

Recent Publications

Sabda

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K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)



The Mother India journal has been continually published since 1949 with K. D. Sethna as Editor. On the occasion of K. D. Sethna's centenary we retrace its origins and development...

MOTHER INDIA

IN 1927, a book by Katherine Mayo bearing the title *Mother India* was released. The book was a hostile criticism of Indian life and culture. Indeed so virulent was the attack on India, so deliberate the emphasis on the seamy side of things Indian that Mahatma Gandhi termed it as “a drain inspector’s report”. In 1949, the same name was adopted by a fortnightly paper with the very opposite intention—to glorify the spirit of this ancient land and its culture. The editor proposed was K. D. Sethna. To quote Sethna, “It took shape because a devotee of Sri Aurobindo’s who was a businessman could not rest with stocks and shares and the general market of material exchanges. He wanted political journalism to carry a touch of the Aurobindonian light.”

Katherine Mayo’s book occupies its place in the rubbish heap of history. If it is remembered at all, it is remembered as a curious artefact of a bygone period. But the fortnightly paper started with K. D. Sethna as Editor doggedly continues to this day, having metamorphosed into a cultural monthly with the passage of time. Sethna is on the threshold of completing his centenary. He is no longer involved with the day-to-day working of the journal but he still continues to scrutinise the proofs, being ably aided in his task by his assistant Ms Minna Paladino.

Mother India has had an interesting history. The first issue was to be out in time for the Mother’s birthday. But Sethna had material enough in hand only for a couple of issues. ‘Wise’ and ‘experienced’ journalists counselled that it was imprudent to start without at least six months’ material in hand. Waving a cautionary forefinger, one of them remarked, “Better to lie quiet for a few months than go up a rocket and come down a stick.” Sethna dispatched an urgent note to the Mother saying: “All journalists advise us to postpone publication for some months. They say that we must be well stocked with articles: otherwise we are doomed. My own instinct is that of Foch at the Battle of Marne in 1914. When he was asked by his superior at the headquarters for a report from the field, he sent the message: ‘*Mon centre cède, ma droite recule, situation excellente, j’attaque.*’* But what do you say?” The Mother wired back, “Stick to the date. Live on faith. Blessings. — Mother.” So the first issue came out on February 19, 1949. The price was four annas. Since then it has continued to the present day without a break even of a single number. In the first number Sethna spelled out the objec-

tives of the paper. To the pertinent question “What is Mother India?” Sethna answered:

“Mother India is manifold. Art, philosophy, science, politics, industry—all these she has been known for through the ages. Yet brighter than her fame for these has been her fame for seeking the Godhead secret within earth’s life. Her art, philosophy, science, politics and industry have been inspired directly or indirectly by this seeking. And unless we realise that Mother India is a spiritual light we shall either fumble in the dark or run after delusive gleams. We cannot fulfil our destiny without following the instinct of divinity in us.”

Aldous Huxley sent the following message for the inaugural issue: “I wish you all success in your venture. You will, of course, be a voice crying in the wilderness. But if a few individuals pay attention, something will have been accomplished.”

Sri Aurobindo had no hesitation in declaring, “...Mother India is my paper.”

While *Mother India*’s stand on the issues of the day was not conventionally political it was not apolitical either. Stoutly refusing to ally itself with any of the dominant political “isms”, it nevertheless considered it its prerogative to comment on and criticise the political situation from a spiritual standpoint. The Editor along with his other colleagues had many interviews with the Mother to obtain definite guidelines for the new paper. K. D. Sethna confessed to the Mother that he had never been associated with politics and knew nothing about it. The Mother smiled and said, “Neither do I.” With natural concern Sethna exclaimed, “Then what shall we do?” The Mother calmly declared, “There is Sri Aurobindo. He will do everything.” Sethna proved a worthy receptacle for Sri Aurobindo’s inner inspiration. The editorials were approved by Sri Aurobindo before publication. The Master and disciple enjoyed perfect rapport and when some misgivings were expressed about whether *Mother India* represented the Aurobindonian view, Sri Aurobindo had no hesitation in declaring, “...*Mother India* is my paper.”

When Mao-tse-tung acquired political ascendancy in China, the Indian Government obliged him by immediately recognising Red China. *Mother India* carried a series of articles condemning this *faux pas* in no uncer-

* ‘My centre is giving way, my right wing is in retreat, situation excellent, I am attacking.’

tain language. So unsparing was Sethna's criticism of the Indian Government that the Mother was provoked to refer the matter to Sri Aurobindo. Reading out the caustic lines to Sri Aurobindo she said, "Amal [K. D. Sethna] has been very violent here. Have you approved of it?" A monosyllabic "Yes" from Sri Aurobindo sealed the fate of the articles.

Not dictated by any conventional political wisdom but moved by a soul-sense and nationalistic feeling born from the spiritual idea of nationhood—this was *Mother India's* style of political journalism. When Truman dismissed General MacArthur, *Mother India* was probably the only publication in the entire world to stand by MacArthur. In an interview Sethna relates, "When the American Consul, Henderson, was trying to be apologetic about certain utterances of MacArthur at a meeting of the Press people, I had to get up and defend MacArthur against the American Consul! I told him that MacArthur belonged to the true Kshatriya temperament which takes pleasure in fighting, especially when it knows that its cause is just."

On the Pakistan question *Mother India's* stand was uncompromising. In one of his articles Sethna declared that "Kashmir was to be claimed for India under the conditions that obtained there in 1949–50." For this statement he was summoned by the Press Council to defend himself. But Sethna got away even as his Master had many years before deftly avoided the snare of the British with his provocative but unprosecutable journalistic writings.

Sri Aurobindo left his physical body in December, 1950. Sethna proposed that the Mother would now be the final judge of his editorials. The Mother replied in effect, "Our [her and Sri Aurobindo's] goals are always the same but our approaches may differ. Our public backgrounds in India are not the same. He was an acknowledged Nationalist leader at one time." At the end of a year or so the Mother expressed her boredom with writings on political subjects. It was then decided to convert *Mother India* wholly into a cultural review and its periodicity changed from fortnightly to monthly.

The Mother was generous in giving small contributions to the journal in the form of "Words" etc. Recounting his association with the Mother, Sethna writes, "Questioned

on the issue of becoming more 'popular', she ruled that wanting to please readers as a means of obtaining a larger circulation was a form of vulgarity: one must write at one's highest and give the readers what, according to one's best

For Sethna, Culture is not merely the artistic and social pursuits, expression and tastes valued by society or the enlightenment resulting from these pursuits but has a deeper origin and raison d'être. Culture for him has a spiritual origin and objective.

lights, one believes they should have. This did not exclude making the field as wide as possible. *Mother India* need not restrict itself to being philosophical or to dealing with spiritual topics. Its appeal could be vast and varied, but there should be consonance, however subtle and implicit, with the great ideal of refining no less than

sharpening all of man's faculties. And, of course, topics concerned with the Integral Yoga were to hold the centre of the stage."

For Sethna, Culture is not merely the artistic and social pursuits, expression and tastes valued by society or the enlightenment resulting from these pursuits but has a deeper origin and *raison d'être*. Culture for him has a spiritual origin and objective. He discerns two movements of Culture—"the unfoldment of man's power of the True, the Beautiful and the Good and the lifting of that power to its highest realisable creativity". In this idealistic view of Culture the aspirant rises from stage to higher stage of self-poise, enlarges his scope and loses all personal initiative in some "in-dwelling and over-brooding Mystery that is the All-True, the All-Beautiful, the All-Good".

Sethna has retired from the job of getting matter together for the magazine month after month. But his vision for the journal is still its guiding light. New individuals are participating in the work of *Mother India*, but the living Presence which set in motion this unique journalistic venture remains the same: Sri Aurobindo.

— Hemant Kapoor
Hemant is on the editorial team of Mother India. He also works at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. His interests include poetry and philosophy.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION TO *MOTHER INDIA*
 In India: Rs. 150.00
 Overseas:
Sea mail: US\$ 18.00 or £12.00
Air mail: US\$ 36.00 for American & Pacific countries
 US\$ 26.00 for all other countries

K. D. SETHNA

The Legacy of a Renaissance Man

On the occasion of the birth centenary of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), SABDA is happy to publish a tribute by Sachidananda Mohanty.

In the spiritual annals of the Ashram, Sethna has undoubtedly carved out a special place as a sadhak-intellectual of rare calibre and acumen. He has been the editor of Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture on a continued basis. In this sketch, Dr Mohanty outlines Sethna, the man and his work, the correspondence he has had with world celebrities like Albert Einstein, Aldous Huxley, Paul Brunton, Kathleen Raine and others; his pivotal contributions to literature and culture; and above all, the special relationship he had with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Sachidananda Mohanty is Professor of English Literature at the University of Hyderabad. Author of 12 books including two edited volumes on Sri Aurobindo, Dr Mohanty has published extensively on the contemporary understanding of education and culture in some of the leading forums in the country including India Today, The Hindu, The Indian Express and The Economic and Political Weekly.

He had his early education at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (1966–1975) and is the editor of a forthcoming volume K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): A Centenary Tribute.

ON 25 November 2004, K. D. Sethna completes one hundred years of his earthly life. He began his life in Bombay as an aspiring young man with a literary future. And by the middle of the last century, he had the privilege of being accepted as a favored disciple of Sri Aurobindo, and had literary correspondence with world-class celebrities like Paul Brunton, Albert Einstein and Aldous Huxley.

Sethna has pioneered research in areas as diverse as Blake and Shakespeare studies, Aryan Invasion theory and ancient Indian history, overhead poetry, Christology, comparative mythology, the study of Hellenic literature and culture, Indian systems of yoga, international affairs, the question of the English language and the Indian spirit, philosophy, literary criticism, mystical, spiritual and scientific thought, the structure of thought in modern physics and biology, etc.

EARLY LIFE

On 25 November 1904, Kaikhushru Dhunjibhoj Sethna (“Kekoo”) was born in a respected Parsi family of Bombay. His father, a specialist in Ophthalmic Surgery (M.D. Bombay, M.R.C.P. from Dublin, Ireland), a highly rated and an intellectually gifted man, who cherished lofty morals and ideals in life, was an extremely loving and considerate parent. While the father at times appeared to be stern and withdrawn, young Sethna, especially in later childhood, felt emotionally drawn to his mother. A touch of self-deprecatory humor constantly marks the recollec-



K. D. Sethna in the 1930s

tion of his childhood experiences, even when it involved family accounts.

Sethna’s childhood was spent in Bombay. His family owned a house in the nearby hill station of Matheran. Sethna and his family frequently went there to spend their weekends and holidays.

Everything in Kekoo's life seemed to be playful, a matter of fun and frolic. And thus, he recalls that he took to verses because a cousin was writing verses about a girl called Katie and he "resolved to outdo him." He outdid his cousin by writing five hundred lines. His cousin also introduced him to some of the major British poets like Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Keats. Under the influence of Byron he wrote "two interminable poems in the Byronian *ottava rima* based on surreptitious feasting on *Beppo* and *Don Juan*" which he was strictly forbidden to read at home.

It was undoubtedly Bombay's literary circles that provided a great source of creative stimulus to the young Sethna.

The atmosphere at home, especially after dinner, was creatively stimulating. Sitting in the company of his father, K. D. Sethna created interesting sketches, in particular the sketches of family members while he lay "sprawling on the carpet."

At school, the choice of a serious interest revolved around literature and painting. Although Sethna preferred the pen, he dreamt that one day he would transform into painting his conception of "coloured scenes and symbols" of the Keatsian world in an ideal studio.

At the college level he excelled in his studies, winning in the Intermediate Arts the Selby Scholarship in Logic as well as the Hughlings Prize for English. He followed it up by taking the Bombay University's prestigious Ellis Prize. He was advised to take up law. Instead, he joined the M.A. program in Philosophy. His planned thesis was called "The Philosophy of Art" but it never got completed as he settled in the Ashram.

At St Xavier's School and College, Sethna spent a great deal of his time over masters like Plato, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. He thought over profound issues like "good and evil, justice, charity and equanimity." While earlier he had "a reckless and wayward disposition," there was now a gentleness, which was the outcome of philosophical developments. Ernst Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* and the work of the Catholic priest Joseph McCabe led him to a crisis of faith.

The new found disbelief in God led him to a confrontation with his father, until one year after his matriculation, the latter suddenly died of heart-failure. The death of his father made him gloomy; it also led him to a new path of self-reliance and a gradual recovery of faith.

It was undoubtedly Bombay's literary circles that provided a great source of creative stimulus to the young Sethna. Then, as well as right up to the early 1950s before he settled down permanently in Pondicherry, he discovered a number of literary friends and associates such as Simon Pereira, upcoming poet Armando Menezies and D. F. Karaka, Frank Moraes, later the famous editor of *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express*, and Frederic Mendonça who went on to become a Professor of English at St Xavier's College. Then there were R. K. Karanjia (later the editor of *Blitz*) and Nissim Ezekiel, who would carve out a place for himself in the domain of Indian English poetry.

Bombay greatly excited Sethna and fascinated his intellectual-artistic imagination. There was, however, another self in him that was to take him away radically to a new path, an unknown universe, a powerful and abiding attraction to the life of the Spirit.

JOURNEY TO PONDICHERRY

A number of aspects of Sethna's life seem to share uncanny parallels with that of his Master Sri Aurobindo: both had studied in elite institutions. Early in life both had been exposed to Western languages and literature, especially the Hellenic culture, and had learnt Latin. Both shared an equal interest in literature and philosophy, while both turned to the pivotal question of Indian history, the problem of the Aryan Invasion. Both were attracted to spiritual and mystical poetry. Significantly, it was the city of Bombay that was to provide for both a catalytic experience for their growth into spiritual consciousness.

It was from a South Indian theosophist plus art critic that he first heard about the Cosmic Consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Later, he discovered an article "The Ashram of Sri Aurobindo Ghose" in a newspaper sheet that covered the shoes he had bought from a shop in Bombay's Crawford Market. The notion of the new yoga that the article mentioned appealed to him. Soon he wrote to the Ashram.

K. D. Sethna arrived in Pondicherry on 16 December 1927. He was taken directly to A. B. Purani's room.

He arrived there just as the Mother had gone up on the terrace above her room for her early morning walk. K. D. Sethna saw her from one of Purani's windows—even though he saw her from a great distance, it left a strong impression on him.

The Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took place on 21 February 1928. Till then K. D. Sethna had never seen Sri Aurobindo.

K. D. Sethna spent the next ten and a half years settled in Pondicherry. Afterwards, for over a decade Sethna alternated between Pondicherry and Bombay, keeping in contact inwardly and through correspondence with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, till he settled down in Pondicherry on a permanent basis in 1954.

K. D. Sethna made a trip to Pondicherry for the Darshan of 24 November 1950 and he stayed in Pondicherry till the 3rd of December, leaving Pondicherry on the night of the 3rd. He left in spite of having had some feeling earlier that he should stay on and not leave. He arrived in Bombay in the afternoon of December 5. Before leaving the station, he got the news – via a telegram brought from his house – that Sri Aurobindo had passed away. K. D. Sethna along with two others immediately returned by plane to Madras and then via taxi to Pondicherry.

At Pondicherry, he found himself overwhelmed by a profound sense of “helplessness.” It was then, he recalled, that he received the smile and the grace of the Mother. Her words came as a great source of reassurance: “Nothing has changed. Call for inspiration and help as you have always done. You will get everything from Sri Aurobindo as before!”

Sethna had married Sehra in 1944. In February 1953 he made the crucial decision to settle in the Ashram again. Sethna was badly in need of five hundred Rupees “to settle a few matters and pay for a thorough migration with my wife and dog.” He managed to clear off his debt of five hundred Rupees by writing an article on Sri Aurobindo for a special India supplement of the *Atlantic Monthly*. As it happened, the article never got published! Sethna's second homecoming to Pondicherry was in February 1954,

when he moved into a house on 13 Rue Ananda Rangapoulle. He left for Bombay on 29 February 1956 in order to see his ailing grandfather who was 98 years old. In the Bombay-bound train Sethna had a profound experience of the Mother. He wrote to her and learnt that she had indeed “visited” him in the train compartment in order to let him know about the descent of the Supermind. According to the reported remark of the Mother, “Only

five people knew what took place—two in the Ashram and three outside.” When Sethna wrote to the Mother about his experience in the train, she said to him: “Among those outside, I counted you.”

One word that is recurrent in Sethna's accounts is the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

One word that is recurrent in Sethna's accounts is the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Parallel to his intellectual-scholarly interests, there is the lifelong commitment to Integral Yoga and the life of the Spirit. Nothing that he wrote after coming in contact with Sri Aurobindo is free from this larger vision. To the observer, there is always the sense that Sethna was chosen by the Divine. From his Master he received, in closed envelopes, lines from *Savitri* that Sri Aurobindo was then composing. And in a letter dated 25 December 1948, two years before he passed away, on the Ashram letterhead, Sri Aurobindo states: “Amal, I have gone through your manuscript of poems* and I propose that

they should be immediately published without further delay.” (“Amal Kiran” was the name given by Sri Aurobindo to Sethna.)

Sethna's scholarship is always shaped and guided by a larger spiritual vision.

A number of volumes by Sethna are exclusively devoted to the spiritual aspects of the Ashram life. They are also about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their Avatarhood, about life, literature and yoga. Books like *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, *Our Light and Delight*, *Life-Poetry-Yoga: Personal Letters* in three volumes, and *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo* are written in an extremely lucid style that appeals to the heart; the books are full of light and delight!

Although these volumes form a separate body of work, distinct from his scholarly corpus, it will be correct to say that Sethna's scholarship is always shaped and guided by

* *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*, Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1949

a larger spiritual vision. This becomes clear when we examine the various contacts and encounters he had with the academic world outside.

INTELLECT AT THE SERVICE OF THE SPIRIT

As part of his intellectual career, Sethna had correspondence with world-class personalities and international celebrities like Aldous Huxley, Albert Einstein, Kathleen Raine, Bede Griffiths and Paul Brunton. But there are lesser-known people too. At times admirers and readers were drawn to him for instruction and insight. A spirit of deep engagement and empathy marks Sethna's relationship with all his correspondents.



K. D. Sethna in the 1970s

In a letter dated 19 September 1946, Paul Brunton, an acclaimed Western scholar and indologist declares: "I was sorry to note that *All India Weekly* had become more of a competition journal than a literary one, so that your own articles disappeared in the three issues which have reached me since April. Please let me know if you are likely to write for them again; otherwise, I shall not renew my subscription."

An identical warmth of admiration is noticed in Brunton's review of *The Secret Splendour* in a Bangalore periodical in 1941: "K. D. Sethna is a rising star in the Indian literary firmament who is well worth watching. With

this slim volume of nearly one hundred pages he makes his debut to the larger world."

Sethna's correspondence with Einstein and Huxley also throws an interesting light on their encounters. In a paper entitled "Mysticism and Einstein's Relativity Physics" published in *Sri Aurobindo Circle, Sixth Number*, Bombay, 1950, Sethna speaks of the implications of the Einsteinian theory of relativity in the domain of religion and mysticism. Einstein's reply is marked by caution, and there are many caveats. In a letter dated 15 August 1950 written from Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study he wrote back: "I have read your paper and found it partly interesting.... It seems to me rather obscure how mysticism can be brought together with that theory for there is no place in it for psychological concepts—as in any physical theory. Of course, the hic and nunc has no place in any physical theory either. Maybe that 'mystical insight' means something to you what is completely hidden to me. I am therefore no judge about it."

There are letters that are extremely illuminating and elevating. For instance, in a note sent from California, USA, dated 29 January 1949, Aldous Huxley, known for his deep empathy for Eastern traditions of religion and spirituality, compliments K. D. Sethna on the launching of *Mother India*. While regretting his inability to contribute to the journal due to a number of pressing engagements, he holds out hope for the success of the venture: "I can only wish you all success in your venture. You will, of course, be a voice crying in the wilderness. But if a few individuals pay attention, something will have been accomplished."

Professional recognition for Sethna came from prestigious quarters. On 14 July 1965, Kimon Friar, the editor of the reputed international journal *Greek Heritage*, while accepting Sethna's article "Greece and Sri Aurobindo" for publication, compliments the author and says: "I read your text with great interest and fascination. It is an outstanding piece of work and a most valuable addition to the *Greek Heritage*."

There were fewer accolades at home. And they came late! K. D. Sethna received the Devavrata Bhisma Award for 1994 from the I.I.I.S. (International Institute of Indian Studies) for his contribution to international peace and world order on the basis of universal Vedantic values. He was also nominated for the Sahitya Akademi Award. However, while thanking the I.I.I.S. for the honor, Sethna, in his letter dated 12 December 1993, draws the attention

of the office bearers of the organization to the fact that “most members of your group are unaware of that most illuminating book, *The Secret of the Veda* by Sri Aurobindo, which contains a Supplement of extreme originality, ‘The Origins of Aryan Speech’.”

Similarly, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Vice Chancellor of Annamalai University in his letter dated 22 October 1964 acknowledges the pioneering research of Sethna in the field of Harappan culture and the Vedic civilization: “You have exploded,” he says, “many wishful theories of pseudo-authorities and furnished almost conclusive evidence about the pristine and autochthonic character of the Aryan civilization in relation to the Indian background.”

Sethna's volumes offer some of the best intellectual responses that the Indian mind has made to Western literature and culture.

In a review of *Blake's Tyger: A Christological Interpretation* by Sethna, well-known critic Prema Nandakumar concludes with the following words: “Thanks to his enormous scholarship, *Blake's Tyger* turns out to be a valuable tutorial on classical and Christian mythology as well as Milton's poetry.” Likewise, in the review of Sethna's *Karpāsa in Prehistoric India: A Chronological and Cultural Clue*, G. C. Pandey, one of the foremost indologists of our country, commended the contribution Sethna made to scholarship in this genre. Similarly, H. D. Sankalia who is the doyen of archaeologists had this to say in his response to *The Problem of Aryan Origins: From an Indian Point of View* in 1981: “I went through your book as soon as it reached me. I think you have covered all the points quite impartially. I think for the Aryans and the Indus Civilisation, we have to await the accepted reading of the Indus Script. Meanwhile, congratulations!”

One is, however, constantly struck by the sense of modesty and loyalty to the Master that Sethna shows. And thus, while appreciating the inclusion of his poem “Tree of Time” in *An Anthology of Verse* being brought out by Blackie and Son (India) Limited, Sethna asks pointedly: “I hope your *Anthology* will try to do justice to the most creative poetic spirit of modern India, Sri Aurobindo. I would be interested to know what poems of his have been included.”

There have been awards from the Ashram circles as well. Mention may be made of the Sri Aurobindo Purashkar for 1998 that he received from the Sri Aurobindo Samiti, Calcutta. There was also an excellent festschrift entitled *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, edited by Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

A NEW SCHOLARLY VISION

Although he has written a great many books of substance and lasting value, it seems to me that it is basically in seven principal areas that Sethna has excelled and made pioneering contributions:

- First, as a poet following in the footsteps of his Master, Sethna's achievement is notable in the field of mystical/spiritual poetry. *The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems*, 1993, is a magnificent achievement in this category. He is also known for the letters on *Savitri* that he received from Sri Aurobindo.

- Second, Sethna will be remembered as an outstanding literary and cultural critic. His books like *Classical and Romantic: An Approach through Sri Aurobindo*, 1997; *Blake's Tyger: A Christological Interpretation*, 1989; *Adventures in Criticism*, 1996; *Inspiration and Effort: Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression*, 1995; “Two loves” and “A Worthier Pen”: *The Enigmas of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1984; “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal”: *An Interpretation from India*, 1995, are excellent examples of this kind. He is also noteworthy as a literary detective. His detective work to identify the Dark Lady of the Sonnets and Mr W. H. in the book “Two Loves” and “A Worthier Pen” is worth special mention.

- Third, Sethna's volumes offer some of the best intellectual responses that the Indian mind has made to Western literature and culture. *Sri Aurobindo and Greece* and “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal”: *An Interpretation from India* are two perfect examples of this kind.

- Fourth, Sethna's contribution to the understanding of the intimate relationship between the English language and the Indian mind will have lasting value. His books *The English Language and the Indian Spirit* and *Indian Poets and English Poetry* containing correspondence between him and Kathleen Raine are a critic's delight, full of insights and illumination.

- Fifth, Sethna's considerable body of writing in the field of Indian history and archaeology has disproved the pernicious dogma of the Aryan Invasion theory. His work *The Problem of Aryan Origins: From an Indian Point of View* will always remain a landmark in this genre.

- Sixth, Sethna has made a notable achievement in the field of creative journalism. His indefatigable role as the editor of *Mother India: Monthly Review of Culture* right from the Bombay days remains unrivaled in the annals of Indian periodical literature. Sri Aurobindo had once said: "Doesn't he know that 'Mother India' is my paper?" when a sadhak's skeptical attitude to the opinions expressed in *Mother India* was reported to him. He wrote powerful political editorials in this journal that were read out to Sri Aurobindo and certified by him prior to publication. In the editorials, Sethna showed courage and conviction in upholding the Aurobindonean vision in the murky world of national and international politics.

- And finally, Sethna was an exponent of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and never hesitated to "take up arms in defence of Sri Aurobindo" against misinterpretations. Sethna has also given us a valuable understanding regarding the place of the Mother in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. His slim book, *The Development of Sri Aurobindo's Spiritual System and the Mother's Contribution to It* provides us with a rare perspective.

It is true that the world has not given due recognition to K. D. Sethna's scholarly and literary works commensurate with his multifaceted talents. But then, fame and recognition have never been the cherished goals of Sethna's life. Despite having a considerable following, he has never desired to travel abroad and to the West. In 1949, Professor Frederic Spiegelberg offered him a special professional position in the USA. Sethna recommended the name of Haridas Chaudhury instead. That's the spirit of the man!

K. D. Sethna is a Renaissance personality in a modern age. While we have a fragmented view of Knowledge and the world today, Sethna attempted to restore into our deepest selves the wholeness and totality of the human experience. He used his powerful intellect for the service of the spirit, and showed through his many-sided and powerful writings, the advent of a new evolutionary order as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. That is how posterity will remember a man called K. D. Sethna.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ENGLISH

The Mother

The following volumes of *Questions and Answers* contain conversations of the Mother with members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the students of the Ashram's school:

Questions and Answers 1950–1951

411 pp., Rs. 200.00

ISBN 81-7058-708-5

For most of this period the Mother answered questions about some of her essays on education and her conversations of 1929, which deal with various aspects of spiritual life. Towards the end she discussed some letters of Sri Aurobindo and his small book *The Mother*.

Questions and Answers 1954

465 pp., Rs. 215.00

ISBN 81-7058-709-3

During this year the Mother answered questions about several of her essays on education and three small books by Sri Aurobindo: *Elements of Yoga*, *Bases of Yoga* and *The Mother*.

Questions and Answers 1955

425 pp., Rs. 200.00

ISBN 81-7058-710-7

During this year the Mother answered questions about three works of Sri Aurobindo: *Bases of Yoga*, *Lights on Yoga* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* (two chapters).

Questions and Answers 1956

409 pp., Rs. 180.00

ISBN 81-7058-733-6

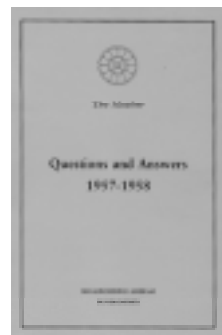
During this year the Mother answered questions about two works of Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Part One) and *Thoughts and Glimpses* (first part).

Questions and Answers 1957–1958

433 pp., Rs. 185.00

ISBN 81-7058-734-4

During this period the Mother answered questions about three works of Sri Aurobindo: *Thoughts and Glimpses* (second part), *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* and *The Life Divine* (two of the concluding chapters).



Compiled from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

The Essential Gita

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REVIEWS**I am with you**

Kailas Jhaveri; Published by Aditi-Utsang, Balasore; Price Rs. 60.00, 80 pp.



I don't think there can be any other words which provide more solace to the heart and to the innermost being in us than these—"I am with you." On a personal level, should the whole inner and outer

world go topsy-turvy, armed with the strength and power of these words, I would survive. And in a way, that is exactly what Kailas Jhaveri did. She survived. And survived well.

As a young, free-spirited woman, Kailasben went against the norm in many aspects of her life, two of which were to shape her future fundamentally. One, her acceptance only theoretically of the strict Jain tradition that she was born into—her heart or her soul perhaps knew that there was something else that was out there, ready and waiting to be pursued and so although she did not go against her natural-born religion, she also didn't surrender to its rigorous dictates. This is what perhaps helped her to remain open to the influences that were to come about later as she made her way to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The second event was going to the United States of America for further studies, in an age when perhaps women in India were not so bold as they are today. Not just that, she went at a time when the situation in America vis-à-vis employment was itself doubtful, plagued as it was with recession. But having defied all the advice to stay put, she went with a fistful of dollars and a heart full of strength and inner conviction. Needless to say, her determination paid off and during the length of her stay overseas, she undoubtedly grew as a person but more importantly received the aid of the Mother in more ways than one, leading to a blossoming of her inner aspiration and surrender. As she herself suggests time and again, the Divine knows best of what it wants from us, and so even though many a time her heart wished to fly back to Pondicherry, the Mother's insistence to continue work in America kept her grounded and led to the maturing of her spiritual consecration.

I am with you is essentially a peep into the life of Kailas Jhaveri with respect to first her introduction to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and thereafter her contact through

letters and gifts, through prayer and aspiration. Even while she lived in a country that was so vibrant and could just as easily have led one astray, her all-consuming thought of wanting to do, wanting to be, just as the Mother may have wished, kept Kailasben firm in her faith and focused on a goal perhaps even unknown to herself. In her own words, “each contact, personal or occult with The Mother and Sri Aurobindo brought in a new light to the different states of my consciousness, and opened up new windows of perception of the various parts of my being, thus eliminating the separation between the material and the spiritual life. What mattered the most was the consciousness which moved my feelings, thoughts and actions and whether they were offered to the Divine or not.”

But what one gleans from the personal accounts of all those who have been fortunate to have received the Mother’s touch is not just the personality of the disciple but the way in which the Mother worked and influenced inwardly and outwardly their lives. Her long distance interaction with Kailasben is just such an example. One would imagine the Mother too busy with the external work of the Ashram and the inner work of Yoga, and yet, to so many aspiring souls, She delivered the words and the help that would enable them to go that extra inch. With Kailasben too, She extended both the warmth and affection of a mother, and the influence and aid of a spiritual Mother and Guru. In return, Kailasben seems to have acted in a way complementing both aspects by being Her child and Her devotee, relying completely on her faith in the Mother’s will. No doubt Kailasben must have been through her own roller coaster ride with life but

she managed to brave each event and move on armed with the ever growing consciousness that lived in the delight and force of the Mother’s Grace.

Even though Kailasben has pursued an intellectual life, interacting with internationally renowned personalities and cultural world ambassadors, her book titled *I am with you* isn’t for literary dissertations or academic evaluation. It is true that the one drawback most personal reminiscences suffer from is a slightly self-absorbed approach, that is to say, predominantly revolving around the author, but that is to be expected since it is after all the author’s personal interactions that are being spoken of. And while some may contend that the language and style used here are too simple, sans decoration and technique, one must remember that it is a recollection of a specific period in the life of a person and a chronicle of events, meant more for those who are looking for that extra glimpse into the Mother’s life which comes about through the sadhak’s or sadhika’s personal interaction with Her. Even if Kailasben speaks about herself in the book, it is the attitude that is revealed and it is the attitude that some may want to identify with or aspire for. Whatever be the case, it is always a blessing to read the Mother’s words and even if they were meant for another, some of the vibrations unknowingly flow into one’s own being and that’s where the magic lies.

— Shonar

Shonar has been writing for the last decade on all kinds of subjects like music, travel, environment, cultural and social issues, and is now occupied in Pondicherry as a researcher, writer and editor.

I used to keep my favourite plant of Perfect Radiating Purity (double Gardinia) at home and put the flowers in front of the photo of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Remembering The Mother’s prayer of the 7th April, 1917, concerning the cherry tree, I had brought a small branch of it one day. In the evening when I came home, I saw that the photo of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo had fallen on the ground with the branch of cherry-blossoms over it. I picked up the photo and found a crack in the glass on The Mother’s side. My heart lost a beat for a moment. I sent a letter and a telegram to enquire about Her health. To console me The Mother wrote on a slip of paper:

*“Wire to Kailas. Do not worry. Doing well..
Love, blessings.. Mother.”*

Nolini-da sent me a telegram and wrote to me separately enclosing that slip and another enclosure: “You will be further comforted, nay, delighted, ecstatic by the enclosure too, which is a copy of her tape-recorded message on the day of Her victory.” This was in 1962, when The Mother was so weak that she could hardly hold a pen to sign the cheques. But I was told that after receiving my telegram, She took a pen and wrote this to me. So great was Her nobility and Her concern! I was indeed grateful to Her.

I am with you, pg. 34



Kalidasa

Essays and Translations

Sri Aurobindo; Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department; Price Rs. 130.00, 329 pp.

The stunningly vast range of adventures in consciousness and lofty or daring actions and imaginativeness that overwhelms

us when we enter the world of the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, gave way to an age marked by natural reactions—a tendency to fix ceilings on the freedoms characterizing the epics. We come to a time “when India was systematising her philosophies and developing her arts and sciences, turning from Upanishad to Purana, from the high rarefied peaks of early Vedanta and Sankhya with their inspiring sublimities and bracing keenness to physical methods of ascetic yoga and the dry intellectualism of metaphysical logic or else to the warm sensuous humanism of emotional religion,—before its full tendencies had asserted themselves, in some spheres before it had taken the steps its attitude portended, Kalidasa arose in Ujjayini and gathered up in himself its present tendencies while he foreshadowed many of its future developments.” (“The Age of Kalidasa”)

Thus the genius, Kalidasa, as if Providentially ordained to glorify a transitional era that might otherwise have remained arid. This reviewer does not think that the phenomenon that was Kalidasa had ever been more clearly and convincingly stated than in the few short essays by Sri Aurobindo, “The Malavas”, “The Age of Kalidasa”, “The Hindu Drama”, and “The Spirit of the Times” written during the period 1898–1903, while he was at Baroda (Vadodara).

The second of the four essays is not confined to the scope its title suggests. It is much more. With exemplary brevity achieved through a poignant prose, Sri Aurobindo tells us about the minds of the epic poets, Valmiki and Vyasa, who preceded Kalidasa at least by a thousand years, the development of Indian literature and the difference between the impulses and forces behind the epic poets and those behind Kalidasa, among several other historically vital issues. In the essay entitled “The Spirit

of the Times” he reveals – but reveals through a few strokes of lightning as though – the wondrous face of the “age when the Indian world after seeking God through the spirit and through action turned to seek Him through the activity of the senses, an age therefore of infinite life, colour and splendour, an age of brilliant painting and architecture, wide learning, complex culture, developing sciences; an age of great empires and luxurious courts and cities; an age, above all, in which the physical beauty and grace of woman dominated the minds and imaginations of men.”

In the recent past India has grown conscious of the need for translating literatures of one language into another. Workshops are held for training aspiring translators in the principles they should follow in this special realm of creativity. They will go a long way in realizing the basic need of the art if they study Sri Aurobindo’s essay “On Translating Kalidasa”. While agreeing with the theory that for the first time gained some ground in the 19th century, though even to this day most of the translators have not proved equal to this demand—that there is a spirit behind the word which eludes the so called “faithful” translator but without capturing which no poetry worth the name

can be presented in a different language, Sri Aurobindo offers several examples of his translation of lines from Kalidasa, explaining the reasons for his not being literal. While “the dark foot of Vishnu lifted in impetuous act to quell Bali” should be the faithful translation of a line from Kalidasa where the poet describes through comparison a huge dark cloud striding northwards, Sri Aurobindo renders it as:

Dark like the cloudy foot of highest God
When starting from the dwarfshape world-immense
With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.

Vishnu may not mean anything for a Western reader than a bizarre Hindu idol. Bali would not convey anything to a foreigner. Hence highest God and Titan. The Sanskrit *śyāmaḥ pādaḥ* has been presented as *dark like the cloudy foot*, “the word cloudy being necessary both to point the simile which is not so apparent & natural to the English reader as to the Indian and to define the precise sort of darkness indicated by the term *śyāmaḥ*.”

Along with these essays the compilation under review gives us a complete feast of all that Sri Aurobindo wrote

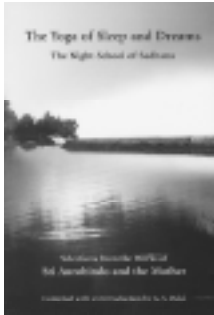
The phenomenon that was Kalidasa had never been more clearly and convincingly stated than in the essays by Sri Aurobindo,

on the great poet, his study of the characters in *Vikramorvasie* and his translation of the poet's works, some in full and some in fragments. However, the comprehensive work Sri Aurobindo had planned on Kalidasa was never completed. A draft of the chapters he intended working on shows how much he had studied them and their historical background. We cannot but heave a sigh of disappointment that Time did not allow those gems of knowledge and ideas already formed to assume visibility. A valuable appendix is an extract from *A Defence of Indian Culture* where Kalidasa figures significantly.

The compilation is a boon not only for the lovers of Kalidasa's works, but also for scholars in need of an insight into that genius the factual aspect of whose life is "lost in the silence of antiquity".

— Manoj Das

Shri Manoj Das is a well-known writer. A Padma awardee, he is a recipient of the Saraswati Samman and Sahitya Akademi award.



The Yoga of Sleep and Dreams

The Night-School of Sadhana

Selections from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Compiled with an Introduction by A. S. Dalal; Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department; Price Rs. 45.00, 107 pp.

For the uninitiated, the title will surely be intriguing. One has heard of Yoga of the body, Yoga of the mind ... but Yoga of sleep and dreams? How does one associate such an actively conscious term like Yoga with what seems to be such a passive and unconscious state like sleep?

To answer that precisely, has been put together this invaluable collection of words by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. One may imagine that organizing a compilation is the easiest thing to do—refer to a topic, select everything under it, and you've got a book ready. Not so in the case of A. S. Dalal, for he takes pains to first familiarize the reader with his theme in his own words which one invariably finds very naturally weaving in and out of those of others, linking different thoughts with ease and making one understand the essence of the subject in hand. Here

too, his introduction is indispensable, where he has thoughtfully and successfully encapsulated all that lies in the realm of sleep and dreams as explained by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What follows thereafter are thematic sections, with only Their words on different aspects of the night world.

Speaking of which, this 'night world' has a different imagery for each and every one of us. It is something which is so unique to oneself that to dive into it headlong is truly a self-revelation, one which may or may not always be pleasant to discover, and yet, one which is crucial and cannot be ignored. Many of us may not even question the necessity behind the urge to sleep, assuming it is the natural way to be. But even though the body at this stage of our evolution does demand its rest, it is nonetheless an aspect of life which can also come very much under our control.

As Sri Aurobindo says, "sleep changes into an inner mode of consciousness in which the sadhana can continue as much as in the waking state, and at the same time one is able to enter into other planes of consciousness than the physical and command an immense range of informative and utilisable experience."

But before we assume control, we first need to begin by raising questions about this seemingly inactive activity of ours and with the aid of those who have traveled far and deep into such worlds, make our own personal journeys and subsequent discoveries. If you think that sleep is all about shutting one's eyes and opening them in time for a new day, think again.

"Sleep can be a very active means of concentration and inner knowledge. Sleep is the school one has to go through, if one knows how to learn his lesson there, so that the inner being may be independent of the physical form, conscious of itself and master of its own life. There are entire parts of the being which need this immobility and semi-consciousness of the outer being, of the body, in order to live their own life, independently."

— The Mother

So if curiosity has begun to take over and you want to know why you sleep, or what happens when you sleep, where you go, whom you meet, why you behave in a manner so different, what the symbolism of all those fantastic voyages really is ... this is the book for you. Sleep and dreams are not just an ordinary by-product of a hard day's work, but an opportunity for growth and progress. Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga cannot be suspended when the hour strikes midnight ... no, it must go on and so it does.

The question then is, how do we become aware of this 'night school of sadhana'?

Read and find out.

— Shonar

Mother and Me

D. B. Bisht; Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry; Price Rs. 40.00, 48 pp.



Mother and Me, a small booklet by Dr D. B. Bisht is a reminiscence of his life and some incidents during his stay in Pondicherry and his contact with the Mother. This is very interesting and enjoyable

especially for those who have had some contact with the Mother. His life history shows how a mysterious force guided the events of his life so that he could come in contact with the Mother. He approached the Mother with a scientific temperament, asking Her questions that a devotee never would. Some of these questions, and the Mother's answers to them, are to be found in the later chapters of this book.

Let me mention here just two of the more interesting episodes in the book. Dr Bisht was a first-class student and his knowledge of medicine is remarkable. He has the ability to diagnose a person's ailment just by looking at him or her. During one of the blessings, he held the Mother's hand for a short while. He could immediately make out that the Mother had an irregular heartbeat. Such people usually do not live long. Dr Bisht found two exceptions; one was his maternal grandmother who lived an active life in the hills of Garhwal until her late seventies. The other was our Mother.

The second episode is even more interesting. One night during his early years in Pondicherry, before he began seeing the Mother in his capacity as doctor, he dreamt that he was urgently called to the Ashram as the Mother was not well. On examining Her, he saw a big dark hemorrhagic patch on Her left foot and part of the leg due to a blockage of blood circulation. This is normally a very painful condition. He contacted the Mother's secretary in the morning and asked him to enquire from the Mother if She had any trouble. The Mother sent word the following day that there was nothing wrong with Her. Eight years later, when he had started attending to the Mother as a physician, he was called, late at night, from the hospital where he worked to come and see the Mother urgently as She was not well. On examining Her, he found to his utter surprise that the Mother had exactly the same patch as he had dreamt eight years earlier.

All in all, a very interesting read.

— Vishwanath Lahiri

Vishwanath-da, a senior member of the Ashram, is in charge of the Centre for Design and Engineering. He has lived in the Ashram since 1948.

Initiation

Spiritual Insights on Life, Art, and Psychology

Michael Miovic; Published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Hyderabad; Price Rs. 250.00, 296 pp.



In his *Chasing the Rainbow*, Manoj Das recounts how the caretaker of the auditorium stopped the social scientist as he was leaving after delivering a speech on evolution. The caretaker, a man from a village, had often marvelled at the sight of a lotus in bloom: "If a wonder like this heavenly flower could be possible out of sheer mud and mire, with the intervention of the sunlight, why on earth can't the human mind, despite all the filth at its bottom, change into a godly mind with the intervention of Grace?"

The same conviction runs solid through the 296 pages of the votive garland offered to the Mother by her bhakta scientist child Michael Miovic. Taking up topics as diverse as psychiatry, translation technique, travel, art criticism, biography, as well as writing short stories and poems, Michael keeps always to the fore a strong aspiration, a robust optimism, and cheerful good humour. With these sadhaklike qualities he illumines all he touches with the light that touched and transformed him for ever one evening in 1993: "... spontaneously and without any effort, the Mother burst upon my awareness like a barrage of fireworks, and suddenly the whole universe became just Her."

That was definitive. As is the name of Michael's book: *Initiation*. For the contents, barring two exceptions, were written post '93 and bear the Midas touch of a consciousness opening to Sri Aurobindo's perspective. Visiting Calcutta, Michael set foot in the Ganges and "all became undulating vastness and peace, perfect clarity. Ganga is indeed a holy river, but only the camera of the soul can register her real image." This is the camera Michael chooses to use in every case.

An exhibition of Monet's late work "was a significant spiritual event, indeed, for me the proof that Western art is capable of responding to the spiritual force and inspiration of Sri Aurobindo's consciousness". Looking at the Parthenon, he has "the impression that it has been beamed down to earth straight from the Overmind". But the real surprises are his takes on the Beatles and Hollywood, as well as his experience of Calcutta.

Stuck in Dumdum Airport due to fog which prevented their landing at Delhi, Michael is not at all fazed by the chaos and harassment of the situation. He sees Sri Aurobindo's "milky-blue aura" hovering everywhere in the city where he was born. Discussing the early music of the Beatles he perceives "the impress of a spiritual force that used the Beatles as a vehicle for expression" and compares their impact to Darshan! He looks at Hollywood and even there his viewfinder succeeds in peering through the scum and detecting "the persistent action of a higher force upon the primitive Hollywood brain".

And yet Michael's is not a facile optimism, content to whitewash the world and sit back satisfied. His observa-

tional acuity and analytical bent amply justify the M.D. tagged to his name on both cover and spine of his book. Seeing a force at work behind expressions of popular culture does not blind him to the limitations of such media. His observations on his own country, America, bring out the balance between accurate observation and elevated idealism. He says that America's mantra is in her Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The nation, like the individual, prospers to the extent it adheres to its swadharma. He comments:

"So far, we have tried to achieve these freedoms of the individual in a rather simplistic, external and materialistic fashion; the widespread sense of alienation in American culture today is proof that this experiment is failing, and eventually the pain will become acute enough to make us try another route."

Taking up a diverse range of topics, Michael keeps always to the fore a strong aspiration, a robust optimism, and cheerful good humour.

In a previous issue of this newsletter, a reviewer said of a festschrift that part of it ought to have been brought out as a separate volume to give it its proper weight. Michael's book is a seed-bank for future studies in art criticism, holistic healing and social analysis. In his wholehearted adoption of Aurobindonean approach in every field of his life and interests he reminds us of Sri Aurobindo's view:

"Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge of the workings of God through Nature and through life. At first it is the workings of life and forms of Nature which occupy us, but as we go deeper and deeper and get a completer view and experience, each of these lines brings us face to face with God."

— Sunam Mukherjee
Sunam is a former student of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. A member of the Ashram, he works at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.

Bepin Chandra Pal on Sri Aurobindo *A portrait of 1909*

In 1918 S. R. Murthy & Co., Madras, published a book of sketches of leading Indian personalities by Bepin Chandra Pal. Among them was a piece on Sri Aurobindo, written in England in 1909, before Sri Aurobindo moved to Pondicherry. We reproduce here extracts from the sketch exactly as it was published. Its special value lies in the fact that it was one of the earliest sketches ever written on Sri Aurobindo, revealing the perspective from which he was seen and understood in those early days.

Bepin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), a national leader, was considered by Sri Aurobindo at one time to be "the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and magnificent orator". He was one of the prominent leaders of the new nationalist movement in Bengal, belonging to the militant extremist section of the Congress and working in cooperation with Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and Sri Aurobindo. He took a leading part in organising the movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905, and popularised the concepts of "Swadeshi" and "Swaraj". For refusing to give evidence in the prosecution of Bande Mataram, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

THE youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India, but in endowment, education, and character, perhaps, superior to them all—Aravinda seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries. The other leaders of the movement have left their life behind them: Aravinda has his before him. Nationalism is their last love: it is Aravinda's first passion. They are burdened with the cares and responsibilities of large families or complex relations: Aravinda has a small family and practically no cumulative obligations. His only care is for his country—the mother, as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism, at the best, a concern of the intellect with some, at the lowest a political cry and aspirations with others, is with Aravinda a supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done. But even of these very few—though their vision may be clear, their action is weak. Man cannot, by a fiat of his will at once recreate his life. Our Karma follows us with relentless insistence from day to day and from death to death. To see the vision of truth and yet not to be possessed by the supreme passion for it which burns up all other desires and snaps asunder, like ashen bands, all other ties and obligations—this is the divine tragedy of most finer natures. They have to cry out with St. Paul at every turn of life's tortuous path—"The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." But blessed are they for whom this tragic antithesis between the ideal and the real has been cancelled: for whom to know the truth is to love it, to love the truth is to strive after it, and to strive after the truth is to attain it: in whom there is no disparity, either in time or degree,

between the idea and its realisation: in whom the vision of the ideal, by its own intrinsic strength at once attunes every craving of the flesh, every movement of the mind, every motion of the heart, and every impulse of the will to itself: who have to strive for its realisation, not within, but without: who have to struggle not with their own Self, but with the Not-Self: who have to fight and conquer not themselves but others, in order to establish the kingdom of God, realised by them in the relations of their own inner life, in the actualities and appointments of the life of their own people or of humanity at large. These are, so to say, the chosen of God. They are born leaders of men. Commissioned to serve special ends affecting the life and happiness of large masses of men, they bear a charmed life. They may be hit, but cannot be hurt. They may be struck, but are never stricken. Their towering optimism, and the Grace of God, turn every evil into good, every opposition into help, every loss into a gain. By the general verdict of his countrymen, Aravinda stands to-day among these favoured sons of God.

* * *

Two strong currents of thoughts, ideals, and aspirations met together and strove for supremacy in Bengal, among the generation to which Aravinda's parents belonged. One was a current of Hindu Nationalism—of the revived life, culture and ideals of the nation that had lain dormant for centuries and had been discarded as lower and primitive by the first batch of English-educated Hindus, specially in Bengal. The other was the current of Indo-Anglicism—the onrushing life, culture and ideals of the foreign rulers of the land, which, expressing themselves through British law and administration on the one side, and the new schools and universities on the other,

threatened to swamp and drown the original culture and character of the people. The two stocks from which Aravinda sprang represented these two conflicting forces in the country. His maternal grandfather, Raj Narain Bose was one of the makers of modern Bengal. A student of David Hare, a pupil of De Rozario, an alumnus of the Hindu College, the first English college that had the support of both the Hindu community and the British rulers of the Province, Raj Narain Bose started life as a social and religious reformer. But while he caught as fully as any one else among his contemporaries, the impulse of the new illumination, he did not lose so completely as many of them did, his hold on the fundamental spirit of the culture and civilisation of his race. He joined the Brahma Samaj, under Maharishi Debendra Nath Tagore, but felt repelled by the denational spirit of the later developments in that movement under Keshub Chunder Sen. In fact, it is difficult to say, to which of its two leaders—Debendra Nath or Raj Narain, the Adi or the older Brahma-Samaj, as it came to be called after Keshub Chunder Sen seceded from it and established the Brahma-Samaj of India—was more indebted for its intense and conservative nationalism. But it may be safely asserted that while Debendra Nath's nationalism had a dominating theological note, Raj Narain's had both a theological and social, as well as a political emphasis. In him it was not merely the spirit of Hinduism that rose up in arms against the onslaught of European Christianity, but the whole spirit of Indian culture and manhood stood up to defend and assert itself against every form of undue foreign influence and alien domination. While Keshub Chunder Sen pleaded for the recognition of the truths in the Hindu scriptures side by side with those in the Bible, Raj Narain Bose proclaimed the superiority of Hinduism to Christianity. While Keshub Chunder was seeking to reconstruct Indian, and especially Hindu, social life, more or less after the British model, Raj Narain's sturdy patriotism and national self-respect rebelled against the enormity, and came forward to establish the superiority of Hindu social economy to the Christian social institutions and ideals. He saw the on-rush of European goods into Indian markets, and tried to stem the tide by quickening what we would now call the Swadeshi spirit, long before any one else had thought of it. It was under his inspiration that a Hindu Mela or National Exhibition was started a full quarter of a century before the Indian National Congress thought of an Indian Industrial Exhibition. The founder of this Hindu Mela was also the first Bengalee who organised gymnasias for the physical training of the youths of the nation. Stick and sword plays, and other ancient but decadent sports and pastimes of the people that have come into vogue recently, were origi-

nally revived at the Hindu Mela under Raj Narayan Bose's inspiration and instruction. Raj Narayan Bose did not openly take any part in politics, but his writings and speeches did a good deal to create that spirit of self-respect and self-assertion in the educated classes that have since found such strong expression in our recent political activities.



Uttarpara, April 1908.

Sri Aurobindo far right, front row; Bepin Chandra Pal far left

A strong conservatism, based upon a reasoned appreciation of the lofty spirituality of the ancient culture and civilisation of the country; a sensitive patriotism, born of a healthy and dignified pride of race; and a deep piety expressing itself through all the varied practical relations of life—these were the characteristics of the life and thought of Raj Narayan Bose. He represented the high-water-mark of the composite culture of his country—Vedantic, Islamic, and European. When he discoursed on Brahma-Jnan or knowledge of God, he brought to mind the ancient Hindu gnostics of the Upanishads. When he cited verses from the Persian poets, filling the ear with their rich cadence—with his eyes melting in love and his mobile features aglow with a supreme spiritual passion—he reminded one of the old Moslem devotees. And when he spoke on the corruptions of current religion, or the soulless selfishness of modern politics, he appeared as a nineteenth century nationalist and iconoclast of Europe. In his mind and life he was at once a Hindu Maharshi, a Moslem Shafi, and a Christian theist of the Unitarian type; and like Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahma-Samaj of which Raj Narayan Bose was for many years the honoured president, he also seems to have worked out a synthesis in his own spiritual life between the three dominant world-cultures that have come face to face in modern India. Like Ram Mohan, Raj Narayan also seems to have realised himself, intellectually and spiritually, that ideal

of composite nationhood in India, which the present generation has been called upon to actualise in social, economic and political relations of their country. Raj Narayan Bose was also an acknowledged leader in Bengali literature. A writer in the "Modern Review" (Calcutta) calls Raj Narayan Bose "The Grandfather of Indian Nationalism." He was Aravinda's maternal grandfather; and Aravinda owes not only his rich spiritual nature but even his very superior literary capacity to his inherited endowments from his mother's line.

If his maternal grandfather represented the ancient spiritual forces of his nation, Aravinda's father, Dr. Krista Dhan Ghose, represented to a very large extent the spirit of the new illumination in his country. Dr. Ghose was essentially a product of English education and European culture. A man of exceptional parts, he finished his education in England and taking his degree in medicine, entered the medical service of the Indian Government. He was one of the most successful Civil Surgeons of his day, and, had his life been spared, he would have assuredly risen to the highest position in his service open to any native of India. Like the general body of Indian young men who came to finish their education in England in his time, Krista Dhan Ghose was steeped in the prevailing spirit of Anglicism. Like all of them he was a thoroughly Anglicised Bengalee, in his ways of life. But unlike many of them, underneath his foreign clothing and ways he had a genuine Hindu heart and soul. Anglicism distorts Hindu character, cripples, where it cannot kill, the inherited altruism of the man, and makes him more or less neglectful of the numerous family and social obligations under which every Hindu is born. Like the original Anglo-Saxon, his Indian imitation also lives first and foremost for himself, his wife and children; and though he may recognise the claims of his relations to his charity, he scarcely places his purse at their service as an obligation. But Krista Dhan Ghose was an exception. Though he affected the European ways of living, he never neglected the social obligation of the Hindu. His purse was always open for his needy relations.

The poor of the town, where he served and lived, had in him a true friend and a ready help. In fact, his regard for the poor frequently led him to sacrifice to their present needs the future prospects of his own family and children. He had his sons educated in England; and so great was his admiration for English life and English culture that he sent them out here even before they had received any schooling in their country. But his charities met such constant and heavy inroads into his tolerably large income that he could not always keep his own children living in

England provided with sufficient funds for their board and schooling. Sons of comparatively rich parents they were brought up almost in abject poverty in a friendless country where wealth counts so much, not only physically, but also intellectually and morally. Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness regardless of his own ones, but sensitive to the sufferings of others—this was the inventory of the character of Dr. Krista Dhan Ghose. The rich blamed him for his recklessness, the man of the world condemned him for his absolute lack of prudence, the highest virtue in his estimation. But the poor, the widow and the orphan loved him for his selfless pity, and his soulful benevolence.

When death overtook him in the very prime of life there was desolation in many a poor home in his district. It not only left his own children in absolute poverty, but destroyed the source of ready relief to many helpless families among his relations and neighbours. His quick intellectual perception, his large sympathies, his selflessness, characterised by an almost absolute lack of what the man of the world always working with an eye to the main chance, calls prudence, as a matter of personal calculation,—these are Aravinda's inheritance in his father's line.

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A new paper was started. Aravinda was invited to join its staff. A joint-stock company was shortly floated to run it, and Aravinda became one of the directors. This paper—"Bande Mataram"—at once secured for itself a recognised position in Indian journalism. The hand of the master was in it, from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian. It at once raised the tone of every Bengali paper, and compelled the admiration of even hostile Anglo-Indian editors. Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country, eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the notice of the callous and self-centred British press. Long extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week even in the exclusive columns of the "Times" in London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it, and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal. The opportunities that were denied him in the National College he found in the pages of the "Bande Mataram," and from a tutor of a few youths he thus became the teacher of a whole nation.

COLLECTED WORKS OF THE MOTHER
Second Edition

To commemorate the Mother's 125th birth anniversary, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram is currently publishing a second edition of the Collected Works of the Mother in a uniform library set of 17 volumes.

The set will be available by the end of 2004 and will be priced at **Rs. 4800** (add on **Rs. 325** for packing and postage within India). Orders are to be placed after 1 January 2005 to **SABDA**, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002.

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THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO

The eighth batch of two volumes of the set of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo was brought out in August. The volumes are:

- Isha Upanishad
- Letters on Poetry and Art

As of October 2004, 23 volumes of The Complete Works set are available. Further releases will be announced later. As mentioned in *Recent Publications* of November 2003, more new material has been found and the set will contain at least 37 volumes—two more than originally anticipated. There will be four volumes of *Letters on Yoga* instead of three, and two of *On Himself* rather than one.

NEW BOOK DISTRIBUTION ARRANGEMENT

In July this year SABDA has entered into an agreement with Rupa & Co., New Delhi, for distribution of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and related publications to booksellers throughout India. Rupa & Co. has an extensive wholesale network, with branch offices all over the country supplying to retailers in their respective zones. This arrangement will facilitate availability at bookshops, especially of English books.

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