobindo sought to make it a creation of the highest plane of inspiration available to man: what he termed the Overmind, home of the poetry that embodies a seeing and a hearing which, whatever be the subject, reveals in all images and

rhythms a sense of the infinite, the Eternal, the Divine. To share in this sense the reader has to develop his consciousness. The practice of yoga is, of course, the most direct means, but it is also a rather difficult process. We Aurobindonians have to essay the difficulties. Still, it is not necessary to complete our Yogic carriers before we can take advantage of a literary Yogic masterpiece like *Savitri*. *Savitri* offers the chance for a course of what I may call “aesthetic Yoga”. If we hush the ordinary noises of our brains, imagine that we have no top to our heads but are open to a vastness above them, and then read the epic audibly so as to allow its sound to aid what our sight takes in from the printed page, then we shall be on the way to doing “aesthetic Yoga”. The spiritual visions and vibrations caught by Sri Aurobindo in his pentameters which seek to bring

A gate of dreams a jar on mystery's verge

Or convey

A wisdom-cry from rapt transcendences

Refine, deepen, widen our beings more and more with each new reading of

The lines that tear the veil from Deity's face.

Now to the Epilogue's problems. A dictated page—a speech of Savitri to Satyavan- has the verses:

Look round thee and behold, glad and unchanged

Our home, this forest with its thousand cries

And the whisper of the wind among the leaves

And, through rifts in emerald scene, the evening sky,

God's canopy of blue sheltering our lives.....(pg 717-18)

It is possible that what has been taken as a noun- ‘scene’- is the past participle “seen” misheard during the dictation. Then the sense would be: “the evening sky seen through rifts in emerald.” The noun “emerald” would stand for “greenness” (here the “leaves” which form a network with “rifts” in it.) Interestingly, Sri Aurobindo has such a usage elsewhere in *Savitri*. On page 390 he speaks of the various moods in which “Earth” shows herself. One of them is her woodland aspect-

The shaggy emerald of her centaur mane,

Followed by her aspect of sky:

The gold and sapphire of her warmth and blaze.

The likelihood of this reading seems enhanced by some lines at the very start of the Epilogue where an equivalent of the sense of “seen” is found:

Peering through an emerald lattice-window of leaves,

In indolent skies reclined, the thinning day

Turned to its slow fall into evening's peace.

But admittedly, here the adjectival “emerald” sends some credence to the other reading.

A little before the “scene/seen” passage we have another bit of ambivalence. Look at the end of this passage spoken by Satyavan:

“Whence hast thou brought me captive back, love-chained.....

For surely I have travelled in strange worlds

By thee companioned, a pursuing spirit,

Together we have disdained the gates of night.

*I have turned away from the celestials' joy
And heaven's insufficient without thee.*

As these lines too were dictated, it is, in the first place, doubtful whether the apostrophe in “celestials’” is properly put. Shouldn’t it be after the s thus “celestials’ joy”? The change would be easily granted, but a real crux comes with the next apostrophe- in ‘heaven’s’. with the apostrophe retained, we have two possible readings. One would take “joy”? as understood after the word, giving us the meaning: “I have turned away from the celestials’ joy and heaven’s joy (which is/are) insufficient without Thee.” The alternative reading would make “heaven’s” a contraction for “heaven is”. This would make the expression extremely romantic. One would hesitate to see anything possibly replacing it. But two points face the romantic interpretation. The “And” at the beginning of the line is rather inconsequential. As a summing up of Satyavan’s mind and heart after his turning away from the “celestials’ joy” we would expect “For”. Again, isn’t the present tense- “heaven is”- somewhat out of place? The entire passage has the past perfect: “Whence hast thou brought me”- “I have travelled’- “We have disdained”- “I have turned away”. What may seem romantically felicitous may not be dramatically so. The sudden present could be felt like a sore thumb sticking out. To end the line with dramatic relevance we would have to drop the apostrophe altogether and make the line a continuation of what has gone before, thus:

And heaven's insufficient without thee.

Then there is a turning away Satyavan from all celestials’ joy and all paradisaal states which are insufficient without Savitri. Essentially, this does not negate the romantic touch but, instead of letting it stand forth, it weaves it as a dramatic element into the general trend of the discourse. That way the mind has more satisfaction, but to the heart there is a loss and the sheer poetic thrill gets subdued.

On p. 719 comes a challenge in dictation which most readers of *Savitri* would try to avoid. We have the lines, addressed by Savitri to Satyavan:

*Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth:
Our bodies need each other in the same last;
Still in our breasts repeat heavenly secret rhythm
Our human heart-beats passionately close.*

That “last” has no meaning in this context. The only possible correction is “lust”. The general support for it is the non-cancellation of our earth by “Heaven’s touch”. The particular support is in the next two lines which, by the way, are to be construed with an eye to the plural verb “repeat”: “Still our human heart-beats passionately close repeat in our breasts heavenly secret rhythm.” But how shall we reconcile ourselves to that word which occurs fifteen times in *Savitri* and everywhere with a vicious meaning? I believe we have to remember what Sri Aurobindo replied to Dilip Kumar Roy when the latter asked how Rama could be an Avatar when Valmiki attributes *Kama* (Lust) to him. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that an Avatar need not come as a Yogi. Rama was an exemplar of the enlightened ethical mind and he functioned as an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal husband, an ideal warrior and finally an ideal king. As an ideal husband he must necessarily have *Kama*, for no sexual relationship between him and his wife would be possible without it. Just because in their relevant contexts the word “lust” occurring fifteen times before the Epilogue had evil associations, it is not inevitable that the identical word in relation to Savitri and Satyavan should have the same bearing. They being physical wife and husband with passionately close human heart-beats would naturally experience lust but with

new associations proper to the wonderful woman and the marvelous man that they were.

Now I come to a challenge in verbal construction on p. 722. Satyavan's parents have arrived with a royal retinue in search of the missing son and daughter-in-law. They rushed first to the former:

*And the swift parents hurrying to their child,—
Their cause of life now who had given him breath,—
Possessed him with their arms....*

How would you explicate the second line? What does the relative pronoun "who" refer to? Here is a Latinised construction. "Their" = "Of them". The relative pronoun "who" goes with the understood "them". And the sense is, in reference to Satyavan, that the thought of him as dead had drained life out of his mother and father but the discovery of him as not dead has saved them from their death-like condition. "He is now the cause of the life of them who once gave him life's breath."

One more question and I am done. Before the whole party went their way home from the forest, one who seemed a priest and sage wants to draw from Savitri for the good of the world's future some guide-lines won by her from her wonderful experiences. She, longing to mother them by uniting their life with her own, replies:

*"Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage."*

What does the past participle "Awakened" go with? Who has had the awakening? Surely the "I" of the last line and surely the truth known or sought is couched in the second line. So I am inclined to reduce the statement thus to prose order: "All the truth that I, awakened to the meaning of my heart, know or seek, O sage, is that to feel love and oneness is to live and this (is) the magic of our golden change."

Perhaps I should terminate my letter by telling you that you have come to the termination of *Savitri* in the Centenary Edition by having read 23,803 lines.

With my love

Amal.

Soul in the Ignorance

**Soul in the Ignorance, wake from its stupor.
Flake of the world-fire, spark of Divinity,
Lift up thy mind and thy heart into glory.
Sun in the darkness, recover thy lustre.**

**One, universal, ensphering creation,
Wheeling no more with inconscient Nature,
Feel thyself God-born, know thyself deathless.
Timeless return to thy immortal existence.**

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 2: 577)

A CHAT WITH NIRODBARAN

(Transcription of a Conversation with Nirod-Da on 7.3.1999)

Ananda Reddy

One day he walked in, while I was taking a class on Savitri at the Hall of Harmony, and quietly sat opposite me. For a while I could not believe my eyes. But, as I was reading Savitri, I could not afford any break of neither any acknowledgement or gratitude. I felt within a great elation, a tremor of joy caught my mind. I felt he was like a bridge between the past and the present, between Sri Aurobindo and myself. He who had taken down dictation of innumerable verses of Savitri from the very Seer-Poet Sri Aurobindo was now here in my class! Silently, I sent my deep gratitude to Him for having sent Nirod-da to my class!

The next day Nirod-da came to my class on The Life Divine. He was very happy with my classes, shook hands with me and showered on me his cryptic praises, almost putting me to embarrassment.

Thus began a new bond between us. He came regularly to my classes and even to my special talks that I had started giving before the major darshans of February and August. He tried to concentrate on the deep metaphysical thought of the books that I had taken up for the classes. But, after a few months he told me that as the acoustics of the Hall was not very good, he could not understand me properly. He tried sitting just next to me, near the loud speaker, right in front of me – but no position seemed to have satisfied him. So, one day, he asked me if I could spare some time and go to his room in the ashram for explaining to him the main thought of The Life Divine! I felt nervous in the beginning but then I thought that it was a great opportunity to go closer to him and to learn from him more about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So, I took up the opportunity and started going to him twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, at 8.30 a.m. We sat in the adjacent room for our classes and I tried my best to make myself clear to him.

His great zeal and enthusiasm to learn afresh The Life Divine was itself something that humbled me. At such an advanced age to have such a deep love of knowledge was something I could not even imagine.

However, unfortunately, this private classes did not last long as I was often called out for lecture tours. But the few classes I have had were very memorable ones.

As was my habit, I carried my audio-record player to a few of the classes, thinking that in case Nirod-da wanted me to repeat any chapter, I could easily give the cassette of that particular class so that he could listen to it at his convenience. In fact, he did the same with a few of my The Life Divine classes that I had held at the Hall of Harmony. It seems he used to play them in his room upstairs, near Sri Aurobindo's room, and listen to them repeatedly.

Well, in one of the classes, the conversation became a serious one and fortunately it was all recorded on my audio-tape. It is from this tape that the following edited transcripts are reproduced for the benefit of the readers. We get here a glimpse into Nirod-da's sadhana, something that could be useful to many sadhaks of Integral Yoga.

Nirod-da: I have seen many phases, many periods of our sadhana. What according to you is the way our yoga is going? In which direction?

Ananda: How can I comment on such a deep subject? I am no one to pass any judgement. But, as you are asking, I may venture to say that we are at present in the vital-physical level.

N. : What further do you see?

A. : In the light of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, I guess it is a step before we reach the level of Matter. I mean there is a kind of cleansing of the vital on the global level – not just the vital, but the vital-physical. Then the next step would be the pure physical.

Although with some individuals the work on the physical has already started, the work in general seems to be on the vital-physical consciousness. That is where the work seems to be concentrated. That is my impression seeing several incidents and happenings around the world. The Mother's working seems to be on that level. On the individual level one cannot say but on the general level we could say that that is where the central work is going on. I don't know... it is my wild guess...

On a smaller scale, some spiritual pockets are being prepared to receive the New Consciousness. There is always a hierarchy in these matters – while the general work is going on on a certain level, smaller groups work on a higher level while individuals work on a still higher level leading the way. This is what I gather from my readings of Sri Aurobindo.

N. : Yes, yes.

A. : There are these avant-garde movements.

N. : Is there a transformation?

A. : “Transformation” is too big a word for me to gauge. I have no clue about it. But again, based on my reading of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, I could say that the work on the physical-consciousness in some individuals seems to be continuing. A focussed work directly on the physical – yes, in some it seems to be there.

But certainly the work on the vital-physical is quite a universal movement. No country or culture seems to have escaped its grip. It seems as if all are pushed into it for a certain purpose of cleansing.

N. : What will be the result of this work on this level?

A. : You are asking me things of which I have no idea. But, thanks to the Mother's grace I have understood their main ideas. In the light of this philosophy what may happen is that before the Supramental consciousness can establish itself in the physical, the vital-physical has to be cleansed. The establishment of the supramental in the physical may take a long long time.

There is already an influence of the New Consciousness in the elite human mental consciousness. Humanity in its awakened and higher consciousness seems to have accepted the New Consciousness though without knowing its source or name. That, of course, does not matter, I suppose.

N. : What is this New Consciousness? Is it the Supermind?

A. : Definitely it is the Supramental Consciousness, but not yet in its full intensity. There is an opening in the elite human consciousness towards this higher Consciousness beyond mind.

- N. : Opening beyond the Mind? Higher Mind? Upwards?
- A. : Yes, beyond the Mind and upwards. There are lots of snatches of a higher intuition revealing the New Consciousness – many persons in the West and East are getting these intuitions. Having opened the Mind, the New Consciousness seems to have gone down into the vital and the vital-physical – trying to establish itself there.
- N. : Is it the Supramental Force?
- A. : How can I judge? Only they can say. But, somehow I feel that it has to be the Supramental Force as no other Force could do such a work.
- N. : So, the supramental Force is active at present?
- A. : One could say so, if I can gauge correctly. I feel it like that from my recent experiences in the world trip when I had gone round both East and West giving lectures on Sri Aurobindo's thought.
- N. : That is why I have called you.
- A. : I think this trip has definitely opened my eyes. In and corners of different countries, things seem to be happening that are indicative of the working of the New Consciousness. There is definitely a new thinking which was not there before.
- N. : Nolinida had once told me. I had come at a time when the work is in the subconscious.
- A. : I heard you say this to someone else also.
- N. : Then, how do you connect that with what you are telling now?
- A. : Again a very difficult question. It is beyond my capacity to answer it. But if I have to answer, I can base myself on my readings and venture to say that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have already done their work on the different levels up to the subconscious wherein they have planted the Supramental Consciousness. Now, humanity is getting the results of that work. Thanks to them that the Mind of representative humanity has opened to the Supramental – at to some degree; thanks to them that the vital-physical is undergoing the necessary cleansing – all the disturbance and the violence etc. are only part of the global cleansing. And thanks to them that the work on the subconscious level too will be taken up. It may also mean lot more of calamities and destruction in the world because as we go down the ladder of consciousness, it may also be that there will be a greater resistance. We cannot at this point fix any time factor for these changes, but, inwardly I am confident that their work is proceeding very rapidly.
- N. : Remember, what you had told me after the Mother passing away – that their work had come to be suspended?
- A. : Yes, that was very long back. But now...
- N. : It looks you have changed your stand now. Is it?
- A. : Yes, Nirod-da. Now not only have I changed my view but I have now a greater conviction. At that time it was more an emotional and sentimental reaction to the shock I had when she passed away. I had not understood then. Today my deeper convictions and beliefs are completely different.
- N. : Good, good. And you have done much work after that.

- A. : Yes. It has helped me immensely in my convictions. All these classes and the assignments abroad...
- N. : It is very obvious that there is a change in you.
- A. : Yes, my whole being has changed.
- N. : Now, going back – the Subconscious too has to change...
- A. : Yes, but this work is not yet on the mass level, is it not?
- N. : Of course not.
- A. : When that happens may be the world would be in greater doldrums, I guess.
- N. : These two things are different – the vital-physical and the subconscious. Is it not?
- A. : If I have understood rightly they are different. Working on the Subconscious would be a much darker expression of mankind.
- N. : Then, after the vital-physical, once again one has to work on the Subconscious. They had said that the work is going on there.
- A. : Now, I suppose humanity has to do its work. Their work is done. They have already done - They have already done their work in the subconscious. But what They have done has to take effect in humanity.
- N. : Naturally.
- A. : That way we could say that They have done the work, but the work itself is not yet complete. Now for humanity The earth consciousness to receive it – that depends on the time factor. It is now for us to receive them – to be open to Their working. It'll be some time before the work is completed. But the process is already there as I see from my lecture tours..

What I see in the last few years is the rapidity of the Movement. I've been going out from 90s onward...

- N. : That's why I am asking you...
- A. : In the last eighteen years, I have seen the rapidity of the Movement that's going on. And my world-trip in 1998 was an eye-opener.
- N. : That's what I thought. Where did you see the changes?
- A. : I see that particularly in North America. There I do feel a positive opening. But, the work on the vital-physical is there all over. And when I analyse the American situation, I feel this opening is due to the absence of their cultural roots whereas Europe is stuck in its past very much, and are therefore slower in their opening. Not hooked to the past, North America could take to Sri Aurobindo and the New Light much faster.

Whereas in India, the picture is a bit different. As we have strong ancient roots, the shaking up is harder here.

- N. : What is harder?
- A. : Because we are so much grounded in the past, the shaking up of the social consciousness has

to be much deeper. And, that is what is happening here – with all the problems of violence, corruption, etc.

But as She seems to have chosen India as the battlefield of the Future, the shaking up is much harder here. This kind of a pulverisation on all different levels is not found always in Europe; it is comparatively a much smoother social life. One who is chosen has to go through harder work, a much harder tapasya. India seems to be going through that harder tapasya.

N. : The resistance, obstructions that we see here, in India, is it not there in the West?

A. : Not in this scale. North America does not have the weight of its cultural past. So, they are opening up more quickly and they may even seem apparently more advanced than other countries in catching up with the new light. Ultimately, India will overtake but that will be much later.

But, I am not disturbed by the things that are happening here in India. I know what Sri Aurobindo has said, and I have faith that things will happen the way he has said. It is now only a period of transition and now we are a part of this disturbing transition. We shall go through. Deeper down, I know that He, Sri Aurobindo, is doing the work.

In Europe, in the vital-physical level the work seems to be going on. But there seems to be no such shake-up there. It is like in the fable of the Vamana Avatar who had come to destroy the mental civilisation – Europe is such a continent of the mental civilisation: all seems to be going well on the surface. So, there doesn't seem to be a violent shake-up there of the social consciousness.

At the same time there Mind is open to the New, they seem to be moving in the right direction, like the European Union, without having to suffer much. But vis a vis, the Aurobindonean movement, there the work is slow and nothing much seems to be happening there.

In the Far East, that is the most difficult block to penetrate because of Buddhism and its different seats. It may take very many decades before they can open to Sri Aurobindo.

N. : They are rooted in their old culture?

A. : Not only in the culture, but in the old forms of Buddhism. There seems to be a marriage of convenience between Buddhism and Materialism. There seems to be the support of Buddhism for enhancing Materialism – to support the Materialistic ideology. So, why should they denounce Buddhism which is helping their materialistic ends?

Unless and until there is a big shake-up on the Materialistic philosophy they may not feel the need to turn to something new – in thought and consciousness.

In India, thanks to Sri Shankaracharya, the negative influence of Buddhism was cut to its limits and spirituality was allowed to flow uninterruptedly.

That is why, there is hardly any centre of Sri Aurobindo in the East, except, of course in Singapore, where again almost all the members are from Indian origin. Other countries – Japan, China, etc. have hardly any of our centres I think.

N. : Very interesting.

A visitor enters Nirod-da's room. The conversation takes a different turn.

- M. : You take wonderful classes of *The Life Divine*. You have inherited it from your father, I suppose.
- A. : It is not only inheritance but also a lot of reading and preparation goes into the classes that I take here.
- N. : It is like giving examination! (*laughter*)
- A. : I read not only from *The Life Divine* but also from other books of Sri Aurobindo. Each book throws light on the other. Just reading *The Life Divine* may not help – a complimentary reading is necessary, I suppose. A parallel reading is needed.
- N. : I see you take lot of water during your classes!
- A. : Yes, my throat gets dry because of the continuous talking.
- N. : Nadkarni too takes in details *Savitri*. He is more general in his explanation. In his own line he is very fine.
- M. : His explanations carry more of worldly experience. He refers to day to day things.
- N. : Your explanations of *Savitri* are more philosophic. The way you give the deeper explanations, he avoids. Naturally. Because his audience may find it boring or not able to understand.
- A. : And also they come from outside and all may not be well-tuned to this philosophy.
- N. : Yes. So, he is very good for them.
- A. : I have now started classes at Auroville too. I go there every Wednesday and take *The Life Divine* classes.
- N. : How many persons come to your classes?
- A. : First day about 20 persons came. The news will spread slowly by word of mouth, they said.
- N. : They need it very badly. When I went I had to tell them what is yoga. That is needed there.
- A. : A small serious group seems to be coming up. So, I felt that I should respond to their need.
- N. : I see. I see. You can do that well. I can't do that. Arindam is too high; and it is difficult for him to go and his English is not clearly understood by these people. You are the best for them.
- I too started here. But I can't go deep.
- M. : We did *Essays on the Gita* with him.
- N. : But now I can't do all that. Somebody here was a learned man – he tried to teach me. But I couldn't respond.
- A. : My cassettes on 'The Mother', that you had heard, are getting a good response.
- N. : Which ones?
- A. : The four talks that I had given on the Triple Poise of the Mother.
- N. : Yes. They were very fine.
- Well, what I was asking was – is the work on both the Subconscient and the vital-physical going on?
- A. : I guess it is, Nirod-da.

- N. : But, here are we making progress? In general, in the Ashram? What do you think?
- A. : About the Ashram, *you* should be telling me! Not I to you!
- N. : Ashram is in a very peculiar condition now. I am using a term – my own invention, not Sri Aurobindo's: there is a Divine Anarchy here!
- A. : Yes! You had told that at Auroville also!
- N. : Divine Anarchy! Ha! So, I don't know it. Since you raise a question, I would like to hear your appreciation of our condition here. After Sri Aurobindo's passing and the Mother's passing, Nolinida said very clearly there will be no... ascent or descent. That has stopped. In our mind, our experience, every one of the difficulties I am passing through, I don't get any response. Positive response. Sometimes, some touch of force etc. Otherwise, flat! I don't know how you feel about it.
- There are other young people also... for instance, your team – X, she is very receptive. She says as soon as I go to the Samadhi, there is a downpour of force etc.
- I don't get any. That in a way makes me... you understand. So, what is happening?
- A. : Well, I feel that in the Ashram – there is a kind of a lull, and, although some individuals are being prepared, but, on the general level, we have almost come to the common human level – that is, the human being who looks after his own food, shelter and comfort. But, definitely the availability of the Force is much more intense for those who really want to feel it.
- But because of the general Tamas of the whole situation, it is hard to...
- N. : That is the trouble with me: the tamas. I have no inclination to do anything, no study etc. I have to force myself a lot... and even then the response that I need I don't get.
- A. : Maybe as Nolinida said, there may be not the ascent and the descent, but, I feel that strong inward pull. And the road inward is much easier than that of the ascent and the descent. It is much clearer, easier, more available.
- So, we also don't try those ascents or descents... well... you know what I mean. But, definitely, for those of us who want to go within, the path is much easier. This path is so very smoothed out... if there is a little bit of an aspiration and an attempt, this inwardness seems to have become the order of the day for the seeker, especially.
- Under the layer of the tamasic lull, the inner sources, the doors seem to be open. We may not be able to go upwards, but, the inward route is much open. And my personal experience is also the same.
- N. : You've got some, my friend, my boy. You're occupied with that being. You have to prepare that being.
- In my case, due to old age or whatever it is, I am not yet – I am trying to prepare now – the background philosophy etc. etc. At one time, I thought that I'll study now, I've got a chance, so on and so forth. But it remains to be seen if... to tell you honestly there is that, as you say, the darkness... sometimes I feel very heavy, the tamas, that is the word. Tamas I had from before; I have tried to throw it out... I was so depressed, "go away" etc. Formerly, I had strength etc. Now that also is less. That is the problem.
- So, as you say, I agree with you. But, interest in life is missing.

- A. : I do the studies very religiously because I know this is also my safeguard.
- N. : Very very right.
- A. : So, for me it is both: the path and the safety. Otherwise we can all fall into the lull of the tamas.
- N. : Yes! Yes! It is very fine.
- A. : So, I feel the Mother has blessed me with both these things.
- N. : It is very much so.
- A. : So, I know that the more I am in contact with Their books, talks etc. I feel much more protected.
- N. : That's excellent.
- A. : Otherwise we could be pulled by the tamas easily. That's how I take my work.
- N. : I wanted to tell you that... if you can help me... that is the main thing... with the work I am doing. Particularly, their work is going on... I am taking only 3 classes of young people.
- A. : But, this question of...
- N. : At another time, I was writing. But now, that is gone. I have nothing to write about. Nothing to talk about, nor to write about! What were you saying?
- A. : Don't you feel – that your contacts with the Mother and Master, in all these years, established in the Psychic Being – that the psychic contact is very alive...
- N. : Then there is no question.
- A. : I mean you can really dip into it... Whenever you are in this mood?
- N. : There is no question. As I said, I try... it is a trial, an attempt, an aspiration, as you say. But tamas is prominent.
- A. : There are also two types of tamas, I feel. Tamas of consciousness and tamas of the body. Maybe because of your age there is a dullness in the body, you see you are ninety-six...
- N. : Both of them, you're right. At times I'm very careless about taking bath etc... What does it matter!? Tamas of the body is there.
- I am going to your talks mainly because I can use my time here – I get something now... which I have not done... Which I could not do...
- A. : But the psychic must have established itself with all the sadhana that you have gone through. You has such intense period of sadhana...
- N. : When Sri Aurobindo was there, when Mother was there, there was no question. And I was writing etc.... Now, all that detail work is gone. Speaking work also is gone. So practically no occupation. That is the main thing. And the physical also is becoming now... weak.
- One way there is a difference between Amal and me. Somehow, he also has now no writing. But he has now achieved... he has a very strong will, what you call an equipoise... He is not disturbed. I have not reached yet that stage. To remain all the time undisturbed. He has no many guests either;

he does not read all the time. But he is not disturbed.

A. : And also he is very joyous, I have seen, whenever we go to him, there is a tremendous joy.

N. : Yes, that is what I am saying. I am trying to have that.

A. : But in you, we see a marked change; there a vibration of love. We feel in you a vibration of love.

N. : You are right. That is coming now. I find it. It was not there before.

A. : Very easily we can note that. Yesterday, in the class when I was telling about love in sadhana, I had you in my mind. You and Amal etc. I had seen this aspect with Nolinida also. Towards his later years, there was a very distinct vibration of love.

N. : He told me: "I am trying to open now, my love. I am trying that." Exactly. That comes. That last element is coming.

A. : Very positively, it is there now.

N. : I am trying to... I feel it... some equality and sense of love and affection – that is coming. So, I am glad to see here that you have found it.

A. : Well, I don't mention it in the classes, but, that's very obvious. All these observations help me in my own teaching in the classes.

N. : Yes.

A. : How a sadhaks goes forward and then things happen. I have been close with Nolinida, with you, with Amal, with Pranabda... all the senior sadhaks... Champaklalji and I watch in them the outer progress, changes. The inner progress we don't know. But even the external manifestations of all of you... I see that there is always a culmination in the love aspect.

N. : Yes, that is opening in everyone.

A. : I would like to request you to write a paragraph on my cassettes on the Mother. I am planning to release them in the form of a booklet. If you could write a paragraph...

N. : No... I've forgotten everything. That's the problem. Otherwise, certainly I would have... I have forgotten everything. If you bring me what you have said, then I can write.

A. : No problem. That's O.K. I am happy that you have...

N. : I forget everything.

Now, I suppose you're in Kuruchikuppam. You go by your car?

A. : I come by scooter. Next week I'll take you to the Research Centre.

N. : Yes, I would like to.

A. : Morning, are you normally available after 10.30 or so?

N. : Normally. Because in the morning, three days I have classes. So, after 10.30 a.m. I am available.

A. : One day, I'll bring my car and then take you...

N. : Yes, yes, I'll come.

I feel a bigger question. I'll ask you later ... about the Lord. His passing is not yet clear to me. That is a big question still in me.

A. : Yes, we'll sit again for it. It is a very interesting question. Then you would have the same question about the passing of the Mother also, is it not?

N. : No, not much... Unless it is connected with it. Certainly it is connected with it... Why Mother said I'll go away! That I can't...

A. : But, it is Sri Aurobindo who had said I'll go away!

Yes, one has to go.

N. : Why that question came to Sri Aurobindo? I don't know. That is a very very serious question. In that connection, as you are saying... How far Sri Aurobindo went in his Sadhana... sacrificing so much... that is a question that is still an enigma. How, to explain along with his yoga... that much he has done... there are details which still I cannot explain. As he had said, you won't understand. It is too deep. Too deep... too deep...

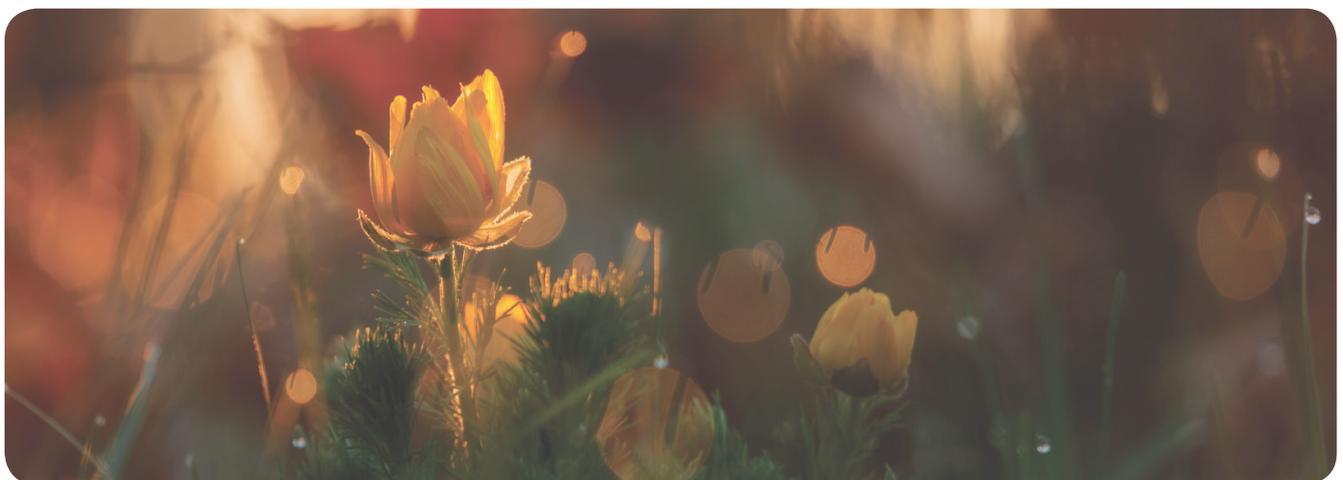
I'll let you know also.

You are doing Their work... I am happy that you're... I don't know about you three... What is his name.. Mr. Y what is his line of action? He also seems to be a good speaker. But his last talk... There are some mistakes there Mr. H has done. Sri Aurobindo didn't take any medicine... didn't try to save himself... it is all not true. He has not still read our book, the last book.

Sri Aurobindo told us ... Sanyal... He told about the problem. He said, you positively see I'll now cure myself! Very clearly. "I'll cure myself. I'm free!" He asked me to give him the report... After that... something happened. Something happened. Indifference...

Another day we'll see...

(Nirod-da has seen this transcript and approved it for publication)



THE UNIVERSAL FORCE OF LOVE

(A letter from Albert Einstein to his Daughter)

In the late 1980s, Lieserl, the daughter of the famous genius, donated 1,400 letters, written by Einstein, to the Hebrew University, with orders not to publish their contents until two decades after his death. This is one of them, for Lieserl Einstein.

“When I proposed the theory of relativity, very few understood me, and what I will reveal now to transmit to mankind will also collide with the misunderstanding and prejudice in the world.

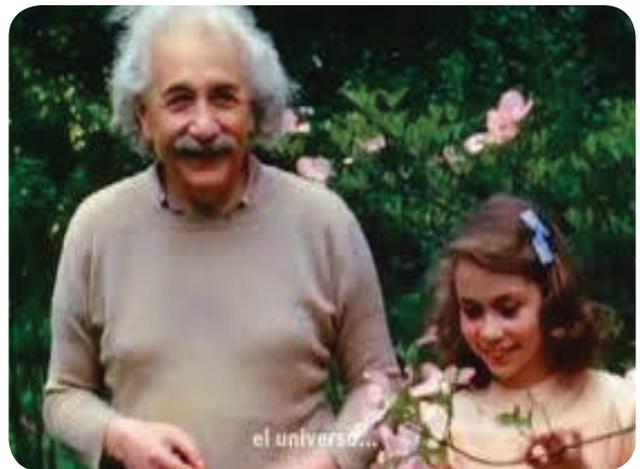
I ask you to guard the letters as long as necessary, years, decades, until society is advanced enough to accept what I will explain below.

There is an extremely powerful force that, so far, science has not found a formal explanation to. It is a force that includes and governs all others, and is even behind any phenomenon operating in the universe and has not yet been identified by us. This universal force is LOVE.

When scientists looked for a unified theory of the universe they forgot the most powerful unseen force. Love is Light, that enlightens those who give and receive it. Love is gravity, because it makes some people feel attracted to others. Love is power, because it multiplies the best we have, and allows humanity not to be extinguished in their blind selfishness. Love unfolds and reveals. For love we live and die. Love is God and God is Love.

This force explains everything and gives meaning to life. This is the variable that we have ignored for too long, maybe because we are afraid of love because it is the only energy in the universe that man has not learned to drive at will.

To give visibility to love, I made a simple substitution in my most famous equation. If instead of $E = mc^2$, we accept that the energy to heal the world can be obtained through love multiplied by the speed of light squared, we arrive at the conclusion that love is the most powerful force there is, because it has no limits.



After the failure of humanity in the use and control of the other forces of the universe that have turned against us, it is urgent that we nourish ourselves with another kind of energy...

If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer.

Perhaps we are not yet ready to make a bomb of love, a device powerful enough to entirely destroy the hate, selfishness and greed that devastate the planet.

However, each individual carries within them a small but powerful generator of love whose energy is waiting to be released.

When we learn to give and receive this universal energy, dear Lieserl, we will have affirmed that love conquers all, is able to transcend everything and anything, because love is the quintessence of life.

I deeply regret not having been able to express what is in my heart, which has quietly beaten for you all my life. Maybe it's too late to apologize, but as time is relative, I need to tell you that I love you and thanks to you I have reached the ultimate answer!".

Your father, Albert Einstein

(<https://wearelightbeings.wordpress.com/2015/04/15/a-letter-from-albert-einstein-to-his-daughter-about-the-universal-force-which-is-love/>)

DISCOVERIES OF SCIENCE

I saw the electric stream on which is run
The world turned motes and spark-whirls of a Light,
A Fire of which the nebula and sun
Are glints and flame-drops, scattered, eremite;

And veiled by viewless Light worked other Powers,
An Air of movement endless, unbegun,
Expanding and contracting in Time's hours
And the intangible ether of the One.

The surface finds, the screen-phenomenon,
Are Nature's offered ransom, while behind
Her occult mysteries lie safe, unknown,
From the crude handling of the empiric Mind.

Our truths discovered are but dust and trace
Of the eternal Energy in her race.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, CWSA Vol. 2: 596)

BEAUTY AND DELIGHT



Beauty is Ananda taking form—but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul. What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one. (14 March 1933)

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 27: 700)

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

Beloo Mehra

Has it ever happened to you?

That you happen to see a picture, somewhere, perhaps in a book, in someone's house, a shop, or somewhere on the net while surfing, and you just find yourself in a quiet awe. Your eyes just stay glued to the picture, but more likely travel through the picture to someplace else, something else, often without your immediate awareness.

Or how about this? That you find yourself listening to a piece of music, either on radio, television, or perhaps coming from a neighbour's house and it is as if you are transported to some other place altogether. It is not a personal memory or a personal emotion that the music brings upon you, but something perhaps un-nameable. At least at the moment when it happens.

Only later, after the immediateness of the experience passes away and you come back to your ordinary awareness you probably ask yourself – what was that? What was it about that picture? Was it saying something to me? What was special about that music? Where did it take me? How? Why? Maybe you also tell yourself – what does it matter why? Or what? The truth of the experience remains, the questions are perhaps immaterial.

Now imagine, if these things were to happen together. When one experience builds upon another, the time gap between the experiences does not matter. The different experiences or memories of the experiences come together not really because of any effort of yours, but simply because beauty too seeks beauty, delight too recalls delight.

When a picture you see reminds you of some music, or when a piece of music you hear takes you to the experience of seeing that picture – maybe long, long ago, maybe only yesterday. Beauty seeks beauty, delight seeks delight.

When a picture searches for its music, or a piece of music finds its right picture, the result is a magical experience of Light and Sound. Of Beauty and Delight.

This is an example of such an experience.

Yes, this is a write-up to experience, not only to read.

*The moment of the experience is one thing and the expression of this experience is another.
(The Mother, CWM, Vol. 8, p. 322)*

I think at various points in our lives we have all heard the sounds of silence. But have you heard silence speak like this?

[Jon Hassell, Album: Last night the moon came dropping its clothes in the street](#)
[Track: Blue Period and Light on the Water](#)

Jon Hassell, the American trumpet player and composer, gives a whole new sound to the silences in this piece of music. Don't you think so?

I was first introduced to his music through a World Music collaboration he had done about 15

years ago with the noted Indian *bansuri* player [Pandit Ronu Majumdar](#) and American guitarist [Ry cooder](#). That album, titled [Hollow Bamboo](#) is a must-listen for all world music lovers.

But let's come back to the music for today. Listen to the sounds of silence in this piece of music.

...if you want to listen to music, you must create an absolute silence in your head, you must not follow or accept a single thought, and must be entirely concentrated, like a sort of screen which receives, without movement or noise, the vibration of the music. That is the only way, there is no other, the only way of hearing music and understanding it. (The Mother, CWM, Vol 8, pp. 235-236)

Listen to it again. And again. Experience the music.

Can you feel the silence entering into you, deep? Doesn't it smoothly take you into that silent space where you are alone with yourself? Does it sound mysterious, hypnotic, a bit haunting even, but in a positive sense of the word?

"...what I mean is that there is an inner condition in which the external form is not the most important thing; it is the origin of the music, the inspiration from beyond, which is important; it is not purely the sounds, it is what the sounds express." (The Mother, CWM, Vol. 5, p. 69)

Let the experience assimilate in you. Sit in silence. Let the silence the music led you to get deeper. Deeper. Let the moments go by...silently, quietly.

Do you recall the sounds of the music? Or the sounds of the silence perhaps?

What do these sounds express for you?

For me, the sounds also express what I see being expressed in this picture below:



Photograph by Marataeman, [Source](#)

I can't tell you how many times in the last year or so, ever since I stumbled upon this picture on the net, I have found myself in a state of 'silent awe' when gazing at it for a few minutes. It is not even an

awe, it is more of a listening, actually. Yes, the picture seems to be speaking of silence. There is something so inviting in this picture, something so quietly and silently inviting. Perhaps an invitation into the world of silence, into the sounds and sights of silence.

Kind of like the music by Jon Hassell.

...when you have an experience, you must never, during the period of the experience, try to understand what it is, for you immediately cause it to vanish, or you deform it and take away its purity... (The Mother, CWM, Vol. 8, p. 236)

This one image and what it did for me made me curious enough to look up some more work by this brilliant photographer, and I find almost all of it so amazingly beautiful in its quiet grandeur and embracing vastness. Take a look, [here](#) and [here](#).

I am always awed by the beauty of the experience, of the moment when sounds and sights come together in such perfect harmony. Such perfect silence.

DIVINE SIGHT

**Each sight is now immortal with Thy bliss:
My soul through the rapt eyes has come to see;
A veil is rent and they no more can miss
The miracle of Thy world-epiphany.
Into an ecstasy of vision caught
Each natural object is of Thee a part,
A rapture-symbol from Thy substance wrought,
A poem shaped in Beauty's living heart,
A master-work of colour and design,
A mighty sweetness borne on grandeur's wings;
A burdened wonder of significant line
Reveals itself in even commonest things.
All forms are Thy dream-dialect of delight,
O Absolute, O vivid Infinite.**

(Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, CWSA Vol. 2: 263)

NATURE IN MEDITATION



Deepshikha Reddy

BLACK STORM

Ananda Reddy

The termagant winds,
Delicate limbs swelled with power,
Drunken Emperor roamed apterous,
and roared.

Flung – cloud upon cloud
till the sun and moon
turned into greylight and blacklight –
and revelled.

Hurled – lighting, thunder
until the black vault
was a broken web of lightings:
Silence struck.

Pandemonium burst:
Earth was ribbed with blood –
blood of birds and trees and rocks.
No Mountain on the tip.

Black sounds flamed wrath,
uprooting buck's bowels –
dug deep into Time's centre.
A gush of fire-water surprised:
the roar turned into a smile.

An apostate of colours,
earth lay as an aquarelle;
and the arabesque sky
shook itself into the azure.
My eyes closed in prayerful silence.

(25-06-1979)

BAJI PRABHOU: ITS POETIC STRENGTH AND BEAUTY

Shruti Bidwaikar

Baji Prabhau was “conceived and written in Bengal during the period of political activity” wrote Sri Aurobindo. (*Collected Poems*, CWSA 2: 704) “It is granite in its suggestion of strength and at the same time as brightly flexible and resonant as a Damascus blade. It is founded on the historical incident of the tremendous self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhau Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji’s retreat held the fort of Rangana for over two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls” (*Sri Aurobindo the Poet*, 17) writes K.D. Sethna in his introductory remarks in his analysis of the long poem. This granite strength in the poem is not all that easy to achieve by. It is only the deft hand of the seer-poet who could translate the intensity of the patriotic fervor into rhythm. For Sri Aurobindo himself observes the difficulty:

...patriotic poetry, war poetry or poetry of the occasion and the moment are so difficult to write greatly and, although it would seem that these things are among the most dynamic and should move most easily to powerful utterance, are oftenest poor in poetic substance and inferior in value. For life they may be dynamic, but they are not so readily dynamic for art and poetry, and precisely because the vital interest, the life attraction is so strong that it is difficult to draw back from the external to the spiritual delight and the spiritual significance. (CWSA 26:261)

This patriotic narrative has not only been able to capture the vitality of a valiant soldier but has transcended it and assimilated a deeper spiritual philosophy and ideal. It is this ideal, this “spirit” added to “life” that gives the desired intensity to the poem. In fact, there are two main streams running parallel – one the war, chivalry, gallantry of Baji Prabhau which is intensified with images and description of the harsh nature. Second is the ideal that Shivaji, the king has set before his countrymen: the ideal to fight for the nation with the strength of God. In its spirit it is a war poetry, vividly describing each and every move of the Moghuls to defeat Shivaji. The Rajputs, Pathans etc, with their might launch successive attacks on the Maratha soldiers and the latter defend their land with equal strength. This picture is portrayed so dramatically that the reader gets arrested in its description. One is led to think of the craftsmanship and command of Sri Aurobindo not only in the imagination of the war scene but also of the usage of the war vocabulary. However, the ideal is what lingers on the minds after the reading of the poem. The practice of Bhagvad Gita which was taught to Shivaji by his spiritual mentors also seems to have influenced a few of his warriors; it is amply reflected in Baji’s attitude towards life and war. The poem also seizes us with the warrior’s faith in Bhavani and the conviction that the Divine Mother will make them Her instruments in the war. Therefore *Baji Prabhau* is not only the story of Baji alone. It speaks of Shivaji, his ideal, Baji, his patriotism and Sri Aurobindo who like his characters in the poem, has himself lived them.

The description of the weather in the opening lines of the poem would at once affect the readers for its horrendous and uninhabitable condition.

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up
Longing for water in the courses parched

Of streams long dead. Nature and man alike,
Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,
Sought an escape from that wide trance of heat.

It is in this torturous state that the war would take place. The time when this battle at the Ghodkind pass was fought is said to be July 1660. During this period of the year the Sahyadri Mountains are barren. They radiate heat as they are rocky and dry. Raigad (where the Shivaji's fort is located) being on the leeward side receives rains much later than the seaward side. Therefore, even in July the mountain range is still dry and hot. Sri Aurobindo had lived and travelled through Maharashtra many a time. He was aware of the weather conditions of this area and would have experienced the heat of those barren mountains many times. It is with his experience that he describes the parched land, the "brilliant sun" and its "tyrant glare".

Experientially, it is a horrifying but poetically it befits the demand of the poem. In one of his letters, addressing the use of the horrendous and ugly as the material of poem Sri Aurobindo wrote, "a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the guna, the rasa which it was meant to embody" (CWSA 27: 702). This poem too successfully uses the horrors of war and weather to create the *bhayanaka* (horror) rasa. In fact there are a few rasas that mark the poem – *bhayanak*, *raudra* (chivalrous), *adbhuta* (surprise/ wonder), *karuna* (compassion) and *shanta* (peace). The *bhayanak* and *adbhuta* are almost interwoven, whereas *veer* and *raudra* strike us wherever Baji comes into the scene. *Karuna* and *shanta* rasas are evoked when Shivaji's unsaid feelings for his Motherland and Baji Prabhou calls for a silent tribute.

Bhayanaka and Adbhuta

Usually *adbhuta* by its very use in poetry is likely to arouse a pleasant surprise but if we go just by larger connotation of the word, we realize that all that is unknown, unexpected and makes our brows rise or hearts sink is indeed *adbhuta*, is surprising from the poetic viewpoint. In this poem a horrifying description is always coupled with a surprising imagery. Therefore, we may cite examples which present both these rasas quite effectively and they are almost always mutually inclusive. Phrases like "noon of Deccan", "tyrant glare", "longing for water", "Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky" "slaying heat" immediately bring to us the horrors of the weather that we have already discussed above. Here "brilliant" may have been used to give the effect of both the torturous and the marvellous. The term "bronze" at once reminds of the "copper sky" described by Coleridge in "The Rime of Ancient Mariner" which describes the terrifying conditions of the still sea. Both the terms "brilliant" and "bronze" heighten the impact of the heat which makes it unbearable and unimaginable.

At last they reached a tiger-throated gorge
Upon the way to Raigurh. Narrowing there
The hills draw close, and their forbidding cliffs
Threaten the prone incline. The Bhonsle paused,
His fiery glance travelled in one swift gyre
Hill, gorge and valley and with speed returned
Mightily like an eagle on the wing
To a dark youth beside him, Malsure
The younger, with his bright and burning eyes,

Who wordless rode quivering, as on the leash;
His fierce heart hungered for the rear, where Death
Was singing mid the laughter of the swords.

These lines again call our attention to the horror of the terrain and make us wonder at the faculties of war of Shivaji and Baji. Shivaji himself explains the horror of this “tiger-throated gorge”

...Thou seest this gorge
Narrow and fell and gleaming like the throat
Of some huge tiger, with its rocky fangs
Agrin for food: and though the lower slope
Descends too gently, yet with roots and stones
It is hampered, and the higher prone descent
Impregnably forbids assault; too steep
The sides for any to ascend and shoot
From vantage....



Tiger-throated gorge

The horrors of a jungle are synonymous with the roar of the tiger. A tiger invokes mortal fear and at the same time an awe for this ferocious but beautiful animal. The description of the gorge as being “tiger-throated” speaks much more than just the geographical make-up of the place. The poet has used it purposely to arouse fear and wonder.

To describe the immensity of destructive force of Baji’s wrath in the war, Sri Aurobindo uses the image of the destructive waves.

Ever foremost where men fought,
Was Baji Prabhou seen, like a wild wave
Of onset or a cliff against the surge.

Then

Towards him singling out the lofty crest,
The princely form: and, as the waves divide
Before a driving keel, the battle so
Before him parted, till he neared, he slew.

The tidal waves are again those wonderful phenomena of nature which invoke beauty and terror at once. It is always beautiful to see a rising wave but its rise is directly proportional to its destructive capacity. It almost appears like the beauty that destroys. The sight to watch a warrior like Baji Prabhou fight would be instantly awe inspiring but it is as horrifying as a wave as he was like a “wild-wave” engulfing his enemies. Interestingly, Sri Aurobindo has used waves, sea, river and clouds in different forms to create an atmosphere and magnify the intensity of war. These images quite prominently recur throughout the poem. For instance, “still the sea/ Of men bore onward” and “till like a bank/ Of some wild river the assault collapsed”, and yet again the nature of Baji’s slaying “as a knife cuts instantly its way//Through water”, with such an ease the men were put to death.

Active they thronged
Humming like bees and stung strong lives to death

Making a holiday of carnage.

Here is another image; the attack of the humming bees which one cannot escape. Such was the attack by the Maratha Battalion. They swarmed like the bees whose combs are struck by a stone and their house endangered. Another phrase “holiday of carnage” evokes horror to the marrow. It is intriguing and poetically pleasing to read this phrase, for it is paradoxical. Paradox however, evokes the widest imagination possible and that is the reason Isha Upanishad is so very intriguing, interesting and yet gripping. For it is through paradoxes that the idea is suggested. The idea of holiday is suggestive of something more relaxing, soothing and a day when one follows one’s hobbies at which one is interested; but a hobby of slaughter! It also suggests the deftness of the warriors. Like the bees skilled at protecting their home and following one’s hobbies on a holiday, the soldiers are trained in protecting their land. Therefore, this slaughter has the deftness as well the interest of the warriors to save their motherland.

It is not only through the help of nature that Sri Aurobindo evokes horror and wonder but also by the live description of death in the war. Here is the example,

They came, they died; still on the previous dead
 New dead fell thickening. Yet by paces slow
 The lines advanced with labour infinite
 And merciless expense of valiant men.
 For even as the slopes were filled and held,
 Still the velocity and lethal range
 Increased of the Mahratta bullets; dead
 Rather than living held the conquered slope,—
 The living who, half-broken, paused.

And

...there for a while
 A slaughter grim went on and all the verge
 Was heaped and walled and thickly fortified
 With splendid bodies.
 Similarly, when Baji is wounded,
 By his side fell fast
 Mahratta and Mogul and on his limbs
 The swords drank blood, a single redness grew
 His body, yet he fought. Then at his side
 Ghastly with wounds and in his fiery eyes
 Death...

These lines speak for themselves, the chivalry of Baji and his battalion and the death scenes of the war. A close reading of the poem gives instances of many more lines of such horrific description but for the paucity of space it is not possible to cite them all here.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry itself is a source of amazement and joy. It was indeed a pleasant discovery to read in the poem how Sri Aurobindo gives us the sense of time. The time from when Shivaji realizes the necessity of the war in the gorge because of the Moghul advances and the time at which the war starts and

ends are all wonderfully suggested just by the position of sun.

Dawn,

At morning when the sun
Was yet below the verge, the Bhonsle sprang
At a high mountain fortress...

Afternoon,

...then where the sun in fire
Descending stooped

Dusk,

And from time to time the gaze
Of Baji sought the ever-sinking sun.

Evening,

But when the sun dipped very low, a stir
Was felt far off

Night,

Bright in the glory of the sinking sun
A jewelled aigrette blazed.

It is the great craftsmanship of the poet who suggests the time by the position of the sun and not by the setting darkness. Similarly, the rapidity and speed of lines and the placement of words which K.D. Sethna has discussed in detail arouse the wonder of the poet that Sri Aurobindo is.

Shanta and Karuna

There are many instances in the poem that speak of the expectant silence before the lethal storms rage in. It surely creates peace, but peace which is rather disturbing than soothing. However, here are a few examples in which the silence is expansive and deepening. It does not make one restless but speaks volumes about Shivaji's character. In fact this character is also reflected by the Nature.

And the Chief
With a high calmness in his shining look,
"We part, O friend, but meet again we must,
When from our tasks released we both shall run
Like children to our Mother's clasp."
.....
Baji and his Mahrattas sole remained
Watched by the mountains in the silent gorge.

In these lines the silent strength of Shivaji is as if transferred to the Mountains and they remain the silent witness of the sacrifice and strength of Baji and his men. In the end, when Baji lay dead, Shivaji is once again quiet, his heart full of gratitude and compassion and pride for his great friend and child of the motherland. Baji whose corpse speaks the story of his bravery and the dead bodies in the gorge narrate his efforts to save his motherland.

But Shivaji beside the dead beheld
A dim and mighty cloud that held a sword

And in its other hand, where once the head
 Depended bleeding, raised the turban bright
 From Baji's brows, still glittering with its gems,
 And placed it on the chief's. But as it rose
 Blood-stained with the heroic sacrifice,
 Round the aigrette he saw a golden crown.

This sight surely evokes compassion. It makes one feel sorry to see all the menace there. But at the same time as is given in the lines the peace of having saved the motherland is effectively evoked in them. Also, when Tanaji Malsure sees the condition of his warriors he too is full of compassion and is filled with aspiration that he too like Baji lay his life protecting the motherland. Baji's death therefore creates peace, compassion and a sense of chivalry for the witnesses. This takes us to the next *rasa* – the *raudra* *rasa*.

Veer and Raudra

The very image of Baji Prabhou evokes *veer* *rasa* which indicates bravery, the warrior spirit the *kshtriya*-hood of the fighter. In this poem it is not only the chivalry of Baji that gives rise to this *rasa* but the mood of chivalry is also invoked by the presence of the goddess who represents *raudra* *rasa* – Bhavani (Durga), the slayer of evil. Again and again in the poem, Baji refers to the goddess or the poet describes Baji being overpowered by the force of Bhavani with which he fights the battle. *Raudra* *rasa* is also created when the strength of Baji is compared with an ever powerful object of Nature. In fact, read one after the other, they create all the four *veer*, *raudra*, *bhayanaka* and *adbhuta* *rasas* for the reader.

So fought they for a while; then suddenly
 Upon the Prabhou all the Goddess came.
 Loud like a lion hungry on the hills
 He shouted, and his stature seemed to increase
 Striding upon the foe.

Next,

Stood visible, Titanic, scarlet-clad,
 Dark as a thunder-cloud, with streaming hair
 Obscuring heaven, and in her sovran grasp
 The sword, the flower, the boon, the bleeding head,—Bhavani.

And then,

Groaning, once more the grim Mahratta turned
 And like a bull with lowered horns that runs,
 Charged the exultant foe behind.

In these lines hungry lion, “thunder-cloud” and in the end “bull with lowered horns” are successively horrifying. Each image succeeds the other in its intensity of causing damage and its penetrating and painful impact. If we try to alter the one with the other the effect will not be as horrifying. For when read one after the other they raise the tempo of the poem and reach its peak before the climax when Baji finally falls dead.

The lines quoted above appear almost towards the end of the poem. They surely portray Baji with a great physical power charged with Bhavani's strength. But the strength of his mind and soul has already

been presented in the poem in the beginning.

“Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
Is a man’s manhood seated. God within
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
And covers One alone. We but employ
Bhavani’s strength, who in an arm of flesh
Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm.
I ask for fifty swords.”

Yet again, when they had to face the enemy right in their face Baji encourages his men thus,

Then Baji first broke silence, “Lo, the surge!
That was but spray of death we first repelled.
Chosen of Shivaji, Bhavani’s swords,
For you the gods prepare. We die indeed,
But let us die with the high-voiced assent
Of Heaven to our country’s claim enforced
To freedom.”

This was then the strength of his soul that Sri Aurobindo has portrayed so wonderfully. Even through his writings in *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo hailed his people to implore the shakti of Bhavani and fight for the nation. It is exactly what Baji does.

Ideologically, *Baji Prabhou* presents the spiritual vision of Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. Both have been the great patriots of the country and have fought for delivering their Motherland from foreign clutches. While one fought with the sword, the other with his pen and in their case both the sword and pen proved to be powerful because they were infused with the spiritual strength of their masters. According to Swami Vivekananda, “Shivaji was the greatest Hindu king that India had produced within the last thousand years; one who was the very incarnation of lord Siva, about whom prophecies were given out long before he was born; and his advent was eagerly expected by all the great souls and saints of Maharashtra as the deliverer of the Hindus from the hands of the Mlecchas, and as one who succeeded in the reestablishment of Dharma which had been trampled underfoot by the depredations of the devastating hordes of the Moghals” (Internet). It is interesting to relate to this comment of Swamiji for he was himself an incarnation of lord Shiva (*God Lives with Them*). Sri Aurobindo has spoken eloquently about both Shivaji and Swami Vivekananda. About Shivaji he says, “Shivaji with his vivid and interesting life and character, ... not only founded a kingdom but organised a nation” (CWSA 20: 251). Swami Vivekananda too worked towards awakening the country out of *tamas*, about which Sri Aurobindo remarks,

Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that

has entered the soul of India and we say, “Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.” So it is with all. Not only are the men greater than their definite works, but their influence is so wide and formless that it has little relation to any formal work that they have left behind them. (CWSA 1: 662)

These were the lion-hearted men who went forth to deliver India. Sri Aurobindo too came forward to fight for the country not only because of his patriotism but also because he had in him assimilated, evoked and inculcated the spiritual strength like his two predecessors. It was only because of the spiritual strength that Shivaji, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo contributed much towards Indian freedom struggle. Rather, it was their spiritual strength that gave the push to the freedom movement which was then carried forward by other people. They breathed great force into it.

With reference to *Baji Prabhou* it would be interesting to see the similarity of spiritual ideology of Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. This poem, through the depiction of Baji Prabhou Deshpande, sets forth the capability and impact of Shivaji on his pupil and connects it to the practice of yoga as envisaged in the Bhagvad Gita which was practiced by both Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. Shivaji perhaps had created an impact of his spiritual ideology on some of his pupil of which Baji Prabhou was one. It may be noted that historical records tell us that Baji Prabhou was at loggerheads with Shivaji. He was also 15-20 years elder to him. But when Baji got defeated in a battle and was generously treated by Shivaji, Baji’s hearted melted down and he understood the great vision of Shivaji who was fighting for the whole nation and not for the small provinces. He then remained a faithful chieftain in the service of Shivaji. It was the vision of Shivaji which makes him the great king and it is because of this quality that he was able to win the hearts of some of his enemies. Therefore, in the poem Baji Prabhou was not only a mouth-piece of Shivaji but also perhaps one who followed the ideal of his visionary king and practiced detachment as suggested in the Gita.

It is significant that Shivaji, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo all implored the shakti of Bhavani to shake the country out of *tamas*. In the poem we read “We but employ/ Bhavani’s strength, who in an arm of flesh...” We hear an echo of this in the message that Sri Aurobindo gave in “Bhavani Mandir”. Like Baji who calls upon the Bhavani within to take over and fight, Sri Aurobindo too asks all countrymen to realize the Bhavani within.

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped, — inactive because the God in us is concealed by *tamas*, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. (CWSA 6:89)

There is a striking similarity between Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo and that is the practice of Gita’s yoga. N.S. Takhakav in his book *Life of Shivaji Maharaja* records many evidences when Shivaji was guided by two of his mentors Sant Tukaram and Swami Ramdas to practice Gita’s yoga. Most essential teaching they gave him was to act without attachment, the act of inner renunciation. It is said that Shivaji had offered his entire kingdom to Swami Ramdas and was commanded by the latter to rule over it as its custodian without any attachment for fruit of his actions. Shivaji Maharaj seems to have practiced it. That is why Sri Aurobindo says,

Not until Shivaji was ready to offer his head at the feet of the Mother, did Bhavani in visible

form stay his hand and give him the command to free his people. Those who have freed nations, have first passed through the agony of utter renunciation before their efforts were crowned with success, and those who aspire to free India, will first have to pay the price which the Mother demands. (CWSA 7: 1032)

Sri Aurobindo's speech given at Uttarpara reveals to us how although he was working for the freedom struggle he was not detached from the act. It was only when he was taken to prison in 1908 that he got the message from Sri Krishna and he practiced the inner renunciation of the Gita. He says,

Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the *sadhana* of the Gita. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Srikrishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. (CWSA 8:7)

This is the philosophy of inner renunciation pronounced by Baji Prabhau almost in the beginning of the poem.

“Me thou shalt not burn.
For this five feet or more of bone and flesh,
Whether pure flame or jackals of the hills
Be fattened with its rags, may well concern
Others, not Baji Prabhau.”

These words resonate with the words of Bhagvad Gita chapter two:

It is uncleavable, it is incombustible, it can neither be drenched nor dried. Eternally stable, immobile, all-pervading, it is forever and forever. (II: 24)

Baji Prabhau was dauntless, fearless, enduring and courageous only because he was not attached to the phenomenal world. He realized Bhavani who was the “all-pervading” divine in him. He did not bother about the last rites of the body about which most of the ordinary men are concerned. Neither Baji nor Shivaji were attached to each other just emotionally. Their relation was strong and had a meaning only as the children of their Mother. Therefore Shivaji tells Baji,

“We part, O friend, but meet again we must,
When from our tasks released we both shall run
Like children to our Mother's clasp.”

He does not say we shall embrace each other, but would run to their Mother's clasp. This is a solidarity, conviction and love they had for their Motherland. No wonder it was with the same conviction that Sri Aurobindo set out to deliver his Motherland from the “demon” (British).

This poem truly is a marvellous example of patriotism that is based on spirituality and practice of Gita: to work for the nation without any demands from it; to lay one's life without any grudge and to realize that it is the Mother who will act and give the strength to act, that we are mere instruments in Her hands. Although written before independence, *Baji Prabhau* still has the power to move the readers to remind us of our duties toward our nation and the Lord. It certainly reminds us of our *rashtra* dharma

and *sanatana* dharma.

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Baji Prabhu Deshpande

LIFE



Courtesy: Internet

The function of the poet even when he is most absorbed in thinking, is still to bring out not merely the truth and interest, but the beauty and power of the thought, its life and emotion, and not only to do that, not only to make the thought a beautiful and living thing, but to make it one thing with life.

(Sri Aurobindo: *The Future Poetry*:242)

HEART OF AN ANGEL

Deepshikha Reddy

The water body in the Ganges was serene and calm reflecting the evening sunset on its breast. The ripples were small and handful, colour was soft with a shine and the feel was that of a lazy liquid languish at the end of the day. If only I could enjoy those moments as they were presented, but I was far from absorbing anything so sublime at that time. My mind was fixed at the outgoing train from Howrah in the next half hour. I was late and getting so late as I may have to miss it. The impending possibility of a very difficult time ahead stiffened my head and I almost could not think anymore. Five pieces of luggage with a shoulder bag and a bag of sweets and sweet-curd to be carried back to Hyderabad was like a mountain load to me.

I was young and 32. Thought no end of myself, accepted everything that was given, bought several saris for my teacher friends, being the famous Calcutta Handloom, the painting books, music records- I felt the world at my feet- “take what you can” was my motto, as if.

Overestimating women power and being foolishly over-confident, I refused to take any help from anyone on the last day of my return. Mama was old and frail whom I had gone to visit. He became grave and said “You have no idea of the Calcutta traffic menace, better be accompanied by your cousin. It will be helpful.”

I just quietened his concern with a brisk flourish as if I was pretty adept in managing the unruly traffic of Calcutta, not having any idea of what I was to face in the next 2/3 hours!

I had never lived in Calcutta. Visits to my grandma and mamas used to be the main purpose with the fringe benefits of Bengal artefacts and unforgivable sweets and tasty savories. I was always accompanied and pampered and over-cared that I could not help. Therefore, the last day I wanted to have things my way and exercised my free choice. The taxi guy was cool and well-behaved. Talked a lot about the life in Calcutta, the politics, education, theatre, cultural events to the Naxal attacks, as if he was a full-fledged administrator in the government. He was very friendly and good. On the way there was a famous joint for lassi that I didn't know about. We both had fun there with the Sardar owner where I missed no chance to impress him with my broken Punjabi.

All went a little too good until we thought we got stuck in a traffic jam. Well, that is quite natural in any big city, I thought, looking at my watch. The concern began when more than half an hour passed by-stranded immobile on the road. Commotion started mounting, voices with raised pitch, arguments turning into fierce fist-pointing gestures, loud horns of all decibels slowly gripped me in fear and helplessness. My driver had gone to find a way out for me through some other route but he too returned dejected declaring all four roads going to Howrah station being choked and blocked leaving no option on the horizon.

Time, as though, suddenly started ticking faster than usual. Many people were standing by enjoying the commotion. Actually there was an accident at a point ahead, a bus hitting a student or something that snowballed into this calamity. I got out and requested a few youngsters to help me carry my luggage in return of some handsome pocket money as well as an act of social help. I succeeded. My driver too helped me. I had come to know that the Ganges was not that far and ferries ply till the station.

All five of them helped me board a ferry, highly overloaded as if on the verge of a severe disbalance.

But I had no time to think of anything then. People were cursing both my luggage dump and me. I barely managed to place my feet somewhere, securing my purse under my armpit. The barge took off as I said "Durga, Durga" to myself. It took 20/25 minutes to reach Howrah. The jostle and hassle of how I managed to alight from the boat with my cursed luggage better remain buried in my memory.

Somehow seeing my pathetically helpless beggarly face, I got help and reached the platform. The train was standing there with all passengers well-settled inside. Last 10/15 minutes were there and my cousin had promised would come to see me off.

I kept on looking left and right for him. Could not leave my luggage to look for my coach. It almost felt like my boat was capsizing on the arrival board.

A Sardajee was watching me from the next bench. Hardly anyone on the platform I noticed but for those who came to see-off. I noticed him but could not request him to help me out. I do not know why I felt so hesitant after being so shamelessly vocal all the way. Finally I requested him to look after my baggage so that I could locate my coach. The guy was quick in response and almost threatened me about the train leaving in minutes. I ran helter skelter and hit against my cousin loaded with litchis and sweet-boxes scolding me where my luggage was. I was so upset with his irresponsible timing towards my departure that I almost didn't care to reply. He too got late because of the traffic menace. He stopped me, held me by hand and asked for the luggage. When I told him I left them to a stranger's care, he almost stopped short of slapping me. We ran back to the Sardarjee with his continuous abuses and stories of the dangerous theft cases daily in that station.

The guy was seated calm protecting my things. Instantly each of us including him carried everything to the nearest gate. They pushed me along inside the coach to look for my exact coach later to be seated. My cousin gave me the last hug calling the name of the Lord. The train started the first steam.

Who then gets on to the board was my benevolent Sardarjee saying that he will help me with my baggage locating my seat. My God! I asked how do you get back? Oh, don't you worry for that sister.

What a Grace and what a relief, my Goodness! I couldn't believe my stars. How deftly then he carried most of my bundles all the way five to six bogies ahead of where we were – I was following him blindly-settled me tucking in everything in place, bringing me a bottle of water too. The train had gained pace. I did not understand how this man would ever go back. He was cool and smiling. I could see that he wanted to say something to me still.

He requested me to come out into the space near the door. I came along to hear him, a bit perplexed picking up some money, two sweet boxes and fruits to express my gratitude. He said, "Sister, please take me seriously about what I am going to tell you. Your cousin who was reprimanding you about your leaving the luggage with me, a stranger, an unknown someone was absolutely right. I had been watching you intently when you were frantically looking for someone. You see I was sitting there all along only with the intension of thieving. I am an ex-convict thrice back from jail and I am a peg in the network of several thieves and pick-pockets operating in this station."

"However, finally when you told me to look after all your luggage with full trust placed in me, I suddenly got knocked off. No one till now had ever any faith in me in terms of a good and moral human being. I am a cursed man, a convict. And here you were trusting me and folding your hand requesting me and lo- you even handed over your money bag to me! Then you pulled it back to look at the number of the

coach in the ticket and not to save your money from a thief like me."

I got totally disarmed.

"Your respect and reliance on my goodness touched me and I decided to be with you."

"But Sister, please do not ever do that again. This world is not that easy and simple as you think, dear sister. You are a good lady. I want you to be protected. Do not trust anyone please. I thank you again for your trusting me. I feel happy today. It is a great day for me."

I became numb, almost lost my sensitivity, could not think anymore. With tearful eyes I held his hands, my voice choking, managed to give him the sweets but not any money at all! He gave me a gentle tap on my shoulder trying to relax me. "I will go down the next station. Do not worry sister- go and have a good journey and always be safe."

Highly dazed and graced by God with a prayer for him in my heart, I left for my seat.

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BOOK REVIEW: *ABC'S OF INDIAN NATIONAL EDUCATION*

Larry Seidlitz

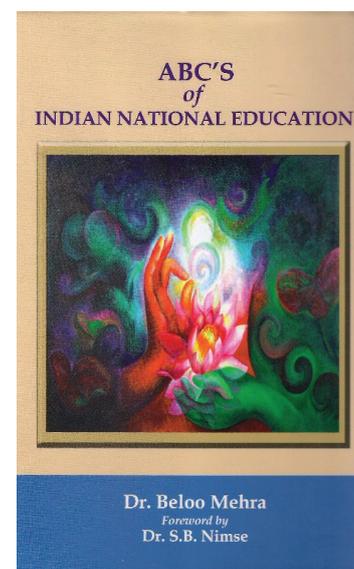
Title: ABC's of Indian National Education

Author: Beloo Mehra, PhD

Publisher: Standard Publishers, 2014

Pages: 150

Price: Rs. 495



The ABC's of Indian National Education by Dr. Beloo Mehra is a thought-provoking book on how to reorient education in India to base it solidly on the foundations of Indian culture and on the development of the complete person and the nation as a whole. The general perspective of the book is largely influenced by the views Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, though other great proponents of a truly Indian education are also cited, as well as the author's long experience in education both in India and abroad. The style is informal, consisting of 26 short essays, one for each letter of the alphabet, each letter standing for a key topic. For example, the letter 'A' starts the book off with a short chapter on the "Aim of Education." This informal style leads away from a more scholarly treatment of the subject in favour of a more "reader friendly" voice meant for general audiences. While this stylistic tactic tends towards breadth rather than depth and integration, the author has mitigated this tendency somewhat by tying some of the chapters together around especially important themes.

While the style makes it relatively easy to read, the ideas and proposals presented are bold and revolutionary. This is in keeping with the transformative nature of the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and other Indian thinkers on education such as Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore whose ideas have inspired the book. For example, the author takes the position that the system of education in India is based largely on principles of the British colonizers, which were designed to create an obedient and subservient population to serve the British political and economic interests. Thus, what is proposed in these pages is a complete overhaul of the education system starting from its general aims down to its day to day activities in the classroom. While many of the topics focus on large issues and principles based on Indian cultural foundations, there are also many practical suggestions for implementing them in the classroom.

To give a better sense of the nature of the education proposed, let us look at a few of the basic principles advocated, and at some of the practical suggestions for their classroom implementation. Starting with aims of education, the author argues that the aim of traditional education is to develop "certain skill sets and gather knowledge of certain content areas that will help children secure their economic and social futures." Instead, she proposes that education should be based on the Indian view of the human being as "a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body." Then citing Sri Aurobindo, she proposes three central aims of education: 1. the growth of the individual's soul and its powers and possibilities, 2. the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its Dharma, and 3. the raising of both the individual and the nation into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. We can see here the much higher reach of the aims as well their wider scope, putting the development of the individual soul within the context of the developing nation-soul and the more inclusive developing soul

of humanity. The author quotes Sri Aurobindo in emphasizing that education must never “lose sight of man’s highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being.”

An education with these profound aims requires radical changes in its approach and methods. Rather than being focused on development of skills sets and practical knowledge, its methods must be redirected towards bringing out the soul and the development of vibrant instruments for its expression through the mind, life and body. So in place of practical knowledge and skills, education is reformulated to develop such things as beauty, joy, self-discovery, self-observation, independent thinking and questioning, reason, concentration, mental silence, receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being.

Rather than imposing so-called “knowledge” upon the learner, qualities such as these must be “evoked,” awakened within the learner. This is a radical reorientation from the traditional approach to education, and here the author provides practical suggestions for how to do this. First, there is the need for creative and carefully thought out learning *opportunities*. Next there is the need for space and time to allow the learner freedom to explore and reflect. There is also the need for providing helpful guidance and resources which the learner may utilize in his or her own way and time. In this approach, teachers are not viewed as “experts” imparting their superior knowledge on the students, rather they are fellow learners and mentors who can offer suggestions and serve as role models. Also relevant to this issue, the author discusses Sri Aurobindo’s principle “from near to far,” the idea that learners proceed gradually outward from what they already know to the next step beyond. Learning is an adventure, a discovery, and this proceeds in an individualistic, organic, and yet logical way.

Let us now look at a few of the concrete suggestions the author makes for implementing these approaches in the classroom. To facilitate self-discovery, the author suggests that “Introspection, journaling, quiet contemplation, self-analysis and other such exercises can be immensely helpful.” There is also a wonderful chapter on the use of stories in the classroom to engage learners, as well as the suggestion to utilize performing arts like dance, drama, ballet, and carefully selected age-appropriate films. Elsewhere she suggests including “inspiring and uplifting music... nature walks, contemplative writing, meditative movement and dance.”

One of the key principles for the type of education advocated here is the importance of the teacher’s own inner development and relation to the students. In order to facilitate the awakening of the soul in students, the teacher’s own soul must be awake or at least be awakening. This principle is more implicit than explicit, but it is there nonetheless. For example, the author writes that “educational thinkers, curriculum planners, and educators must dig into some of the writings of the great Indian thinkers and philosophers and seek inspiration on how to help learners develop a deeper sensitivity and appreciation of beauty—in form and in spirit, in thought and in action, in feelings and in sentiment.” Elsewhere she suggests “regular in-service orientations and workshops for teachers. Thoughtfully prepared exercises that can gently lead to introspection and an inward gaze can help teachers regain a new perspective on their approach to life, their work, their teaching style and their motivations.”

The overhaul of the Indian system of education to reflect such aims is a huge and complex undertaking. As the author suggests, the changes must be made step by step not only on the outside, but inside each educator. In this easy to read book there are many wise and helpful reflections on how this revolution can be brought about.

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Some shall be made the glory's receptacles
And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.
These are the high forerunners, the heads of Time,
The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,
The high transfigurers of human clay,
The first-born of a new supernal race.

Sri Aurobindo

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