

# The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

January 2017



***“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”***

*- The Mother*

Year 7

Issue 10

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**Editor : Ms. Garima Sharma,** B-45, Batra Colony, Village Bharatpur, P.O. Kaushal Ganj, Bilaspur Distt. Rampur (U.P)

# THE RESURGENT INDIA

A Monthly National Review

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## SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

*Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella*

*Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels*

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## **A Declaration**

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother 13, p. 124-25)

**OUR APPROACH TO HISTORY – THE  
UNSUITABILITY OF THE TRADITIONAL  
APPROACH FOR THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF  
THE AGE OF RAMAYANA AND MAHABHARATA**

**The Footfalls**

We hear them, O Mother!  
Thy footfalls,  
Soft, soft, through the ages  
Touching earth here and there,  
And the lotuses left on Thy footprints  
Are cities historic,  
Ancient scriptures and poems and temples,  
Noble strivings, stern struggles for Right.

Where lead they, O Mother!  
Thy footfalls?  
O grant us to drink of their meaning!  
Grant us the vision that blindeth  
The thought that for man is too high.  
Where lead they, O Mother!  
Thy footfalls?

Approach Thou, O Mother, Deliverer!  
Thy children, Thy nurslings are we!  
On our hearts be the place for Thy stepping,  
Thine own, Bhumyâ Devi, are we.  
Where lead they, O Mother!  
Thy footfalls?

*(Sister Nivedita, Footfalls of Indian History)*

History is commonly understood as “the study of man’s dealings with other men and the adjustments of working relations between

human groups”<sup>1</sup>. It may also be viewed as “the discipline that studies the chronological record of events (as affecting a nation or people), based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their causes”.<sup>2</sup> Can we really confine the meaning of history to such narrow definitions or is there another broader and deeper way of looking at it? Yes, history can be viewed in a much deeper and broader way than as a set of straight narrations of events which occurred during a course of time. The modern as well as the traditional historians dwell mostly on the outer happenings and neglect almost completely the psychological elements – the base on which the history of a nation should be built and studied. The outer events and facts have their own place in history, but they should not be taken as all important and sufficient in themselves or even as the most important. This is the great mistake that most historians invariably make. They focus mainly on the outer facts and ignore or just give a secondary importance to the psychological element. This is because, as Sri Aurobindo says, “Modern Science, obsessed with the greatness of its physical discoveries and the idea of the sole existence of Matter, has long attempted to base upon physical data even its study of Soul and Mind and of those workings of Nature in man and animal in which a knowledge of psychology is as important as any of the physical sciences. Its very psychology founded itself upon physiology and the scrutiny of the brain and nervous system. It is not surprising therefore that in history and sociology attention should have been concentrated on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have been very much neglected. This kind of science would explain history and social development as much as possible by economic necessity or motive, – by economy understood in its widest sense. There are even historians who deny or put aside as of a very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and the influence of the thinker in the development of human institutions. The French Revolution, it is thought, would have happened just as it

did and when it did, by economic necessity, even if Rousseau and Voltaire had never written and the eighteenth-century philosophic movement in the world of thought had never worked out its bold and radical speculations.”<sup>3</sup>

Such a tendency of materialistic historians to simplify and reduce the problem to simple material formulas is also due to the fact that “The Surfaces of life are easy to understand; their laws, characteristic movements, practical utilities are ready to our hand and we can seize on them and turn them to account with a sufficient facility and rapidity. But they do not carry us very far. They suffice for an active superficial life from day to day, but they do not solve the great problems of existence. On the other hand, the knowledge of life’s profundities, its potent secrets, its great, hidden, all-determining laws is exceedingly difficult to us. We have found no plummet that can fathom these depths; they seem to us a vague, indeterminate movement, a profound obscurity from which the mind recoils willingly to play with the fret and foam and facile radiances of the surface. Yet it is these depths and their unseen forces that we ought to know if we would understand existence; on the surface we get only Nature’s secondary rules and practical bye-laws which help us to tide over the difficulties of the moment and to organise empirically without understanding them her continual transitions.

Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves, than its own communal and collective life. Sociology does not help us, for it only gives us the general story of the past and the external conditions under which communities have survived. History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time. What we do seize are current or recurrent phenomena, facile generalisations, partial ideas. We talk of democracy, aristocracy and autocracy, collectivism and individualism, imperialism and

nationalism, the State and the commune, capitalism and labour; we advance hasty generalisations and make absolute systems which are positively announced today only to be abandoned perforce tomorrow; we espouse causes and ardent enthusiasms whose triumph turns to an early disillusionment and then forsake them for others, perhaps for those that we have taken so much trouble to destroy. For a whole century mankind thirsts and battles after liberty and earns it with a bitter expense of toil, tears and blood; the century that enjoys without having fought for it turns away as from a puerile illusion and is ready to renounce the depreciated gain as the price of some new good. And all this happens because our whole thought and action with regard to our collective life is shallow and empirical; it does not seek for, it does not base itself on a firm, profound and complete knowledge. The moral is not the vanity of human life, of its ardours and enthusiasms and of the ideals it pursues, but the necessity of a wiser, larger, more patient search after its true law and aim.”<sup>4</sup>

We approach the history of the Age of Ramayana and Mahabharata for a profounder understanding of the true law and aim of the individual and the collective existence. In fact, these epics and the Puranas seek to provide just this by attempting to express and bring home the profound truths of the Veda – not just exclusively in the language of the intuitive mentality as is done in the Upanishads which when approached by the intellect unaided by intuition leads to (and have led to) the breaking up of the highest spiritual and philosophic truths into the narrow formulas opposed to each other and often leading to sterile disputatious and debates but by synthesizing them by a fusion, relation or grouping in the way most congenial to the Indian mind and spirit. This has been done sometimes expressly and explicitly with an unparalleled mastery as in the Bhagavad Gita, but most often in a form which may carry it even to the popular imagination and feeling by freely making use of history, myth, legend, tale, symbol, apologue, miracle and parable. In this respect, the Puranas – though not devoid of history (as popularly understood) – are essentially a true religious poetry, an

art of aesthetic presentation of religious truth. "The Puranas construct a system of physical images and observances each with its psychical significance. Thus the sacredness of the confluence of the three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, is a figure of an inner confluence and points to a crucial experience in a psycho-physical process of Yoga and it has too other significances, as is common in the economy of this kind of symbolism. The so-called fantastic geography of the Puranas, as we are expressly told in the Puranas themselves, is a rich poetic figure, a symbolic geography of the inner psychical universe. The cosmogony expressed sometimes in terms proper to the physical universe has, as in the Veda, a spiritual and psychological meaning and basis. It is easy to see how in the increasing ignorance of later times the more technical parts of the Puranic symbology inevitably lent themselves to much superstition and to crude physical ideas about spiritual and psychic things."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the Vedas, the Puranas started not with conceptions drawn from the physical universe but supplied entirely from the psychic universe within us. "The Vedic gods and goddesses conceal from the profane by their physical aspect their psychic and spiritual significance. The Puranic trinity and the forms of its female energies have on the contrary no meaning to the physical mind or imagination, but are philosophic and psychic conceptions and embodiments of the unity and multiplicity of the all-manifesting Godhead. The Puranic cults have been characterised as a degradation of the Vedic religion, but they might conceivably be described, not in the essence, for that remains always the same, but in the outward movement, as an extension and advance. Image worship and temple cult and profuse ceremony, to whatever superstition or externalism their misuse may lead, are not necessarily a degradation. The Vedic religion had no need of images, for the physical signs of its godheads were the forms of physical Nature and the outward universe was their visible house. The Puranic religion worshipped the psychical forms of the Godhead within us and had to express it outwardly in symbolic figures and house it in temples that were an architectural sign of cosmic significances. And the very inwardness it intended necessitated a

profusion of outward symbol to embody the complexity of these inward things to the physical imagination and vision. The religious aesthesis has changed, but the meaning of the religion has been altered only in temperament and fashion, not in essence. The real difference is this that the early religion was made by men of the highest mystic and spiritual experience living among a mass still impressed mostly by the life of the physical universe: the Upanishads casting off the physical veil created a free transcendent and cosmic vision and experience and this was expressed by a later age to the mass in images containing a large philosophical and intellectual meaning of which the Trinity and the Shaktis of Vishnu and Shiva are the central figures: the Puranas carried forward this appeal to the intellect and imagination and made it living to the psychic experience, the emotions, the aesthetic feeling and the senses. A constant attempt to make the spiritual truths discovered by the Yogin and the Rishi integrally expressive, appealing, effective to the whole nature of man and to provide outward means by which the ordinary mind, the mind of a whole people might be drawn to a first approach to them is the sense of the religio-philosophic evolution of Indian culture.”<sup>6</sup>

In the light of the above it must be obvious how hopeless and futile it is to approach the creations of Indian Rishis with the surface intellect unaided by deeper psychological experience which alone may possibly enable one to penetrate behind their symbolism and separate the historical element in these from the other elements all of which have been used to give expression to the master impulse of the Indian mind which is to reduce all its experience of life to the corresponding spiritual term and factor. It is this turn of the Indian mind which has made it possible for it to transfigure even the most external things of life into a basis for new spiritual experience. In the Bhagawat Purana – considered the greatest among all the Puranas – the emotional, the sensuous and even the sensual motions of being, before they could draw the soul farther outward leading to ethical degeneracy or licence, have been taken and transmuted into a psychological form and, so changed, become the elements of the

mystic capture of the Divine through the heart and the senses and a religion of the joy of God's love, delight and beauty.

Thus, in an integral view of man, the history of man must be the record of the outer expressions by – whatever means – of the inner urges, needs, motives and aspirations of his four-fold being: Body, Life, Mind and Soul. Under such a view of things history will not shrink from giving due importance to the records of the spiritual intuitions and intimations of mystics, sages and saints of the world which are probably the highest and noblest part of the collective wisdom of humanity, revealing the deepest and innermost and, therefore, the truest sources of our being and life. So, when viewed in this light, the popular “secular” and “scientific” school of history by denying the deeper dimensions of human life impoverishes itself and its clients by shutting itself to the insights of some of the wisest minds, hearts and souls of the world and to a source of illumination deeper and greater than reason – the one thing that enables him to transcend the limitations of his mental being.

If one looks at things in this way, it becomes obvious that, the absence of purely historical writings for which India is unjustly reproached by the occidental mentality is of no great importance. In the inspiring words of Sri Aurobindo, “Let us suppose that all historical documents, archives, records were destroyed or disappeared in the process of Time and the catastrophes of civilisation, and only the pure literature survived. Of how many nations should we have the very life, heart & mind, the whole picture of its life & civilisation and the story of its development adequately revealed in its best writing? Three European nations would survive immortally before the eyes of posterity, the ancient Greeks, the modern English and French, and two Asiatic nations, the Chinese & the Hindus, – no others.

Of all these the Hindus have revealed themselves the most perfectly, continuously and on the most colossal scale, precisely because they have been the most indomitably original in the form & matter of their literature. The Vedas, Upanishads & Puranas are

unique in their kind; the great Epics in their form and type of art stand apart in the epic literature of the world, the old Sanscrit drama has its affinities with a dramatic species which developed itself in Europe more than a thousand years later, and the literary epic follows laws of form and canons of art which are purely indigenous. And this immense body of first-rate work has left us so intimate & complete a revelation of national life & history, that the absence of pure historical writings becomes a subject of merely conventional regret.”<sup>7</sup>

## **A. THE OFFICIAL VERSION OF HUMAN HISTORY**

“Strange! the Germans have disproved the existence of Christ; yet his crucifixion remains still a greater historic fact than the death of Caesar.

40. Sometimes one is led to think that only those things really matter which have never happened; for beside them most historic achievements seem almost pale and ineffective.

41. There are four very great events in history, the siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindavan and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindavan created devotional religion, (for before there was only meditation and worship,) Christ from his cross humanised Europe, the colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.

42. They say that the Gospels are forgeries and Krishna a creation of the poets. Thank God then for the forgeries and bow down before the creators.”<sup>8</sup>

“Sri Aurobindo, who had made a thorough study of history, knew how uncertain are the data which have been used to write it. Most often the accuracy of the documents is doubtful, and the information they supply is poor, incomplete, trivial and frequently distorted. As a whole, the official version of human history is nothing but a long, almost unbroken record of violent aggressions: wars, revolutions, murders or colonisations. True, some of these aggressions and

massacres have been adorned with flattering terms and epithets; they have been called religious wars, holy wars, civilising campaigns; but they nonetheless remain acts of greed or vengeance.

Rarely in history do we find the description of a cultural, artistic or philosophical outflowering.

That is why, as Sri Aurobindo says, all this makes a rather dismal picture without any deep significance. On the other hand, in the legendary accounts of things which may never have existed on earth, of events which have not been declared authentic by 'official' knowledge, of wonderful individuals whose existence is doubted by the scholars in their dried-up wisdom, we find the crystallisation of all the hopes and aspirations of man, his love of the marvellous, the heroic and the sublime, the description of everything he would like to be and strives to become.”<sup>9</sup>

The Mother, when once asked if Brindavan also existed anywhere else than on earth, said, “The whole earth and everything it contains is a kind of concentration, a condensation of something which exists in other worlds invisible to the material eye. Each thing manifested here has its principle, idea or essence somewhere in the subtler regions. This is an indispensable condition for the manifestation. And the importance of the manifestation will always depend on the origin of the thing manifested.

In the world of the gods there is an ideal and harmonious Brindavan of which the earthly Brindavan is but a deformation and a caricature.

Those who are developed inwardly, either in their senses or in their minds, perceive these realities which are invisible (to the ordinary man) and receive their inspiration from them.

So the writer or writers of the Bhagavat were certainly in contact with a whole inner world that is well and truly real and existent, where they saw and experienced everything they have described or revealed.

Whether Krishna existed or not in a human form, living on earth, is only of very secondary importance (except perhaps from an exclusively historical point of view), for Krishna is a real, living and active being; and his influence has been one of the great factors in the progress and transformation of the earth.”<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo asserted the same thing when he wrote, “Some say Krishna never lived, he is a myth. They mean on earth; for if Brindavan existed nowhere, the Bhagwat could not have been written.”<sup>11</sup>

The traditional historical accounts tend to exclude or at least play down the importance of the most important characters in the evolving drama of the human life on this globe because it doubts not only the actuality of their physical existence but also the authenticity of the most abnormal and fantastic powers and acts – still reverberating in the hearts and souls of innumerable on this globe – attributed to such characters. This it has to do because it lacks the key of profound mystic experience which alone can enable one to interpret these in terms of concepts and forms intelligible to a receptive human intelligence. To a deeper view of things – which alone is suitable for approaching the Epics and Puranas – the persistent reality and the enormous influence of these legendary characters on human life which has been affirmed by the testimony of countless mystics and sages down the ages cannot reasonably be doubted by anyone with some mystic experience.

Discussing the question of the historicity and occult reality of Sri Krishna, Sri Aurobindo, in one of his letters to D.K. Roy wrote, “I have always regarded the incarnation as a fact and accepted the historicity of Krishna as I accept the historicity of Christ.

The story of Brindavan is another matter; it does not enter into the main story of the Mahabharata and has a Puranic origin and it could be maintained that it was intended all along to have a symbolic character. At one time I accepted that explanation, but I had to abandon it afterwards; there is nothing in the Puranas that betrays

any such intention. It seems to me that it is related as something that actually occurred or occurs somewhere; the Gopis are to them realities and not symbols. It was for them at the least an occult truth, and occult and symbolic are not the same thing; the symbol may be only a significant mental construction or only a fanciful invention, but the occult is a reality which is actual somewhere, behind the material scene as it were and can have its truth for the terrestrial life and its influence upon it, may even embody itself there. The lila of the Gopis seems to be conceived as something which is always going on in a divine Gokul and which projected itself in an earthly Brindavan and can always be realised and its meaning made actual in the soul. It is to be presumed that the writers of the Puranas took it as having been actually projected on earth in the life of the incarnate Krishna and it has always been so accepted by the religious mind of India.”<sup>12</sup>

## **B. THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GREATER AND VASTER PLANES (ABOVE, BEHIND AND BELOW THE LEVEL OF OUR SURFACE CONSCIOUSNESS) AND THEIR INTERACTION WITH THE TERRESTRIAL LIFE IN STUDYING THE VARIOUS KINDS OF SCENES AND ACCOUNTS FOUND IN THE EPICS AND PURANAS**

These planes whose action – because they are superconscient, inner and subconscient to our surface consciousness – we are not normally conscious of, may be looked upon as the occult sources of all that we think, feel and do. In the common order of things, the balance in a man’s being is an overwhelming dependence on and domination by his physical being\* (largely sub-conscient) for whose satisfaction man is automatically impelled to utilise the two higher parts – the life and the mind. Man’s surface perception of the world depends largely on his organ of reception called manas – the sense

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\*Also includes, in Sri Aurobindo’s terminology, the physical vital and the physical mind.

mind – which uses the sense organs and its own direct and independent faculty of perception to form what are called “percepts” – the things perceived – and “concepts” – the things conceived or thought of. These two together make what is called “understanding” which colours all that we think, feel and do.

It is of utmost importance to understand that the quality of a person’s understanding – the thing on which his whole life depends – is determined by the balance of the action of the occult planes in his being. An increased or more pronounced action of the two greater planes – the inner and the superconscient – leads the nature towards joyous clarity, wideness and harmony. The action of the lower – subconscious and inconscient – planes leads to just the opposite – to confusion, narrowness and disharmony leading to pain and suffering. All the spiritual or yogic practices may be looked upon as concentrated (and consecrated) attempts to favourably alter the balance of the action of the occult planes in one’s being by progressively replacing the action of the lower planes by that of the higher. Ordinarily a person is almost entirely dominated by the action of the lower planes which are the home of what are termed *Dasyus* (*Panis*, *Vritras*, *Nidah*, *Namuchis*, etc.) in the *Veda* and *Asuras*, *Rakshasas* and *Pisachas* – the denizens respectively of the largely subconscious mental-vital, vital and physical-vital planes – in the *Puranas* and the *Epics*. The gods or the *Devas* belong to the higher planes and what are termed *Yakshas*, *Gandharvas*, *Apsaras*, *Kinnaras*, etc. have their stations somewhere in-between. Besides these beings which are exhaustively described in Sanskrit literature, there are other greater Beings, Powers and Presences pertaining to the sublimer ranges of the greater planes. These tend to be universal in their nature with a wider and more powerful but less easily perceptible action. Only a very tiny fraction of the denizens of these planes is interested in materially expressing itself on our plane. Still, even this little is too much for the small material plane to accommodate which is not even so much as a drop compared to the ocean of these planes or – to use a more apt and revealing Puranic symbol – is like a mustard seed on one of the thousand hoods of *Seshanaga* – the *Ananta*. The result is that the parts (or fraction of the

beings) of these planes that seek expression here have to battle for it. Each of these strive to express themselves – as completely as they may – through the thoughts, feelings and actions of human beings.

The Epics and the Puranas are full of the descriptions of battles between these occult presences, especially between the Devas and the Asuras. Most of these beings and their battles belong predominantly to subtler psychological planes. A great confusion, bewilderment and disbelief is unnecessarily created when one takes these, as a materialistic mind is apt to take, as belonging to the physical plane. Often the Epics and the Puranas concern themselves solely with the description and narration of the scenes, places and beings of these planes and their implicit action or influence – something very very difficult to unravel even by one with some mystic experience – on human beings which they try to convey by resorting to the use of – the only means that can be effective in this task – symbols, myths, legends, etc. A mind without any understanding of the action of these planes is likely to find these scriptures full of unintelligible and senseless stuff which, in his view, must have its origin in the tendency of the primitive singers to indulge in an uncontrolled poetic imagination and fantasy.

When a Power or Being of the occult planes consciously takes birth in a human body or comes to possess, almost entirely, an already existing human being then, depending on the nature of the Being, there is a birth or a culmination of either a Deva or an Asura in the human being. In the Mahabharata, the story of the Devic background of the Pandavas and their strifes and battles with the Kauravas of Asuric origin is really a story of battle between the Devas and the Asuras.

The people who are born with or develop an opening to a substantial action of the inner planes tend to grow into poets, artists, musicians, devotees and saints. The action of the superconscient produces great sages, seers and prophets. The great Asuras and Titans are the products of an unimpeded action of the nether subconscious planes.

Behind all the apparent battles, actions and strivings of all these planes, there stands the Supreme Divine Will which – because of the enormity and complexity of the task of progressively unveiling and manifesting the Truth of the Absolute – brings up and uses all these and countless other planes and existences in and beyond Time and Space going into the Eternal and the Infinite and even beyond these to serve its end. To a deeper and higher view of things all these existences, planes, powers, beings, etc. – in spite of the appearances to the contrary – only conspire to carry out and fulfill the Will of the Supreme Absolute who – according to the Veda and the Vedanta – is identical with our Real Self.

### **C. THE UNSUITABILITY OF THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH FOR THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE AGE OF RAMAYANA AND MAHABHARATA**

The traditional approach confines itself to the apparent physical world and is able to take account of the action of the hidden occult ranges of our being only to the extent they visibly impinge and produce an effect upon the physical appearances of things. Such an approach is hopelessly inadequate when one is interested in penetrating – as far as may be possible for one – into the secrets of the Epics and the Puranas composed by the ancient seer-poets – the Rishis – who used symbol, myth, history, legend, tale, miracle, etc., to bring home and give expression to the Truths of the supreme Reality, not just through the mind but through all the various parts – even the most external – of a human being. Thus, these writings – when properly approached – can be of great help to us for understanding better the true law and aim of our individual and collective existence.

To the ancient Indian mentality the deeper and higher planes or worlds were as important – even more important – as the apparent drab physical world because the divine Truth finds a less mixed and freer expression on these planes which lie behind everything that finds expression on the physical plane which is only akin to a shadow of these in some respects. The expression of the divine Truth is very

marred and mixed – often turning it to almost the opposite – on this outermost plane. A vivid and high experience of the apparently mixed and unreal character of this plane is behind the “Mayavada” of Shankara and others. According to Sri Aurobindo, to a deeper and more integral experience, this apparent world is not fundamentally unreal – something is there behind it – only its appearance to us is very defective. Even on the subtle physical plane – just next to our own – what appears ugly here is beautiful there and what is beautiful here is there divine. These occult planes are capable of being entered into by one with developed occult faculties and even further explored if one resorts to yogic practices and the strict discipline necessary for it. As pointed out above, these planes are, in a way, precursors of the physical plane and provide a far greater access and penetration into the secrets of why and how of things. A person conscious on these planes and able to act there – as our ancient mystics and seers were able to – can produce effects on the physical plane which would appear to be miraculous – although they are not really so because still subject to a higher and more plastic determinism of these planes – to all those who live in the ordinary physical consciousness and have no capacity of subtle sight. In the Epics and the Puranas an unsparing use has been made of what would seem miraculous and bizarre to an occidental mentality which tends to discount and discard the accounts of such phenomena as vain and senseless exaggerations. But to do this, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to emasculate these legends and tales of the most characteristic part of their strength.

A.D. Pusalker in his book “Studies in the Epics and Puranas” has provided a succinct summary of almost all the noteworthy attempts by the academic scholars, both Indian and Occidental, to make something of these scriptures. As expected, all these attempts, with an unavoidable inherent element of the pride of the intellect and the sense of superiority (to the ancients) accompanying them, have not been able to enter into the secret of these scriptures and rarely got beyond facile observations on the date of origin, construction, later accretions and other salient features of the outer

body. For example, Pusalker in his eulogy of the critical edition of the Mahabharata prepared by the Bhandarkar Institute of Poona mentions the enormous amount of highly credible and conscientious work – appreciated even by foreign savants – done by the editor Sukthankar. This edition, according to Pusalker, has omitted – after applying high standards of critical assessment and much judicious deliberation – certain portions from the popular traditional text of the Mahabharata. According to him, “Among the notable omissions may be mentioned (1) the celebrated prayer of Draupadī to Kṛṣṇa (B.II 68. 41-46) when Duḥśāsana was stripping off her garments...”<sup>13</sup> Now, this most celebrated prayer of Draupadi is, besides certain portions of the Bhagavad Gita in the Bhishma Parva, the most important and popular part of the Mahabharata and has been at the core of the thousands of devotional songs composed by saints and devotees to give vent to their deepest feelings about the interventions of the divine Grace in their lives. These songs have deeply inspired and given solace to millions and millions of devotees across the land for millenniums. Such things can be done only when one’s heart and soul are covered up by the limited materialistic sense of the real which blinds one to the deeper realities and erects false standards for judging them. Here too, Pusalker reports that, “According to the Editor, from the artistic standpoint, the text seems to gain rather than lose by the exclusion of these.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, with such a dry materialistic mentality which prides itself on its intellectual capacities, one cannot be expected to penetrate into the secrets of these great Indian literary spiritual creations. To manipulate or to examine such important parts of our national creations in the light of one’s narrow mental measures is to further deprive these of the most characteristic parts of their strength.

One of the suggestions implicit behind the above exclusion may be that, perhaps, these six Slokas are a later addition by some zealous devotee of Krishna who wanted to aggrandise his “ista devata”. Even if this were true, it does not in the least detract from – in fact enormously adds to – the enormous value of these Slokas except for

those who, suffering from what Sri Aurobindo termed “the secular refrigeration” of their deeper parts are able to explain away such vistas of the savior Grace of the Divine which fortunately, at least in India has always been a reality for innumerable devotees who have repeatedly witnessed its intervention at the critical moments of their lives to “save the day” for them. It is easy for such people to have an abiding trust in the concrete reality of the Divine’s promise when he says in Sloka 9.31 of the Gita, “Know it for certain, O Kaunteya, that my devotee never perishes.” It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the most precious thing in the whole creation – the jewel of devotion to the Divine – has been cast on a dung-hill by the abstraction loving philosophers.

There is another class of intellectuals who are openly “believers” and readily admit the reality of a Presence and a controlling Power behind the appearances of things and have often even risen above the widespread tendency of mistaking morality and ethical nature for spirituality but lack actual experience of things spiritual. In the spiritual field the efforts and writings of such people tend – even when entirely well-intentioned – to put false colours and thus debase the truths of the spirit. Their efforts, besides misdirecting those who come to be impressed by their show of eloquence and objectivity, are tantamount to helping the “bad coin” to drive the “good coin” out of circulation. Such people also cannot at all be expected to penetrate into the secret of these scriptures and do anything fruitful on this front. Speaking on such well intentioned efforts of the moderns, Yogi Sri Krishnaprem, with his usual eloquence, had this to remark, “These moderns, when they do believe in religious experience, can think of it only in terms of a sort of vague Wordsworthian ‘Spirit divine which rolls through all things,’ or ‘something far more deeply interfused’ – or some words to that effect – I am forgetting all these things. They think that these vague poetic intuitions are the same thing as the living experience of the mystics. They pride themselves on their ‘undogmatic,’ ‘synthetic’ eclecticism in support of which they invoke the names of the great teachers of the past, quite forgetting that these said great teachers

were neither 'synthetic,' nor 'eclectic.' Look at Buddha, Shankara or Chaitanya. None of them were at all eclectic but on the other hand all strongly urged a single view with a one-pointed *shraddha* (faith) and *nishtha* (assiduity). But the 'undogmatic' modern vogue is to look upon *shraddha* or *nishtha* with something akin to commiseration, if not contempt. A learned article I read the other day in the Orient described Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu as 'plunging into the ocean maddened to ecstasy by its beauty.' *Hai! Hai!* (alas!) and I suppose it was the beauty of the muddy puddle of rain-water on the site where now stands Radhakunda that led Sri Chaitanya Deva to do the same there? The majesty of the ocean may be a great thing, but it was not that which had intoxicated Sri Gauranga, but the infinitely more maddening sense-destroying beauty of Sri Krishna whom he saw standing in front of him.

Gone were the ocean-waves, and in their place he saw only the blue rippling waters of the Jumna surrounding the blue smiling figure of his Lord and it was that sight that annihilated his senses and made him plunge madly in, careless of all but of reaching his Beloved. But I suppose that is all effete superstition?

For myself I am glad I have turned my back on all the synthetic modern pseudo-universalism. Every year that passes it slips farther and farther away."<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on the work of the famous modern psychologists like Jung, Sri Aurobindo in an important letter to Dilip Kumar Roy expressed himself in a similar vein when he wrote, "No doubt, they are very remarkable men in their own field, but this new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a-b-c-d of the subconscious and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t = cat, t-r-e-e = tree) is the foundation of all knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher lights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of things is above and not below, *upari budhna e[space]m* [their foundation is above]. The superconscious, not the subconscious,

is the true foundation of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is besides poor and dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the province of the greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing.”<sup>16</sup>

What is true of the efforts of the modern psychologists and apparent believers in religious experience is even more true of the efforts of modern historians when, devoid of any real sympathy and understanding of the genius of India and its past spiritual culture and tradition and filled with pride in their intellectual prowess, they try, using the little plummet of their mind, to probe and fathom the depths of the ocean of spiritual truth which has found expression in our sacred scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Epics and the Puranas. The upshot of all the above is that if one’s aim in approaching the history of ancient India is to arrive at a profounder understanding of the true law and aim of our individual and collective existence, the official or traditional way of approach to history will not be adequate for anything but a colourful display of our fancies, ideas and crude notions based on the extremely limited orb of our psychological existence. The loss of Hindu intellectual faith in the totality of the spiritual aspects of our religion is at the base of this kind of tendency which has – contrary to all expectation – spread even more during the 5-6 decades after Independence under the garb of an application of the sane and objective reason by a pseudo-secular mentality to the study of our past. The results of this tendency, especially in the field of history, have been most injurious to the survival of our spiritual culture and tradition – the soul of the nation. Perhaps Swami Vivekananda had an inkling of this kind of thing when he said, “... if you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone

of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.”<sup>17</sup>

Or again, in the words of Sri Krishnaprem, “When the traditions of a nation die then that nation is dead and even if it persists as a great Power in the world, yet it is nothing but an aggregate of meaningless individuals determinedly pursuing their contemptible aims... History is a symbol, and what that symbol signifies is something infinitely more precious than a mere peddling adherence to a sequence of so-called ‘facts.’ There is only one root fact anywhere, and that is the Eternal One. Whatever helps to reveal Him is a fact, and whatever to hide Him is a lie even if all the fools in the world affirm it.”<sup>18</sup>

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# HISTORY OF INDIA – THE VEDIC AGE (25)

## XIII. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THE HISTORICAL BASES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDA

### C. SRI AUROBINDO'S DETAILED PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDA

To clearly illustrate and bring into light some of the key elements in Sri Aurobindo's very deep and profound psychological interpretation of the Rig Veda we list here under appropriate headings some of the most important selections from his seminal work, *The Secret of the Veda*, where he has provided on the basis of his deep, high and vast spiritual experience, **a detailed psychological interpretation of the Veda by opening up the intricate Vedic symbolism sufficiently to permit the cultured intelligence of today to go behind and feel the deeper truth behind the Vedic legends and images** such as those of the Oceans and Rivers, the Dawn and Herds of the Dawn, the Cow and the Angiras legend, the Hound of Heaven, the Conquest over the Dasyus, the Human Fathers, etc.

#### ***(i) The Image of the Oceans and the Rivers and the Vedic Idea of Existence***

According to Sri Aurobindo, it is beyond doubt that "...the Vedic Rishis used the image of water, a river or an ocean, in a figurative sense and as a psychological symbol,... existence itself is constantly spoken of in the Hindu writings, in Veda, Purana and even philosophical reasoning and illustration as an ocean. The Veda speaks of two oceans, the upper and the lower waters. These are the ocean of the subconscious, dark and inexpressive, and the ocean of the superconscious, luminous and eternal expression but beyond the human mind. Vamadeva in the last hymn of the fourth Mandala speaks of these two oceans. He says that a honeyed wave climbs up from the ocean and by means of this mounting wave which is the Soma (*aṁ u*) one attains entirely to immortality; that wave or that Soma is the secret name of the clarity (*ghṛasya*, the symbol of the

clarified butter); it is the tongue of the gods; it is the nodus (*n̄bhi*) of immortality.

*Samudrād ūrmir madhum̄n ud̄rad,  
up̄un̄ sam am̄tatvam̄ nā;  
Gh̄tasya n̄ma guhyā yad asti,  
jihv̄ dev̄n̄m am̄tasya n̄bhī.*<sup>a</sup>

I presume there can be no doubt that the sea, the honey, the Soma, the clarified butter are in this passage at least psychological symbols. Certainly, Vamadeva does not mean that a wave or flood of wine came mounting up out of the salt water of the Indian Ocean or of the Bay of Bengal or even from the fresh water of the river Indus or the Ganges and that this wine is a secret name for clarified butter. What he means to say is clearly that out of the subconscious depths in us arises a honeyed wave of Ananda or pure delight of existence, that it is by this Ananda that we can arrive at immortality; this Ananda is the secret being, the secret reality behind the action of the mind in its shining clarities. Soma, the god of the Ananda, the Vedanta also tells us, is that which has become mind or sensational perception; in other words, **all mental sensation carries in it a hidden delight of existence and strives to express that secret of its own being.** Therefore Ananda is the tongue of the gods with which they taste the delight of existence; it is the nodus in which all the activities of the immortal state or divine existence are bound together. Vamadeva goes on to say, 'Let us give expression to this secret name of the clarity, – that is to say, let us bring out this Soma wine, this hidden delight of existence; let us hold it in this world-sacrifice by our surrenderings or submissions to Agni, the divine Will or Conscious-Power which is the Master of being. He is the four-horned Bull of the worlds and when he listens to the soul-thought of man in its self-expression, he ejects this secret name of delight from its hiding-place.'

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<sup>a</sup> IV.58.1

*Vayaṁ nāma pra bravāma ghṛtasya,  
 asmin yajñe dhṛayāma namobhiḥ;  
 Upa brahma avac chasyamaṇaḥ,  
 catuḥśloka avamādgaura etat.<sup>a</sup>*

Let us note, in passing, that since the wine and the clarified butter are symbolic, the sacrifice also must be symbolic. In such hymns as this of Vamadeva's the ritualistic veil so elaborately woven by the Vedic mystics vanishes like a dissolving mist before our eyes and there emerges the Vedantic truth, the secret of the Veda.

Vamadeva leaves us in no doubt as to the nature of the Ocean of which he speaks; for in the fifth verse he openly describes it as the ocean of the heart, *hṛdyāṁt samudrāṁt*, out of which rise the waters of the clarity, *ghṛtasya dhṛrāṁ*; they flow, he says, becoming progressively purified by the mind and the inner heart, *antar hṛdā manasā pṛyamānaḥ*.<sup>b</sup> And in the closing verse he speaks of the whole of existence being triply established, first in the seat of Agni – which we know from other riks to be the Truth-Consciousness, Agni's own home, *svā damam tāṁ bhāt*, – secondly, in the heart, the sea, which is evidently the same as the heart-ocean, – thirdly, in the life of man.

*Dhṛman te viśvaḥ bhuvanam adhi ṛitam,  
 antaḥ samudre hṛdyantar yuḥi.<sup>c</sup>*

**The superconscious, the sea of the subconscious, the life of the living being between the two, – this is the Vedic idea of existence.**

The sea of the superconscious is the goal of the rivers of clarity, of the honeyed wave, as the sea of the subconscious in the heart within is their place of rising. This upper sea is spoken of as the

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<sup>a</sup> IV.58.2, <sup>b</sup> IV.58.6, <sup>c</sup> IV.58.11

Sindhu, a word which may mean either river or ocean; but in this hymn it clearly means ocean. Let us observe the remarkable language in which Vamadeva speaks of these rivers of the clarity. He says first that the gods sought and found the clarity, the *ghṛtam*, triply placed and hidden by the Panis in the cow, *gavi*. It is beyond doubt that *go* is used in the Veda in the double sense of Cow and Light; the Cow is the outer symbol, the inner meaning is the Light. The figure of the cows stolen and hidden by the Panis is constant in the Veda. Here it is evident that as the sea is a psychological symbol – the heart-ocean, *samudre hṛdi*, – and the Soma is a psychological symbol and the clarified butter is a psychological symbol, the cow in which the gods find the clarified butter hidden by the Panis must also symbolise an inner illumination and not physical light. The cow is really Aditi, the infinite consciousness hidden in the subconscious, and the triple *ghṛtam* is the triple clarity of the liberated sensation finding its secret of delight, of the thought-mind attaining to light and intuition and of the truth itself, the ultimate supra-mental vision. This is clear from the second half of the verse in which it is said, ‘One Indra produced, one Surya, one the gods fashioned by natural development out of Vena’; for Indra is the Master of the thought-mind, Surya of the supra-mental light, Vena is Soma, the master of mental delight of existence, creator of the sense-mind.<sup>a”1</sup>

“ ‘These move’ says Vamadeva ‘from the heart-ocean; penned by the enemy in a hundred enclosures they cannot be seen; I look towards the streams of the clarity, for in their midst is the Golden Reed. Entirely they stream like flowing rivers becoming purified by the heart within and the mind; these move, waves of the clarity, like animals under the mastery of their driver. As if on a path in front of the Ocean (*sindhu*, the upper ocean) the mighty ones move compact of forceful speed but limited by the vital force (*vṛta*, *vṛyu*), the streams of clarity; they are like a straining horse which breaks its limits, as it is nourished by the waves.’ On the very face of it this is the poetry of a mystic concealing his sense from the profane under

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<sup>a</sup> IV.58.4

a veil of images which occasionally he suffers to grow transparent to the eye that chooses to see. What he means is that the divine knowledge is all the time flowing constantly behind our thoughts, but is kept from us by the internal enemies who limit our material of mind to the sense-action and sense-perception so that though the waves of our being beat on banks that border upon the superconscient, the infinite, they are limited by the nervous action of the sense-mind and cannot reveal their secret. They are like horses controlled and reined in; only when the waves of the light have nourished their strength to the full does the straining steed break these limits and they flow freely towards That from which the Soma-wine is pressed out and the sacrifice is born.

<sup>a</sup> *Yatra soma s̄yate yatra yaj̄o,*  
*gh̄tasya dh̄r̄ abhi tat pavante.*

This goal is, again, explained to be that which is all honey, – *gh̄tasya dh̄r̄ madhumat pavante*; it is the Ananda, the divine Beatitude. And that this goal is the Sindhu, the superconscient ocean, is made clear in the last rik, where Vamadeva says, ‘May we taste that honeyed wave of thine’ – of Agni, the divine Purusha, the four-horned Bull of the worlds – ‘which is borne in the force of the Waters where they come together.’

<sup>b</sup> *Ap̄m an̄e samithe ya h̄tas,*  
*tam āȳma madhumantā ta r̄mim.*

We find this fundamental idea of the Vedic Rishis brought out in the Hymn of Creation (X.129) where the subconscious is thus described. ‘Darkness hidden by darkness in the beginning was this all, an ocean without mental consciousness . . . out of it the One was born by the greatness of Its energy. It first moved in it as desire which was the first seed of mind. The Masters of Wisdom found out in the non-existent that which builds up the existent; in the heart they found it by purposeful impulsion and by the thought-mind. Their

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<sup>a</sup> IV.58.9, <sup>b</sup> IV.58.11

ray was extended horizontally; there was something above, there was something below.' In this passage the same ideas are brought out as in Vamadeva's hymn but without the veil of images. Out of the subconscious ocean the One arises in the heart first as desire; he moves there in the heart-ocean as an unexpressed desire of the delight of existence and this desire is the first seed of what afterwards appears as the sense-mind. **The gods thus find out a means of building up the existent, the conscious being, out of the subconscious darkness; they find it in the heart and bring it out by the growth of thought and purposeful impulsion, *prati*, by which is meant mental desire as distinguished from the first vague desire that arises out of the subconscious in the merely vital movements of nature.** The conscious existence which they thus create is stretched out as it were horizontally between two other extensions; below is the dark sleep of the subconscious, above is the luminous secrecy of the superconscious. These are the upper and the lower ocean.

This Vedic imagery throws a clear light on the similar symbolic images of the Puranas, especially on the famous symbol of Vishnu sleeping after the pralaya on the folds of the snake Ananta upon the ocean of sweet milk. It may perhaps be objected that the Puranas were written by superstitious Hindu priests or poets who believed that eclipses were caused by a dragon eating the sun and moon and could easily believe that during the periods of non-creation the supreme Deity in a physical body went to sleep on a physical snake upon a material ocean of real milk and that therefore it is a vain ingenuity to seek for a spiritual meaning in these fables. My reply would be that there is in fact no need to seek for such meanings; for these very superstitious poets have put them there plainly on the very surface of the fable for everybody to see who does not choose to be blind. For they have given a name to Vishnu's snake, the name Ananta, and Ananta means the Infinite; therefore they have told us plainly enough that the image is an allegory and that Vishnu, the all-pervading Deity, sleeps in the periods of non-creation on the coils of the Infinite. As for the ocean, the Vedic imagery shows us that it

must be the ocean of eternal existence and this ocean of eternal existence is an ocean of absolute sweetness, in other words, of pure Bliss. For the sweet milk (itself a Vedic image) has, evidently, a sense not essentially different from the *madhu*, honey or sweetness, of Vamadeva's hymn.<sup>a</sup>

Thus we find that **both Veda and Purana use the same symbolic images; the ocean is for them the image of infinite and eternal existence.** We find also that the image of the river or flowing current is used to symbolise a stream of conscious being. We find that Saraswati, one of the seven rivers, is the river of inspiration flowing from the Truth-consciousness. We have the right then to suppose that the other six rivers are also psychological symbols."<sup>2</sup>

## ***(ii) The Substance of the Veda and the Mystic Meaning Behind Its Symbols, Legends and Symbolic Words***

"The Vedic hymns, whatever else they may be, are throughout an invocation to certain 'Aryan' gods, friends and helpers of man, for ends which are held by the singers, – or seers, as they call themselves (*kavi*, *ṛṣi*, *vipra*), – to be supremely desirable (*vara*, *vra*). These desirable ends, these boons of the gods are summed up in the words *rayi*, *rdhas*, which may mean physically wealth or prosperity, and psychologically a felicity or enjoyment which consists in the abundance of certain forms of spiritual wealth. Man contributes as his share of the joint effort the work of the sacrifice, the Word, the Soma Wine and the *ghṛta* or clarified butter. The Gods are born in the sacrifice, they increase by the Word, the Wine and the Ghrita and in that strength and in the ecstasy and intoxication of the Wine they accomplish the aims of the sacrificer. The chief elements of the wealth thus acquired are the Cow and the Horse; but there are also others, *hiraṇya*, gold, *vra*, men or heroes, *ratha*, chariots, *praj* or

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<sup>a</sup> IV.58.1

*apatya*, offspring.<sup>a</sup> The very means of the sacrifice, the fire, the Soma<sup>b</sup>, the *ghṛta*, are supplied by the Gods and they attend the sacrifice as its priests, purifiers, upholders, heroes of its warfare, – for there are those who hate the sacrifice and the Word, attack the sacrificer and tear or withhold from him the coveted wealth. The chief conditions of the prosperity so ardently desired are the rising of the Dawn and the Sun and the downpour of the rain of heaven and of the seven rivers, – physical or mystic, – called in the Veda the Mighty Ones of heaven. But even this prosperity, this fullness of cows, horses, gold, men, chariots, offspring, is not a final end in itself; all this is a means towards the opening up of the other worlds, the winning of Swar, the ascent to the solar heavens, the attainment by the path of the Truth to the Light and to the heavenly Bliss where the mortal arrives at Immortality.

Such is the undoubted substance of the Veda. The ritual and mythological sense which has been given to it from very ancient times is well known and need not be particularised; in sum, it is the performance of sacrificial worship as the chief duty of man with a view to the enjoyment of wealth here and heaven hereafter. We know also the modern view of the matter in which the Veda is a worship of the personified sun, moon, stars, dawn, wind, rain, fire, sky, rivers and other deities of Nature, the propitiation of these gods by sacrifice, the winning and holding of wealth in this life, chiefly from human and Dravidian enemies and against hostile demons and mortal plunderers,

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<sup>a</sup> *“The Rishi desires a bliss fruitful in offspring, that is in divine works and their results and this is to be effected through the conquest of all the riches held in itself by our divided mortal being but kept from us by the Vritras and Panis ...the sons of Danu or Diti.”<sup>3</sup> These riches are to be won by us with the help of the gods, the sons of Aditi – the undivided consciousness.*

<sup>b</sup> *“The delight extracted from existence is typified by the honey wine of the Soma; it is mixed with the milk, the curds and the grain, the milk being that of the luminous cows, the curds the fixation of their yield in the intellectual mind and the grain the formulation of the light in the force of the physical mind. These symbolic senses are indicated by the double meaning of the words used, go, dadhi and yava.”<sup>4</sup> V.27.5*

and after death man's attainment to the Paradise of the gods. We now find, that **however valid these ideas may have been for the vulgar, they were not the inner sense of the Veda to the seers, the illumined minds (*kavi, vipra*) of the Vedic age. For them these material objects were symbols of the immaterial; the cows were the radiances or illuminations of a divine Dawn, the horses and chariots were symbols of force and movement, gold was light, the shining wealth of a divine Sun – the true light, [ॐ]  *jyotiḥ*]; both the wealth acquired by the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself in all their details symbolised man's effort and his means towards a greater end, the acquisition of immortality.** The aspiration of the Vedic seer was the enrichment and expansion of man's being, the birth and the formation of the godheads in his life-sacrifice,<sup>a</sup> the increase of the Force, Truth, Light, Joy of which they are the powers until through the enlarged and ever-opening worlds of his being the soul of man rises, sees the divine doors (*devāḥ dvāraḥ*) swing open to his call and enters into the supreme felicity of a divine existence beyond heaven and earth. This ascent is the parable of the Angiras Rishis.”<sup>5</sup>

“The Gods constantly stand out in their psychological functions; **the sacrifice is the outer symbol of an inner work, an inner interchange between the gods and men, – man giving what he has, the gods giving in return the horses of power, the herds of light, the heroes of Strength to be his retinue, winning for him victory in his battle with the hosts of Darkness, Vritras, Dasyus, Panis. When the Rishi says, ‘Let us become conscious whether by the War-Horse or by the Word of a Strength beyond men’, his words have either a mystic significance or they have no coherent**

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<sup>a</sup> “*The Son of the sacrifice is a constant image in the Veda. Here it is the godhead himself, Agni who gives himself as a son to man, a Son who delivers his father. Agni is also the War-Horse and the steed of the journey, the White Horse, the mystic galloping Dadhikravan who carries us through the battle to the goal of our voyaging.*”<sup>6</sup> **When one psychologically reaches a stage where one is capable of recognising the divine Will (Agni) – even though not yet, most of the time, of consciously assenting to it – then it (the stage) may be taken to symbolise the birth of Agni in one's being.**

**meaning at all.** In the portions translated in this book we have many mystic verses and whole hymns which, however mystic, tear the veil off the outer sacrificial images covering the real sense of the Veda. ‘Thought’, says the Rishi, ‘has nourished for us human things in the Immortals, in the Great Heavens; it is the milch-cow which milks of itself the wealth of many forms’ – the many kinds of wealth, cows, horses and the rest for which the sacrificer prays; evidently this is no material wealth, it is something which Thought, the Thought embodied in the Mantra, can give and it is the result of the same Thought that nourishes our human things in the Immortals, in the Great Heavens. A process of divinisation, and of a bringing down of great and luminous riches, treasures won from the Gods by the inner work of sacrifice, is hinted at in terms necessarily covert but still for one who knows how to read these secret words, *māyā vacāsi*, sufficiently expressive, *kavaye nivacanā*. ...Under pressure of the necessity to mask their meaning with symbols and symbolic words – for secrecy must be observed – the Rishis resorted to fixed double meanings, a device easily manageable in the Sanskrit language where one word often bears several different meanings, but not easy to render in an English translation and very often impossible. Thus the word for cow, *go*, meant also light or a ray of light; this appears in the names of some of the Rishis, Gotama, most radiant, Gavishthira, steadfast in the Light. The cows of the Veda were the Herds of the Sun, familiar in Greek myth and mystery, the rays of the Sun of Truth and Light and Knowledge; this meaning which comes out in some passages can be consistently applied everywhere yielding a coherent sense. The word *ghṛta* means ghee or clarified butter and this was one of the chief elements of the sacrificial rite; but *ghṛta* could also mean light, from the root *ghṛ* to shine, and it is used in this sense in many passages. Thus the horses of Indra, the Lord of Heaven, are described as dripping with light, *ghṛta-smu*,<sup>a</sup> – it certainly does not

<sup>a</sup> *Sayana, though in several passages he takes ghṛta in the sense of light, renders it here by ‘water’; he seems to think that the divine horses were very tired and perspiring profusely! A Naturalistic interpreter might as well argue that as Indra is a God of the sky, the primitive poet might well believe that rain was the perspiration of Indra’s horses.*

mean that ghee dripped from them as they ran, although that seems to be the sense of the same epithet as applied to the grain of which Indra's horses are invited to partake when they come to the sacrifice. Evidently this sense of light doubles with that of clarified butter in the symbolism of the sacrifice. **The thought or the word expressing the thought is compared to pure clarified butter**, expressions like *dhiya*  $\square$  *ghṛita*  $\square$  *c*  $\square$  *m*, the luminous thought or understanding occur. There is a curious passage in one of the hymns translated in this book calling on Fire as priest of the sacrifice to flood the offering with a mind pouring ghr̥ita, *ghṛitapru*  $\square$  *manas*  $\square$  and so manifest the Seats ('places', or 'planes'), the three heavens each of them and manifest the Gods. But what is a ghee-pouring mind, and how by pouring ghee can a priest manifest the Gods and the triple heavens? But admit the mystical and esoteric meaning and the sense becomes clear. What the Rishi means is a 'mind pouring the light', a labour of the clarity of an enlightened or illumined mind; it is not a human priest or a sacrificial fire, but the inner Flame, the mystic seer-will, *kavi-kratu*, and that can certainly manifest by this process the Gods and the worlds and all planes of the being. The Rishis, it must be remembered, were seers as well as sages, they were men of vision who saw things in their meditation in images, often symbolic images which might precede or accompany an experience and put it in a concrete form, might predict or give an occult body to it: so it would be quite possible for him to see at once the inner experience and in image its symbolic happening, the flow of clarifying light and the priest god pouring the clarified butter on the inner self-offering which brought the experience. This might seem strange to a Western mind, but to an Indian mind accustomed to the Indian tradition or capable of meditation and occult vision it would be perfectly intelligible. **The mystics were and normally are symbolists, they can even see all physical things and happenings as symbols of inner truths and realities, even their outer selves, the outer happenings of their life and all around them. That would make their identification or else an association of the thing and its symbol easy, its habit possible.**

Other standing words and symbols of the Veda invite a similar interpretation of their sense. As the Vedic ‘cow’ is the symbol of light, so the Vedic ‘horse’ is a symbol of power, spiritual strength, force of tapasya. When the Rishi asks Agni for a ‘horse-form cow-in-front gift’ he is not asking really for a number of horses forming a body of the gift with some cows walking in front, he is asking for a great body of spiritual power led by the light or, as we may translate it, ‘with the Ray-Cow walking in its front.’<sup>a</sup> As one hymn describes the recovery from the Panis of the mass of the rays (the cows, – the shining herds, *gavyam*), so another hymn asks Agni for amass or abundance or power of the horse – *aṅṅryam*. So too the Rishi asks sometimes for the heroes or fighting men as his retinue, sometimes in more abstract language and without symbol for a complete hero-force – *suṅṅryam*; sometimes he combines the symbol and the thing. So too the Rishis ask for a son or sons or offspring – *apatyam* – as an element of the wealth for which they pray to the Gods, but here too an esoteric sense can be seen, for **in certain passages the son born to us is clearly an image of some inner birth: Agni himself is our son, the child of our works, the child who as the Universal Fire is the father of his fathers**, and it is by setting the steps on things that have fair offspring that we create or discover a path to the higher world of Truth.”<sup>7</sup>

**References:**

1. **Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.15, pp.102-04, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
2. **Ibid, pp.105-08**
3. **Ibid, p.207**
4. **Ibid, p.468**
5. **Ibid, pp.138-39**
6. **Ibid, p.461**
7. **Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.16, pp.12-16, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**

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<sup>a</sup>Compare the expression which describes the Aryan, the noble people as led by the light – *jyotir-agrāṅṅ*.

# THE GREATNESS OF INDIA AND ITS CULTURE (25)

## 5. THE GREATNESS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

“THE ARTS which appeal to the soul through the eye are able to arrive at a peculiarly concentrated expression of the spirit, the aesthesis and the creative mind of a people, but it is in its literature that we must seek for its most flexible and many-sided self-expression, for it is the word used in all its power of clear figure or its threads of suggestion that carries to us most subtly and variably the shades and turns and teeming significances of the inner self in its manifestation. The greatness of a literature lies first in the greatness and worth of its substance, the value of its thought and the beauty of its forms, but also in the degree to which, satisfying the highest conditions of the art of speech, it avails to bring out and raise the soul and life or the living and the ideal mind of a people, an age, a culture, through the genius of some of its greatest or most sensitive representative spirits. And if we ask what in both these respects is the achievement of the Indian mind as it has come down to us in the Sanskrit and other literatures, we might surely say that here at least there is little room for any just depreciation and denial even by a mind the most disposed to quarrel with the effect on life and the character of the culture. **The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world’s great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and**

**the culture of which it was the reflecting medium. The great and noble use made of it by poet and thinker did not fall below the splendour of its capacities. Nor is it in the Sanskrit tongue alone that the Indian mind has done high and beautiful and perfect things, though it couched in that language the larger part of its most prominent and formative and grandest creations.** It would be necessary for a complete estimate to take into account as well the Buddhistic literature in Pali and the poetic literatures, here opulent, there more scanty in production, of about a dozen Sanskrit and Dravidian tongues. The whole has almost a continental effect and does not fall so far short in the quantity of its really lasting things and equals in its things of best excellence the work of ancient and mediaeval and modern Europe. The people and the civilisation that count among their great works and their great names the Veda and the Upanishads, the mighty structures of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti and Bhartrihari and Jayadeva and the other rich creations of classical Indian drama and poetry and romance, the Dhammapada and the Jatakas, the Panchatantra, Tulsidas, Vidyapati and Chandidas and Ramprasad, Ramdas and Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar and Kamban and the songs of Nanak and Kabir and Mirabai and the southern Shaiva saints and the Alvars, – to name only the best-known writers and most characteristic productions, though there is a very large body of other work in the different tongues of both the first and the second excellence, – must surely be counted among the greatest civilisations and the world’s most developed and creative peoples. **A mental activity so great and of so fine a quality commencing more than three thousand years ago and still not exhausted is unique and the best and most undeniable witness to something extraordinarily sound and vital in the culture.**”<sup>1</sup>

## **I. THE HINDU TEMPERAMENT IN LITERATURE**

“The Hindu has been always decried as a dreamer & mystic. There is truth in the charge but also a singular inaccuracy. The Hindu mind is in one sense the most concrete in the world; it seeks after

abstractions, but is not satisfied with them so long as they remain abstractions. But to make the objects of this world concrete, to realise the things that are visited by sun & rain or are, at their most ethereal, sublimated figures of fine matter, that is comparatively easy, but the Hindu is not contented till he has seized things *behind* the sunlight also as concrete realities. He is passionate for the infinite, the unseen, the spiritual, but he will not rest satisfied with conceiving them, he insists on mapping the infinite, on seeing the unseen, on visualising the spiritual. **The Celt throws his imagination into the infinite and is rewarded with beautiful phantoms out of which he evolves a pale, mystic and intangible poetry; the Hindu sends his heart & his intellect & eventually his whole being after his imagination and for his reward he has seen God and interpreted existence. It is this double aspect of Hindu temperament, extreme spirituality successfully attempting to work in harmony with extreme materialism, which is the secret of our religion, our life & our literature, our civilisation. On the one side we spiritualise the material out of all but a phenomenal & illusory existence, on the other we materialise the spiritual in the most definite & realistic forms; this is the secret of the high philosophic idealism which to the less capable European mind seems so impossible an intellectual atmosphere and of the prolific idolatry which to the dogmatic & formalising Christian reason seems so gross.** In any other race-temperament this mental division would have split into two broadly disparate & opposing types whose action, reaction & attempts at compromise would have comprised the history of thought. In the myriad minded & undogmatic Hindu it worked not towards mental division but as the first discord which prepares for a consistent harmony; the best & most characteristic **Hindu thought regards either tendency as essential to the perfect & subtle comprehension of existence; they are considered the positive & negative sides of one truth, & must both be grasped if we are not to rest in a half light. Hence the entire tolerance of the Hindu religion to all intellectual attitudes except sheer libertinism; hence also the marvellous perfection of graded thought-attitudes in**

**which the Hindu mind travels between the sheer negative & the sheer positive and yet sees in them only a ladder of progressive & closely related steps rising through relative conceptions to one final & absolute knowledge.**

The intellectual temperament of a people determines the main character-stamp of its poetry. There is therefore no considerable poet in Sanscrit who has not the twofold impression, (spiritual & romantic in aim, our poetry is realistic in method), who does not keep his feet on the ground even while his eyes are with the clouds. The soaring lark who loses himself in light, the ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void are not denizens of the Hindu plane of temperament. Hence the expectant critic will search ancient Hindu literature in vain for the poetry of mysticism; that is only to be found in recent Bengali poetry which has felt the influence of English models. The old Sanscrit poetry was never satisfied unless it could show colour, energy & definiteness, & these are things incompatible with true mysticism. Even the Upanishads which declare the phenomenal world to be unreal, yet have a rigidly practical aim and labour in every line to make the indefinite definite & the abstract concrete. But **of all our great poets Kalidasa best exemplifies this twynatured Hindu temperament under the conditions of supreme artistic beauty & harmony.** Being the most variously learned of Hindu poets he draws into his net all our traditions, ideas, myths, imaginations, allegories; the grotesque & the trivial as well as the sublime or lovely; but touching them with his magic wand teaches them to live together in the harmonising atmosphere of his poetic temperament; under his touch the grotesque becomes strange, wild & romantic; the trivial refines into a dainty & gracious slightness; the sublime yields to the law of romance, acquires a mighty grace, a strong sweetness; and what was merely lovely attains power, energy & brilliant colour. His creations in fact live in a peculiar light, which is not the light that never was on sea or land but rather our ordinary sunshine recognisable though strangely & beautifully altered. The alteration is not real; rather our vision is affected by the recognition of something concealed by the sunbeams & yet the cause of the

sunbeams; but it is plain human sunlight we see always. May we not say it is that luminousness behind the veil of this sunlight which is the heaven of Hindu imagination & in all Hindu work shines through it without overpowering it? Hindu poetry is the only Paradise in which the lion can lie down with the lamb.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***A. The Pre-eminence of Indian Literature Among the Great Literatures of the World***

**“Let us suppose that all historical documents, archives, records were destroyed or disappeared in the process of Time and the catastrophes of civilisation, and only the pure literature survived. Of how many nations should we have the very life, heart & mind, the whole picture of its life & civilisation and the story of its development adequately revealed in its best writing? Three European nations would survive immortally before the eyes of posterity, the ancient Greeks, the modern English and French, and two Asiatic nations, the Chinese & the Hindus, – no others.**

**Of all these the Hindus have revealed themselves the most perfectly, continuously and on the most colossal scale, precisely because they have been the most indomitably original in the form & matter of their literature.** The Vedas, Upanishads & Puranas are unique in their kind; the great Epics in their form and type of art stand apart in the epic literature of the world, the old Sanscrit drama has its affinities with a dramatic species which developed itself in Europe more than a thousand years later, and the literary epic follows laws of form and canons of art which are purely indigenous. **And this immense body of first rate work has left us so intimate & complete a revelation of national life & history, that the absence of pure historical writings becomes a subject of merely conventional regret.** The same intense originality and depth of self-expression are continued after the decline of the classical language in the national literatures of Maharashtra, Bengal & the Hindi-speaking North.”<sup>3</sup>

## ***B. Hindu Drama and Poetics – the True Worth of the Western Evaluation of It***

“...the average English mind is capable of appreciating character as manifested in strong action or powerfully revealing speech, but constitutionally dull to the subtleties of civilized character which have their theatre in the mind and the heart and make of a slight word, a gesture or even silence their sufficient revelation. **The nations of Europe, taken in the mass, are still semicivilized; their mind feeds on the physical, external and grossly salient features of life; where there is no brilliance & glare, they are apt to condemn the personality as characterless. A strength that shuns ostentation, a charm that is not luxuriant, not naked to the first glance, are appreciable only to the few select minds who have chastened their natural leanings by a wide and deep culture. The Hindu on his side distastes violence in action, excess in speech, ostentation or effusiveness in manner; he demands from his ideal temperance and restraint as well as nobility, truth and beneficence; the Aryan or true gentleman must be मित्ताचारः and मितभाषी, restrained in action and temperate in speech.**

This national tendency shows itself even in our most vehement work. The Mahabharat is that section of our literature which deals most with the external and physical and corresponds best to the European idea of the epic; yet the intellectualism of even the Mahabharat, its preference of mind-issues to physical and emotional collisions and catastrophes, its continual suffusion of these when they occur with mind and ideality, the civilisation, depth and lack of mere sensational turbulence, in one word the Aryan cast of its characters, are irritating to European scholars. Thus a historian of Indian literature complains that Bhema is the one really epic character in this poem. He meant, evidently, the one character in which vast and irresistible strength, ungovernable impetuosity of passion, warlike fury & destroying anger are grandiosely displayed. But to **the Hindu, whose ideas of epic are not coloured with the wrath of Achilles, epic motive and character are not confined to**

what is impetuous, huge and untamed; he demands a larger field for the epic and does not confine it to savage and half savage epochs. Gentleness, patience, self-sacrifice, purity, the civilized virtues, appear to him as capable of epic treatment as martial fire, brute strength, revenge, anger, hate and ungovernable self-will. Rama mildly and purely renouncing the empire of the world for the sake of his father's honour seems to them as epic & mighty a figure as Bhema destroying Kechaka in his wild fury of triumphant strength and hatred. It is noteworthy that the European temperament finds vice more interesting than virtue, and in its heart of hearts damns the Christian qualities with faint praise as negative, not positive virtues; the difficulty European writers experience in making good men sympathetic is a commonplace of literary observation. In all these respects the Hindu attitude is diametrically opposed to the European."<sup>4</sup>

"The vital law governing Hindu poetics is that it does not seek to represent life and character primarily or for their own sake; its aim is fundamentally aesthetic, by the delicate & harmonious rendering of passion to awaken the aesthetic sense of the onlooker and gratify it by moving or subtly observed pictures of human feeling; it did not attempt to seize a man's spirit by the hair and drag it out into a storm of horror & pity & fear and return it to him drenched, beaten and shuddering. To the Hindu it would have seemed a savage and inhuman spirit that could take any aesthetic pleasure in the sufferings of an Oedipus or a Duchess of Malfi or in the tragedy of a Macbeth or an Othello. Partly this arose from the divine tenderness of the Hindu nature, always noble, forbearing & gentle and at that time saturated with the sweet & gracious pity & purity which flowed from the soul of Buddha; but it was also a necessary result of the principle that aesthetic & intellectual pleasure is the first object of all poetic art. Certainly poetry was regarded as a force for elevation as well as for charm, but as it reaches these objects through aesthetic beauty, aesthetic gratification must be the whole basis of dramatic composition; all other objects are superstructural. The Hindu mind therefore shrank not only from violence, horror & physical tragedy,

the Elizabethan stock-in-trade, but even from the tragic moral problems which attracted the Greek mind; still less could it have consented to occupy itself with the problems of disease, neurosis and spiritual medicology generally which are the staple of modern drama and fiction. An atmosphere of romantic beauty, a high urbanity and a gracious equipoise of the feelings, a perpetual confidence in the sunshine & the flowers, are the essential spirit of a Hindu play; pity and terror are used to awaken the feelings, but not to lacerate them, and the drama must close on the note of joy and peace; the clouds are only admitted to make more beautiful the glad sunlight from which all came & into which all must melt away. It is in an art like this that the soul finds the repose, the opportunity for being, confirmed in gentleness and in kindly culture, the unmixed intellectual and aesthetic pleasure in quest of which it has turned away from the crudeness & incoherence of life to the magic regions of Art.

When therefore English scholars, fed on the exceedingly strong & often raw meat of the Elizabethans, assert that there are no characters in the Hindu drama, when they attribute this deficiency to the feebleness of inventive power which leads "Asiatic" poetry to concentrate itself on glowing description and imagery, seeking by excess of ornament to conceal poverty of substance,... **Certainly if we expect a Beautiful White Devil or a Jew of Malta from the Hindu dramatist, we shall be disappointed; he deals not in these splendid or horrible masks. If we come to him for a Lear or a Macbeth, we shall go away discontented; for these also are sublimities which belong to cruder civilisations and more barbarous national types;** in worst crimes & deepest suffering as well as in happiness & virtue, the Aryan was more civilized & temperate, less crudely enormous than the hard, earthy & material African peoples whom in Europe he only half moralised. If he seeks a Père Goriot or a Madame Bovary, he will still fail in his quest; for though such types doubtless existed at all times among the mass of the people with its large strain of African blood, Hindu Art would have shrunk from poisoning the moral atmosphere of the soul by

elaborate studies of depravity. The true spirit of criticism is to seek in a literature what we can find in it of great or beautiful, not to demand from it what it does not seek to give us.”<sup>5</sup>

**References:**

- 1. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.20, pp.314-15, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
- 2. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol.1, pp.212-14, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry**
- 3. Ibid, p.147**
- 4. Ibid, pp.189-90**
- 5. Ibid, pp.191-93**

## PRINCIPLES AND DESIRES

“In the divine sight, principles and desires are one and the same thing: principles are whims of the mind just as desires are whims of the vital.”

– **The Mother**

(Collected works of the Mother, 14, pp.364-65)