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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE WORD OF THE SILENCE

A bare impersonal hush is now my mind,
A world of sight clear and inimitable,
A volume of silence by a Godhead signed,
A greatness pure of thought, virgin of will.

Once on its pages Ignorance could write
In a scribble of intellect the blind guess of Time
And cast gleam-messages of ephemeral light,
A food for souls that wander on Nature's rim.

But now I listen to a greater Word
Born from the mute unseen omniscient Ray:
The Voice that only Silence' ear has heard
Leaps missioned from an eternal glory of Day.

All turns from a wideness and unbroken peace
To a tumult of joy in a sea of wide release.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 141)

ADDRESS AT THE BARODA COLLEGE SOCIAL GATHERING

*(Delivered in Baroda on 22 July 1899. Text published in the Baroda College
Miscellany, September 1899.)*

IN addressing you on an occasion like the present, it is inevitable that the mind should dwell on one feature of this gathering above all others. Held as it is towards the close of the year, I am inevitably reminded that many of its prominent members are with us for the last time in their College life, and I am led to speculate with both hope and anxiety on their future careers, and this not only because several familiar faces are to disappear from us and scatter into different parts of the country and various walks of life, but also because they go out from us as our finished work, and it is by their character and life that our efforts will be judged. When I say, our efforts, I allude not merely to the professorial work of teaching, not to book-learning only, but to the entire activity of the College as a great and complex educational force, which is not solely meant to impart information, but to bring out or give opportunities for bringing out all the various intellectual and other energies which go to make up a man. And here is the side of collegiate institutions of which this Social Gathering especially reminds us, the force of the social life it provides in moulding the character and the mind. I think it will not be out of place, if in dwelling on this I revert to the great Universities of Oxford and Cambridge which are our famous exemplars, and point out a few differences between those Universities and our own and the thoughts those differences may well suggest.

I think there is no student of Oxford or Cambridge who does not look back in after days on the few years of his undergraduate life as, of all the scenes he has moved in, that which calls up the happiest memories, and it is not surprising that this should be so, when we remember what that life must have meant to him. He goes up from the restricted life of his home and school and finds himself in surroundings which with astonishing rapidity expand his intellect, strengthen his character, develop his social faculties, force out all his abilities and turn him in three years from a boy into a man. His mind ripens in the contact with minds which meet from all parts of the country and have been brought up in many various kinds of trainings, his unwholesome eccentricities wear away and the unsocial, egoistic elements of character are to a large extent discouraged. He moves among ancient and venerable buildings, the mere age and beauty of which are in themselves an education. He has the Union which has trained so many great orators and debaters, has been the first trial ground of so many renowned intellects. He has, too, the athletics clubs organized with a perfection unparalleled elsewhere, in which, if he has the physique and the desire for them he may find pursuits which are also in themselves an education. The result is that he who entered the University a raw student, comes out of it a man and a

gentleman, accustomed to think of great affairs and fit to move in cultivated society, and he remembers his College and University with affection, and in after days if he meets with those who have studied with him he feels attracted towards them as to men with whom he has a natural brotherhood. This is the social effect I should like the Colleges and Universities of India also to exercise, to educate by social influences as well as those which are merely academical and to create the feeling among their pupils that they belong to the community, that they are children of one mother. There are many obstacles to this result in the circumstances of Indian Universities. The Colleges are not collected in one town but are scattered among many and cannot assemble within themselves so large and various a life. They are new also, the creation of not more than fifty years—and fifty years is a short period in the life of a University. But so far as circumstances allow, there is an attempt to fill up the deficiency, in your Union, your Debating Club and Reading Room, your athletic sports and Social Gathering. For the success of this attempt time is needed, but your efforts are also needed: and I ask you who are soon to go out into the world, not to forget your College or regard it as a mere episode in your life, but rather as one to whose care you must look back and recompense it by your future life and work, and if you meet fellow-students, alumni of the same College, to meet them as friends, as brothers.

There is another point in which a wide difference exists. What makes Oxford and Cambridge not local institutions but great and historic Universities? It is the number of great and famous men, of brilliant intellects in every department which have issued from them. I should like you to think seriously of this aspect of the question also. In England the student feels a pride in his own University and College, wishes to see their traditions maintained, and tries to justify them to the world by his own success. This feeling has yet to grow up among us. And I would appeal to you—who are leaving us—to help to create it, to cherish it yourselves, to try and justify the College of its pupils. Of course, there is one preliminary method by which the students can add fame to their College. Success in examinations, though preliminary merely, and not an end in itself, is nevertheless of no small effect or importance. You all know how the recent success of an Indian student has filled the whole country with joy and enthusiasm. That success reflects fame not only on India but on his University and College, and when the name of the first Indian Senior Wrangler is mentioned, it will also be remembered that he belonged to Cambridge and to St. John's. But examinations, however important, are only a preliminary. I lay stress upon this because there is too much of a tendency in this country to regard education as a mere episode, finished when once the degree is obtained. But the University cannot and does not pretend to complete a man's education; it merely gives some materials to his hand or points out certain paths he may tread, and it says to him,—“Here are the materials I have given into your hands, it is for you to make of them what you can;” or—“These are the paths I have equipped you to travel; it is yours to tread them to the end, and by your success in them justify me before the world.”

I would ask you therefore to remember these things in your future life, not to drop the effects of your College training as no longer necessary, but, to strive for eminence and greatness in your own lines, and by the brilliance of your names add lustre to the first nursing home of your capacities, to cherish its memory with affection as that which equipped your intellects, trained you into men, and strove to give you such social life as might fit you for the world. And finally I would ask you not to sever yourselves in after days from it, but if you are far, to welcome its alumni when you meet them with brotherly feelings and if you are near to keep up connection with it, not to regard the difference of age between yourselves and its future students but associate with them, be present at such occasions as this social gathering and evince by your acts your gratitude for all that it did for you in the past.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 353-56)

‘The Earth Aspiring’

*A Mind unvisited by illusion’s gleams,
A Will expressive of soul’s deity,
A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,
A Joy that drags not sorrow as its shade.
For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:
Heaven’s privilege she claims as her own right.
Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,
Clear in a greater light than reason owns:
Our intuitions are its title-deeds;
Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.
Earth’s winged chimaeras are Truth’s steeds in Heaven,
The impossible God’s sign of things to be.
But few can look beyond the present state
Or overleap this matted hedge of sense.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 51-52)

**‘A FEW MINUTES PASSED IN SILENCE
BEFORE THEE...’**

November 22, 1913

A FEW minutes passed in silence before Thee are worth centuries of felicity....

Grant, O Lord, that all shadows may be dispelled and that I may be more and more Thy faithful servant in constancy and serenity. Before Thee may my heart be pure as a pure crystal, so that wholly it may reflect Thee.

Oh! the sweetness of abiding in silence before Thee....

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 34)

SHE LEADS US TO HIM SHE BRINGS HIM CLOSER TO US

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

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

123. The Condition of the Earth and a Possibility

This is the condition of the earth, and it is not very bright. But for us one possibility remains—I have spoken about it to you several times already—even if, outside, things are deteriorating completely and the catastrophe cannot possibly be avoided, there remains for us, I mean those for whom the supramental life is not a vain dream, those who have faith in its reality and the aspiration to realise it—I don't necessarily mean those who have gathered here in Pondicherry, in the Ashram, but those who have as a link between them the knowledge Sri Aurobindo has given and the will to live according to that knowledge—there remains for them the possibility of intensifying their aspiration, their will, their effort, to gather their energies together and shorten the time for the realisation. There remains for them the possibility of working this miracle—individually and to a small extent collectively—of conquering space, duration, the time needed for this realisation; of replacing time by intensity of effort and going fast enough and far enough in the realisation to liberate themselves from the consequences of the present condition of the world; of making such a concentration of force, strength, light, truth, that by this very realisation they can be above these consequences and secure against them, enjoy the protection bestowed by the Light and Truth, by Purity—the divine Purity through the inner transformation—and that the storm may pass over the world without being able to destroy this great hope of the near future; that the tempest may not sweep away this beginning of realisation.

Instead of falling asleep in an easy quietude and letting things happen according to their own rhythm, if one strains to the utmost one's will, ardour, aspiration and springs up into the light, then one can hold one's head higher; one can have, in a higher region of consciousness, enough room to live, to breathe, to grow and develop above the passing cyclone.

This is possible. In a very small way, this was already done during the last war, when Sri Aurobindo was here. It can be done again. But one must want it and each one must do his own work as sincerely and completely as he can.

(M 9: 170-71)

124. We Shall Realise What He Expects of Us

“A new humanity means for us the appearance, the development of a type or race of mental beings whose principle of mentality would be no longer a mind in the Ignorance seeking for knowledge but even in its knowledge bound to the Ignorance, a seeker after Light but not its natural possessor, open to the Light but not an inhabitant of the Light, not yet a perfected instrument, truth-conscious and delivered out of the Ignorance. Instead, it would be possessed already of what could be called a mind of Light, a mind capable of living in the truth, capable of being truth-conscious and manifesting in its life a direct in place of an indirect knowledge. Its mentality would be an instrument of the Light and no longer of the Ignorance. At its highest it would be capable of passing into the supermind and from the new race would be recruited the race of supramental beings who would appear as the leaders of the evolution in earth-nature.”

The Supramental Manifestation, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 67

This was certainly what he expected of us, what he conceived of as the superman who must be the intermediate being between humanity as it is and the supramental being *created* in the supramental way, that is, no longer belonging to animality at all and delivered from all animal needs.

As we are, we have been created in the ordinary animal way, and therefore, even if we transform ourselves, there will remain something of this animal origin. The supramental being as he conceived of it, is not formed in the ordinary animal way *at all* but directly, through a process that for the moment still seems occult to us, but is a direct handling of forces and substance in such a way that the body can be a “materialisation” and not a formation according to the ordinary animal principle.

It is quite obvious that intermediate beings are necessary, that it is these intermediate beings who must find the means of creating beings of the supermind, and, undoubtedly, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this he was convinced that this is what we must do.

I think—I know—that it is now certain that we shall realise what he expects of us. It has become no longer a hope but a certainty. Only the time necessary for this realisation will be longer or shorter according to our individual effort, our concentration, our goodwill... and the *importance* we give to this fact. For the inattentive observer things may appear very much what they were before, but for one who knows how to see and is not deceived by appearances things are going well.

Let each one do his best and perhaps not many years will have to elapse before the first visible results become apparent to all.

It is for you to know whether this interests you more than everything else in the world.... There comes a moment when the body itself finds that there is *nothing in the world* which is so worth living for as this transformation; that there is nothing

which can have as great an interest as this passionate interest of transformation. It is as though all the cells of the body were athirst for that Light which wants to manifest; they cry out for it, they find an intense joy in it and are *sure* of the Victory.

This is the aspiration that I am trying to communicate to you, and you will understand that everything else in life is dull, insipid, futile, worthless in comparison with that: the transformation in the Light.

(M 9: 191-92)

125. Presenting All Points of View

“It is open also to doubt whether the evolution is likely to go any farther than it has gone already or whether a supramental evolution, the appearance of a consummated Truth-Consciousness, a being of Knowledge, is at all probable in the fundamental Ignorance of the earthly Nature....

Admitting that the creation is a manifestation of the Timeless Eternal in a Time Eternity, admitting that there are the seven grades of Consciousness and that the material Inconscience has been laid down as a basis for the reascent of the Spirit, admitting that rebirth is a fact, a part of the terrestrial order, still a spiritual evolution of the individual being is not an inevitable consequence of any of these admissions or even of all of them together. It is possible to take another view of the spiritual significance and the inner process of terrestrial existence. If each thing created is a form of the manifest Divine Existence, each is divine in itself by the spiritual presence within it, whatever its appearance, its figure or character in Nature. In each form of manifestation the Divine takes the delight of existence and there is no need of change or progress within it. Whatever ordered display or hierarchy of actualised possibilities is necessitated by the nature of the Infinite Being, is sufficiently provided for by the numberless variation, the teeming multitude of forms, types of consciousness, natures that we see everywhere around us. There is no teleological purpose in creation and there cannot be, for all is there in the Infinite: the Divine has nothing that he needs to gain or that he has not; if there is creation and manifestation, it is for the delight of creation, of manifestation, not for any purpose. There is then no reason for an evolutionary movement with a culmination to be reached or an aim to be worked out and effectuated or a drive towards ultimate perfection.”

The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 826-27

This is an argument Sri Aurobindo is presenting. As he has said, it is *one* way of looking at the problem and solving it, but that does not mean that this is his own point of view. And this is exactly what he does throughout the book, all the time; he presents different arguments, different points of view, different conceptions, and once he has placed all these problems before us, then he comes and gives the solution.

And that is why our method of reading has a drawback, for I read one paragraph to you and if we stop there, it seems as though he had proved his own point of view; and then, if by chance one doesn't remember very well and the next time I read another paragraph in which he expounds another point of view—sometimes totally different, sometimes even opposite—and we stop there, the conclusion is: this too is his point of view. So there is a contradiction. And then if we continue, there are two or three contradictions! I am telling you this because I have heard people who read in a rather superficial way and perhaps also don't read continuously enough—people who consider themselves extremely intelligent and learned—who have told me, “But Sri Aurobindo repeats himself all the time in this book! He tells us the same thing again in almost every paragraph.” (*Mother laughs*) For he presents all other points of view, then gives his own, the conclusion; then once again he presents every point of view, gives all the problems, and ends up by proving the truth of what he wants to teach us—so he “repeats himself”!

After all, of course, one has only to read attentively enough to avoid falling into this trap. One must be careful, not come to a conclusion in the middle of a subject, not say to oneself, “Ah, look! Sri Aurobindo says it is like that.” He does not say it is “like that”, he tells you there are *some people* who say it is like that. And he shows you the problem as it is presented by many people, and then once again the same problem as presented by other people; and only when he has finished explaining to us all the points of view does he give his own conclusion. And what is exceedingly interesting is that his conclusion is always a synthesis: all the other points of view find their place provided they are properly arranged. This excludes nothing, it combines everything and synthesises all points of view.

But as we have a lesson every three weeks, we have time (*laughing*) to forget all we have read before! I don't know if you can remember the problem that was set?... No?...

Is there or is there not an individual evolution?... There is a universal evolution—Sri Aurobindo has shown this—but within this universal evolution, is there or is there not an individual evolution?... Now, he has given us one theory—which holds together perfectly, which is quite logical, you see—but in which it is not at all necessary to postulate an individual evolution. The whole universal plan is logical, can be logically proved, without introducing the necessity of an individual evolution.

But if we continue with patience, in a little while he will prove to us why and how this notion of individual evolution must be introduced into the system of explanation that will be chosen. But what I should like to know is whether this problem has any reality for you or not—whether it corresponds to something you understand or not. If you have followed that, it is possible to conceive of a progressive, evolving universe, in which the individual is not necessarily evolving individually...

I must ask you questions to find out whether you understand first of all the difference between universal and individual evolution, and how both can proceed.

How does Nature proceed in its universal evolution? I think, you have understood this, haven't you?

(M 9: 224-26)

126. Taking Up All Theories

We have decided to read paragraph by paragraph so that we can go into certain detailed explanations, but this method has one drawback: as I have already told you, it is that Sri Aurobindo takes up all the theories and expounds them in all their details, with all their arguments, in order to show later what their defects are and their inability to solve the problem, and to present his own solution; but (*laughing*), when we stop in the middle of an argument and take a single paragraph, if we read this paragraph without going on to the very end, we may very well imagine or believe that he is giving his own opinion.

In fact there are some unscrupulous people who have done that, and when they wanted to prove that their own theories were correct, they quoted paragraphs from Sri Aurobindo without saying what went before or what came after, in support of their own theory. They said, "You see, Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* has written that." He has written that, but that does not mean that it was his own way of seeing. And now we are facing the same difficulty. For the last two lessons, I think, I have been reading the detailed demonstration of one of the modern theories of life, evolution, the purpose of existence—or the purposelessness of existence—and Sri Aurobindo presents this in quite a... conclusive way, as if it were his own theory and own way of seeing. We stop in the middle and are left with a kind of uneasiness and the feeling, "But that is not what he told us! How is it that he is expounding that to us now?..." It is quite a big drawback. But if I were to read to you the whole argument, when we came to the end you wouldn't remember the beginning and you wouldn't be able to follow! So the best thing is to go on quietly, one paragraph at a time, trying to understand what he is saying, but without thinking that he wants to prove to us that it is true. He simply wants to expound the theories with everything that supports them, without telling us that this is the best way of seeing things.

In reality, you should take this reading as an opportunity to develop the philosophical mind in yourself and the capacity to arrange ideas in a logical order and establish an argument on a sound basis. You must take this like dumb-bell exercises for developing muscles: these are dumb-bell exercises for the mind to develop one's brain. And you must not jump to hasty conclusions. If we wait with patience, at the end of the chapter he will tell us—and tell us on a basis of irrefutable argument—why he has come to the conclusion he arrives at.

(M 9: 249-50)

127. Removing the Little Dancing Point

Thought-control! Who can control his thoughts? Only those who have trained themselves to it, who have tried hard since their childhood.

There is the whole range, you see, from total lack of control, which for most people comes to this: it is their thoughts which rule them and not they their thoughts. The vast majority of people are troubled by thoughts they cannot get rid of, which literally possess them, and they don't have the power to close the door of their active consciousness to these thoughts. Their thoughts govern them, rule them. You hear people saying every day, "Oh! That thought, all the time it comes back to me, again and again, and I can't get rid of it!" So they are assailed by all kinds of things, from anxiety to ill-will and fear. Thoughts which express dread are extremely troublesome; you try to send them away, they return like a rubber band and fall back on you. Who has control? It requires years of labour and such a long practice. And so, to come to something which is not complete control but anyway already represents a stage: to have the ability to do this in your head (*Mother moves her hand across her brow*), to annul all the movements, to stop the vibrations. And the mental surface becomes smooth. Everything stops, as when you open a book at a blank page—but almost materially, you understand... blank!

Try a little when you are at home, you will see, it is very interesting.

And so, one follows the place in one's head where the little point is dancing. I have seen—I have seen Sri Aurobindo doing this in somebody's head, somebody who used to complain of being troubled by thoughts. It was as if his hand reached out and took hold of the little black dancing point and then did this (*gesture with the finger-tips*), as when one picks up an insect, and he threw it far away. And that was all. All still, quiet, luminous.... It was clearly visible like this, you know, he took it out without saying anything—and it was over.

And things are very closely interdependent: I also saw the case when someone came to him with an acute pain somewhere: "Oh, it hurts here! Oh, it hurts! Oh!..." He said nothing, he remained calm, he looked at the person, and I saw, I saw something like a subtle physical hand which came and took hold of the little point dancing about in disorder and confusion, and he took it like this (*same gesture*) and there, everything had gone. "Oh, oh! Look my pain has gone."

There.

(M 9: 253-54)

128. Only One Thing to Do

If all these arguments were true and there were to be no higher realisation... there would be nothing left to do. But fortunately this is not true.

Only, Sri Aurobindo has said many times that there will be no irrefutable proof of the truth of what he has said and predicted until it is accomplished; only when everything is accomplished will those who refuse to believe be obliged to recognise their mistake—but perhaps they won't be there to do it!

So there is only one thing to do: to proceed on one's way keeping one's own faith and certitude, and to pay no heed to contradictions and denials.

(M 9: 255)

* * * * *

(To be continued)

At a certain stage in the Yoga when the mind is sufficiently quieted and no longer supports itself at every step on the sufficiency of its mental certitudes, when the vital has been steadied and subdued and is no longer constantly insistent on its own rash will, demand and desire, when the physical has been sufficiently altered not to bury altogether the inner flame under the mass of its outwardness, obscurity or inertia, an inmost being, long hidden within and felt only in its rare influences, is able to come forward and illumine the rest and take up the lead of the Sadhana. Its character is a one-pointed orientation towards the Divine or the Highest, one-pointed and yet plastic in action and movement; it does not create a rigidity of direction like the one-pointed intellect or a bigotry of the regnant idea or impulse like the one-pointed vital force; it is at every moment and with a supple sureness that it points the way to the Truth, automatically distinguishes the right step from the false, extricates the divine or Godward movement from the clinging mixture of the undivine. Its action is like a searchlight showing up all that has to be changed in the nature; it has in it a flame of will insistent on perfection, on an alchemic transmutation of all the inner and outer existence. It sees the divine essence everywhere but rejects the mere mask and the disguising figure.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 154-55)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

The Mother's Classes in the Playground

AFTER the lesson was over we would just sit there, as if stunned. You could say that a massive peace had come down on to the Playground. In that bright glow the Mother's delicate beauty was indescribable: just Her sweet voice that continued to reverberate within us seeking our response. So many memories come up again and again to mind. After the lesson, the Mother would close the book and say:

"Come, let's meditate a little, shall we?"

We all closed our books and sat still. As if we were champions of meditation! One by one all the lights were switched off.

During the fortnight when the moon was waxing, the Playground was enveloped in soft moonlight. The moon would bow to the Mother by encircling Her entire body. A little away the *ashwattha* tree in our house rustled and swayed. There too the gentle play of light and shade was visible on every branch and leaf. I looked up and noticed that everyone was absorbed in deep meditation. The roar of the sea wafted in from a distance. It felt like another planet. The heart never had enough of looking at the Mother. I felt as if I was living in some dream-kingdom. Looking skyward I felt as if the sky too was bending earthward, transfixed at the sight of the Mother. What an extraordinarily tranquil, gentle air! As if all earthly creatures were in a trance!

*Stabdho aakash, neerob shashi robi,
Tomaar charonpaaney nayan kori nato
Bhubon daandiyey aachhey ekanto.*

(The skies are silent, silent the moon and the sun,
Their eyes fixed on Thy Feet,
While the world stands still in solitude.)

My eyes were fixed on the horizon while the sea breeze caressed our bodies. It was a godly hour.

The gentle breeze spread a sweet subtle fragrance from the Mother's body. That very familiar fragrance again! Whenever we went to the Mother we returned with Her fragrance on us brought to us by Her loving touch. And this sweet fragrance would remain with us for the whole day at home. We always felt that the Mother was there with us. What a wonderful sensation!

Seeing the Mother in this form I remembered a song from my childhood:

*Who says God has no form, who says God has no shape?
Let him wipe his eyes and see tonight.
See, O disbeliever, how glorious is my Mother's form,
How at Her feet a million moons scatter their silver radiance!*

I kept looking at the Mother, kept looking...God knows when I fell into this rapture, imperceptibly absorbed in meditation. Suddenly I felt there was nobody anywhere and I was sitting all alone. Where this place was I did not know. And then I would suddenly start and see everyone still deeply engrossed in meditation. I looked at the Mother and She too was in deep meditation. No, the meditation was not over yet! And in this way my own meditation would often be interrupted. What an amazing experience that was: by just staring at the Mother's face a supreme trust would make my eyes close once again. What a joy to be sitting so close to the Mother!

The Playground looked different in the waning moon. As soon as the lights were turned off everyone seemed to be alone. The whole Playground would be covered in darkness. Looking up, I could see the stars blossom in the sky. The residents of the skies were watching the Mother. I felt as if someone was signalling to us from afar, calling us, as it were. Sitting near the Mother in this dense darkness, I felt that the Mother looked like someone unknown and unknowable. After all, the Mother has always been beyond human touch and holding. Hasn't She come of Her own will down to the earth? And that is why we are blessed to be able to see Her.

I did not know that Darkness had so many forms. We have always looked upon Darkness as fearsome. The Mother is present in our midst, down here under the illimitable sky. Why fear the unknown, then? I remember some incidents from my childhood.

In the evening I would sit, the door open, and stare at the empty field that stretched out in front. Not a living creature anywhere around. My little mind, looking out into that boundless darkness, would be overcome with some kind of sadness. But due to some tremendous attraction of this dark earth I kept sitting on the staircase next to the door. That same darkness, that same night has slowly descended on to the Playground as well, but in place of sadness, peace would come into our mind and body. In the Mother's presence everything was transfigured into peace and we would slip into meditation. I felt as if I did not exist! Or that I had become just a point! What an astonishing experience that was! When I opened my eyes I saw thick darkness flooding all around the Mother. All of a sudden I felt: "Who are we sitting with?" The one described by a writer as "the one Refuge of all, Light of lights, Pace of all movement, Life of all life, Soul of all beauty" was for man and humanity but thick darkness. Was this due to an absence of form? What we cannot understand, cannot know, whose core we cannot penetrate for lack of a path, that is what we call darkness. That writer was unaware that the Divine Mother Herself and the Supreme Purusha would become visible to us in human form and we would be blessed. Despite being inhabitants of that distant realm they came down to this mortal world. They were no longer dense darkness to human eyes. With this massive discovery I started feeling a profound thrill of beatitude race through my mind and body.

The Mother used to read to us from Her *Prayers and Meditations* in the Darshan room mostly after half past noon. Wise, experienced sadhaks also joined us young immature girls and boys. Dada (Pranab) sat facing the Mother. Behind the Mother's

chair sat one of Her devoted attendants. All of us would sit facing the Mother, all around Her. The grown-ups sat behind us. The Mother used to answer all kinds of questions. I did not understand much. At that time I did not understand French at all. Moreover the subjects were all highly philosophical. One day, after the class when I went up to Her to receive flower-blessings from Her I finally blurted out:

“Mother, I get a terrible headache after the class. Why is that?”

The Mother started laughing.

“You are not yet ready to understand all these philosophical concepts. I am getting new cells ready in your brain. Slowly you will understand everything. After the class, go home and quietly sit in meditation. With time the understanding will come.”

Today I feel like hearing these words from the Mother once again. Now when I read the Mother’s or Sri Aurobindo’s books I quite enjoy them. Now it is not as difficult as before. Mother Mahasaraswati with all Her skilfulness and moulding artistry has shaped our minds and intelligence with exceeding patience, even without our knowing. How many different forms have we seen of the Mother’s ceaseless, untiring, ever-dynamic force of action! It did not seem all that unusual then. How else did we expect a Mother to look after Her children? Today I feel, it was the Mother herself who must have given us this sense of “right”, otherwise how could we have ever behaved with such impudence! Could such impossible things have ever occurred had the Mother not consented?

These classes that started in the Meditation hall upstairs in fact had their origin in the Mother’s room. The Mother used to read from *Prayers and Meditations* there after ten. A large sofa was kept for the Mother’s rest near the cupboard one passes as one turns to go to Her second-floor room. The Mother would sit on this sofa and read out the prayers. We had been dreaming about hearing the Mother read the *Prayers and Meditations* to us. We kept telling one another:

“Ah, if only the Mother would invite us one day to read *Prayers and Meditations*!”

And in that anticipated joy we kept memorising all the prayers. We did not know then that She used to read out from this book to Dada (Pranab) every day. The Mother came out on to the terrace at about ten o’clock (this was known as the Terrace Darshan). We would be waiting from much earlier at the Ashram in the open courtyard near Satyakarma’s room. We carried the book, *Prayers and Meditations*, with us. Then Chitra and I would sit and read this book together. It was from then that this desire rose strongly in us to read this book with the Mother. And what a surprise! Our prayer was answered one day! One day, Chitra, Tapati and I were waiting on the staircase to go to the Mother. First Tapati entered. The Mother told her something. Tapati did not come out from the room. Then it was Chitra’s turn. She went to the Mother a little hesitantly. The Mother told her something as well. And she too did not come out of the room!

“Good Lord! What punishment was awaiting me this time?”

I went in a little reluctantly with this thought in my head.

“Would you like to study *Prayers and Meditations*?” I went wild with this unexpected joy! On entering the room I saw that Tapati and Chitra were happily seated next to Pranab. Their eyes seemed to say:

“Just see, how our prayer has been answered!”

So we were four to start with. And that is how the *Prayers and Meditations* class started. On Tapati’s birthday the Mother had given her a copy of *Prayers and Meditations* to read but that was much before this class started. Gradually the number of people coming to this class increased. For lack of space the class was shifted to the Meditation hall next to Sri Aurobindo’s room.

I have to tell you about an amusing incident that happened when the class was organised in the Mother’s room. We prepared our questions before going to the class. We had just begun learning French then. And so naturally the questions were properly committed to memory again and again. Even then we got terribly nervous talking in French. One of us while trying to ask a question in French got so nervous that instead of saying ‘*N’est-ce pas cela?*’ blurted out: ‘*N’est ta pas ta la?*’

We were rolling with laughter! The Mother too began laughing joyously as She watched us. That poor girl was so embarrassed then!

My friend Gauri (who was later given the work of attending on the Mother at the Playground) and I used to take so much trouble to prepare the questions. Our knowledge of French was such at that stage that writing a single line in French was like having a brain operation! Just to think of our facial expression at that time makes me laugh.

The Mother’s chair was placed facing Sri Aurobindo’s room. Perhaps the Mother could see Sri Aurobindo in this way. We sat facing the Mother and so we did not have the privilege of getting a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo. We did not ever look back, not even out of curiosity! There was a subtle wall of ‘don’ts’ that prevented us from doing such things. The Mother used to ask almost each one of us to open the book with eyes closed. The line that appeared had to be recited loudly to the Mother. Someone had this line to recite:

“*O Mère, prends pitié de moi!*” and the Mother nodded in answer as it were! I got the following line one day:

“*Paix, paix sur toute la terre.*”

Tapati got: “*Écoute notre prière, réponds à notre appel, viens!*”

We had to concentrate with our eyes closed and with the help of a paper cutter we opened any page and pointed at a line. The line that came up was supposed to be some sort of an indication for that person. The Mother has spoken at great length about this in the *Bulletin* of August 1960 on page 58. It is most interesting. You’re feeling down? All right, just concentrate with your eyes closed and open a page from *Bases of Yoga*. What line has come? Just what corresponds perfectly to that particular state of your mind at that time! That is how the Mother taught each one of us to read! And this is how the Mother continued to play with us. Probably through this game the Mother was watching the progress of our consciousness, She was keeping track

of the personal difficulties on the path. Then in a subtle way She would send Her help to each according to his need. Everything that happened then in the guise of a game has today sunk below the waves of memory. Even at that time we did not realise that all this would be lost one day. We had not grasped its value then. We had not the intelligence to understand that nothing more substantial than a few memories is all that would be left to us.

It was in this class that the Mother asked one day:

“Which is the shortest prayer in *Prayers and Meditations*?”

The entire class was stumped! Even the grown-ups who knew French well lowered their heads in silence, like bad students who had not revised their lessons! Tehmi-ben from amongst us softly mentioned the date and year of that prayer. Tehmi-ben always kept herself in the background as she was a most timid and quiet sort of a girl. The Mother looked affectionately at Tehmi-ben for some time while we younger ones swelled up with pride. One of us answered a question that even the grown-ups had not been able to do! There was a subtle competition between the young and the old right from the beginning! It is like the first child who sees his younger siblings arrive and thinks that they have come to take their share of the mother’s love. There is a tinge of jealousy. Well, it was something like that! In tennis, this competition was most glaring. Even in football. Often the matches were between the young and the old. But it was great fun.

One day this class suddenly stopped.

The year was 1947. India became free and Partition followed. That year, on the evening of 15th August one of Sri Aurobindo’s disciples was killed by some outsiders. It was a ghastly sight. It was in this class that after this dreadful incident the Mother was forced to comment:

“Become sincere. Walk on the path of Truth. Otherwise one day either Sri Aurobindo or I will have to go away.”

A deep pain had been felt at these words of the Mother. We were all trembling with fear. How could the Mother say such a thing? And that is what happened. This is perhaps our misfortune.

The Mother wills one way and we in our lack of intelligence go on another. One day while walking in the Playground the Mother observed:

“I had known so far the saying ‘Man proposes, God disposes’ but now I see it is ‘God proposes, man disposes’.” The Mother’s voice had a tinge of sadness as it were.

We have become obstacles in the Mother’s Work. And yet I will assert, in the Mother’s words:

No human will can finally prevail against the Divine’s Will.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

“ENERGY” IN MODERN PHYSICS

[A NOTE ON NON-MATERIALISTIC SCIENCE: Today, when Science reigns supreme as the dominant knowledge system, there is a tendency to search for a scientific explanation even for phenomena which, strictly speaking, are outside the domain of Science. At the same time, the modern era has witnessed an increased intellectual interest in non-materialist points of view. There is a renewed interest in mysticism and spirituality. The urge towards a more and more complex and all-encompassing synthesis is an inevitable drive of Nature. So it is not surprising that attempts have been made, both by practitioners of Science and by non-scientists alike towards a more holistic and synthetic world-view which sees a play of consciousness and mind even in the scientific domain. Insofar as the search for the “intrinsic how and why of things” is concerned the philosopher and the yogi are within their rights when they talk of consciousness as the fundamental reality and therefore the ground of all our instruments of knowledge. But Consciousness is a thing subjective and when we extend the yogic and philosophical approach to objective science we trespass on the territory of natural science. The scientist runs the same risk when he tries to view the supraphysical in the light of the physical. We reproduce here a passage from a letter of Sri Aurobindo *à propos* of this issue.

...in physics you are in the very domain of the mechanical law where process is everything and the driving consciousness has chosen to conceal itself with the greatest thoroughness—so that, “scientifically speaking”, it does not exist there. One can discover it there only by occultism and yoga, but the methods of occult science and of yoga are not measurable or followable by the means of physical science—so the gulf remains still in existence. It may be bridged one day, but the physicist is not likely to be the bridge-builder, so it is no use asking him to try what is beyond his province.

What follows is an old but hitherto unpublished piece by Amal Kiran wherein he shows conclusively that modern Physics remains firmly anchored to its materialistic moorings notwithstanding the claims to the contrary.]

It is said that modern physics has completely revolutionised our old ideas about matter by finding the fundamental reality of the familiar universe to be pure energy, energy which has nothing material about it.

To assess what the so-called revolution is, let us briefly remind ourselves of

what the old ideas were. According to the old physics, matter is essentially that which occupies space, has mass, inertia and weight as well as a capacity for doing work. This capacity is its energy. Energy, according to the old physics, must always be carried by something material and has no existence apart from matter. Again, neither matter nor energy can ever be destroyed. Both change from one form to another, but there can be no change in the amount of matter or the amount of energy in the universe.

Today, we are told, two important considerations have given the death-blow to the Materialism based on the old physics. The first consideration is that matter has been found to be composed of electrical charges, of pure electricity unattached to any particle of the matter of common experience: this shows that non-material energy is the ultimate constituent of the world. The second consideration is that the theory of Relativity developed by Einstein involves the possibility of changing, under certain conditions, matter into energy and energy into matter and also of producing tremendous quantities of energy from a very small amount of matter because matter is nothing but “congealed” energy. The Atom Bomb which devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki is declared to be the Einsteinian possibility come true.

It is generally overlooked that the two considerations do not support each other. If the Atom Bomb is the releasing of the congealed energy that is matter and if in the releasing there is a change of matter into energy, the electrical charges into which familiar matter has been analysed cannot be non-material. For, in the Atom Bomb, what is done is the fission or splitting of the nucleus of the atom, resulting in the release of the energy with which the nucleus was held together and in the conversion of part of the nucleus into Einsteinian energy. This means that for Einstein the nucleus of the atom is matter, as much matter as the matter of familiar experience which he deems to be congealed energy. Therefore, the neutrons and protons composing the nucleus are material and so too are the electrons which belong to the same category as they!

If matter were not here, would Sullivan on pages 46 and 47 of *Limitations of Science* be able to speak of an electron having inertia and of the diameter of an electron being about one-fifty-thousandth part of the diameter of the whole atom? And would Dr. Gerald Wendt, quoting Prof. Millikan, be able to speak, on page 77 of *The Atomic Age Begins*, of the electron weighing about one-two-thousandth of the weight of the smallest known atom, that of hydrogen? The popular notion that the electrical charges of which matter is composed are pure energy is clearly a mistake. Besides, it is not even true that matter is wholly composed of electrical charges: the neutron which was discovered by the Cambridge scientist James Chadwick and which is as much an ultimate particle as the electron or the proton, has the same mass as the proton but no electrical charge at all! What is still more significant, the neutron and the proton are now declared to be able to change into each other and, precisely by that charge, to be holding together the nucleus: this shows definitely that the electrical charge in the nucleus is simply one state of ultimate matter.

In fact the atom's nucleus is much more material than any piece of ordinary matter. For, all the actual mass or weight of a piece of ordinary matter is calculated to be contained in the nuclei of the atoms composing that piece, but since an atom is mostly empty space except for the electrons revolving about the nucleus and since the nucleus is only one-millionth of a billionth of the size of the atom, the nucleus contains the mass of an atom of ordinary matter in a millionth of a billionth of the atom's volume: in other words, it is a million billion times as dense as what we know as matter! The nucleus is not only matter but matter incredibly concentrated.

The problem, however, remains whether the Einsteinian energy is non-material. Evidently, whatever energy is let loose by the flying apart of the components of the nucleus is not different essentially from the energy known to the old physics: it is merely the capacity for work possessed by material components packed together with incredible density and naturally the unpacking is as tremendous in work-value as the packing. The sole energy that may be different is the product of the destruction of part of the nucleus, the destruction whereby matter is said to disappear and become pure energy. Does this energy blow Materialism to pieces?

First of all, is there any warrant for affirming that if, as Einstein calculated, matter can be changed into energy and energy into matter, the prime reality of the universe is non-material? Why should we think that energy takes precedence? It is not only that matter can be reduced to energy: it is also that energy can be reduced to matter. So why not say matter is the prime reality and constitutes energy? Logically, this conclusion carries as much warrant as the other if matter and energy are regarded, after Einstein, as convertible terms. But, of course, the same amount of difficulty is experienced by us in thinking of the material becoming the non-material as *vice versa*. If nothing more could be pronounced by modern physics than the mutual convertibility of matter and energy, we would be left puzzled and gaping.

Luckily, there is a clue to the puzzle. Let us ask: when matter is spoken of as destroyed and changed into energy, what is it we get? What is the pure energy that results? Sullivan writes on page 48 of *Limitations of Science*: "Incomparably the most intense source of energy would be obtained by annihilating matter. If we could make a proton and a electron coalesce, they would both vanish in an intense flash of radiation." This was written before the discovery of the neutron and of the positron, the true opposite of the electron, and before the nucleus of the atom was split; but the point about destroying or annihilating matter and thereby producing intense energy was already a part of physics. Other writers also speak of "dematerialising" an electron, which is a particle of matter, into a photon, which is a particle of light. What matter's annihilation or dematerialisation results in is light or radiation. Light or radiation is the pure energy into which matter can be changed. But have we here the non-material? Does a photon differ essentially from an electron or proton or neutron?

Says Jeans on page 153 of *The New Background of Science*: "It is just as accurate to speak of the mass of a photon as of the mass of an atom or of a motor car." Again,

on page 154: “We have to imagine that photons of radiation are endowed with inertia, like a bullet or an electron.” Listen to Sir W. Bragg, an authority on radiation: “Light, visible and invisible, X-rays, the emission of radioactive substances, electrons, matter itself, are now seen to have common properties and to be united in some manner which we do not fully understand.” (*The Universe of Light*) No doubt, photons have some properties peculiar to themselves, just as electrons have or protons or neutrons; but they have all the essential properties of that which is described as “dematerialising” or being destroyed into them. Matter, therefore, is not destroyed or dematerialised in an essential sense: it is destroyed or dematerialised in only a technical sense which puts it over against radiation. The scientific opposite of matter is not anything “non-material” but only “radiant”. The pure energy into which matter is changed is essentially just as much matter!

Einsteinian energy, no less than the energy which so many suppose electricity to be, is very far from dealing a death-blow to Materialism. Our conception of matter is not so simple as in the nineteenth century. But we certainly have not gone beyond the material to an energy that is free from materiality. Energy in modern physics has two meanings: the old one which stands for capacity to do work and which refers to a property of matter, and the new one which stands for that which is not technically *matter* but has *basically* nothing non-material and is only another form of matter possessing all the properties of technical matter, including the capacity to do work. An example of this capacity is what is called “radiation pressure”, the push which rays of light give to the object on which they fall.

If we ask why radiation came to be considered pure energy, the answer is: “Formerly, radiation was explained as due to the movement set up in a universal medium filling all space, the ether: it was an energy like all others, inseparable from matter. But the experiment of Michelson and Morley showed once for all that such a medium, if it existed, failed to give the slightest indication of its existence. So it was rejected by science. Now, if radiation or radiant energy was not carried across space by any matter, must it not be labelled as pure energy?” Yes, there is good logic in the label, but, when we discover light to be composed of tiny particles, of photons that have mass and inertia and size, we are no longer misled. And then we realise that the so-called revolution in physics on the strength of “pure energy” leaves things fundamentally as they were. It merely gives us matter writ small, matter refined. To suggest that matter is there no more is to act like the young lady who, having strayed so far from the path of virtue as to become a mother without marriage, pleaded in mitigation: “Oh, it’s only such a wee little baby!”

25.10.1947

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

TEHMI-BEN—NARAD REMEMBERS

WITHOUT the All-encompassing vision we cannot say what it is that calls one soul to another when there is no obvious pull of the vital, mind, or body. So it was with my friendship with Tehmi-ben and the honour to be with her in her last years. It seemed, however, to be the continuation of a profound spiritual association perhaps through many previous lives. She had few close friendships but they ran deep and were always grounded in love and adoration of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. She had, however, many friends in the Ashram who cared for her with love and devotion. A friend would come on Mondays, another on Wednesdays, to see her and to offer their finest dishes. I was often in the enviable position of being asked to share the delicacies they would prepare to entice her to eat.

In this series of remembrances I will attempt to give a partial portrait of Tehmi-ben as I knew her from our extensive conversations and the memories others have shared with me. And yet, only fragments will be revealed, for though she spoke to me freely of her life as a child, her college years, her experiences with Mother and Sri Aurobindo, she spoke little of her Ashram life and personal relationships. Her final months were difficult as she felt she had already left her body and only a shell was remaining. Still, we shared a world of experiences and she would ask me, almost every evening, “Tell me a nice story”, and I would recount some of my travels, my work with flowers and my experiences with Nature. I read her poems of the great poets, especially Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Yeats, Blake, Rumi, Hafiz, A.E., Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and many others, some from her small but important collection, others from the Ashram library. I learned to act out the voices in Mary Stewart’s telling of the Arthurian legend which she waited to hear each evening. And although I was required to give a synopsis of the previous chapters before I read any further, since she said she could remember nothing any longer, she would still recall long passages from *Savitri* and Sri Aurobindo’s sonnets, as well as complete poems of many poets during our discussions of various aspects of poetry! Not all, however, was ‘seriousness’, for there were many moments of laughter and humour. She would be delighted when Bharati would say, “Shall we thrash Narad in *Scrabble*”, (something they did all too often as both had an uncanny knack of seeing seven-letter words!) and when I would use such words such as lox (smoked salmon), orca (the black and white killer whale) or other terms unfamiliar to her, she would say “Absurd, remove it”, in a very authoritative tone. If I asked her if she would like to challenge the word and lose a turn she would say to the others who sometimes joined us, “He makes up these words and then uses the dictionary to justify them!” I would then accuse her of psychological warfare and we would go back and forth enjoying our verbal jousting match.

The last days were not easy. I felt that Mother was working on her body and I told her this, breaking down the asceticism, rigidity, etc., very rapidly, a part only of

her outward self, as inwardly she was totally given to Mother. She would no longer eat and rarely even take a sip of juice, preparing her departure. On her last day in this embodiment her lifelong friends gathered around her as she prepared to leave. I came to her room early in the morning and she waved to me her beautiful greeting as she always did. I asked her if she would like some juice and she said “yes”. Aruna who stayed in her room during the night went to mix some orange syrup, the only thing that Tehmi-ben would take. Suddenly she raised her hand in a gesture that always meant “NO!”—something to which we had been long accustomed. But then she moved her hand slightly to the left and right and as I was wondering what was happening she said, softly and sweetly, “Where is your hand?” I gave it to her and she held it firmly and smiled. Those were her last words to me.

I was asked to perform the rites at her cremation, along with Ashwin, anointing her with oil and sandalwood, lighting the camphor and the pyre. It was the first time I had ever done this but there was no sorrow as I knew that she was already safely with Mother.

Light-heartedly and with deep affection, I called her “My lady” and each evening kissed her forehead before leaving. She would smile or say, “Goodnight, dear” and in her voice I could hear the music of an “ancient one”, child of the Mother, and knew that I was blessed beyond words to have been granted the grace to know her as a beloved friend, elder sister and realised soul.

(To be continued)

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

*O power-winged Love, Thou bearest me
Over storm-black gulfs and endless mires of sleep,
To sunlit havens of purity.*

Thémis

(Poems by Thémis, p. 1)

LIGHT-SECRETS

A Ray of light in silence overspilling speaks,
Gushing forth from an unknown mystical world,
Straight like an arrow, comes down marvellously
Guarding a secret in its tender touch
Lighting up life in colours
And colouring life in light.

Whispering in reflections it embraces matter,
Echoing through textures it follows a form,
Hiding layers within layers shadows invisible,
Revealing an outline, caressing contours,
Dancing in its graceful curve
And curving in its graceful dance.

O Ray of light, you smile in poised silence
While matter is tickled by your searching beams,
Weaving gold and blue in creaseless harmony,
Reds feeling greens, blues longing for yellows,
Notes of coloured laughter throb in my veins
While my whole being becomes your stage
For the unveiling dance of your divine Secret.

GOPIKA

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of November 2005)

5

Ahmedabad

IN January 1933, Krishnalal returned from Shantiniketan to Ahmedabad, his course unfinished due to lack of funds. In July 1927, when he had returned from Baroda, also without being able to complete his course, torrential rains were lashing central Gujarat—in one week 53” in Ahmedabad, far more than it normally obtained throughout a year (the worst affected was Kheda with 100”)—the total damages were assessed at several crores. Ahmedabad’s convoluted alleys were flooded, the recently constructed drains were choked, 6,000 houses had collapsed, and over 50,000 persons had been rendered homeless.¹ Said the family wag *Eevo varhaad paidone, eevo varhaad paidone, ke aapno Karsan chhe ne, ee Vadodarethi haathini ambaadipar behhi ne aiyvo!* (Such a deluge, our Karsan returned from Baroda in the howdah of a royal elephant!) Both times new vistas had been opened to Krishnalal; enthusiasm and inspiration had filled him to overflowing when rude circumstances had thrown him back to this same uninspiring situation.

He started teaching in the SNDT College for women. But “subsequently, even my family and social situation became stifling walls.”² If it was strenuous to advance on the path Nandababu had opened to him while fulfilling his family responsibilities, it was impossible to join the Congress politics as expected by his Mandal, for his past experience in that field had not been encouraging.

It is at such times, writes his brother, Vasudev, when the soul’s anguish is at a high pitch, that Divine Grace smiles upon a man. Soon after Krishnalal took up his art career, Ambubhai Purani gave up his revolutionary activities at the cost of being misunderstood and denigrated even by his nearest and dearest, and had settled in Pondicherry under the aegis of Sri Aurobindo. All through those years, Krishnalal had kept in continuous touch with Ambubhai. Coming to know of his thirst for further progress in Art, Ambubhai inspired him to visit the Ashram and seek the guidance of the Mother.

*

Pondicherry

Champaklal was among the aspiring artists then being guided by the Mother. He first visited Pondicherry in 1921, five years after he was introduced to Sri Aurobindo’s

Yoga, and settled here in 1923. Drawing had been his childhood passion and he had passed two public examinations in it in 1914-15. It was perhaps some time in 1927 (after she and Sri Aurobindo moved to the Meditation House) that Mother began to permit a few disciples to come to the Stores in the Library House when she went there for some work every evening before going down to the Reception Room for collective meditation and soup distribution. After she had finished her work, this group used to have talks or readings and sometimes “spiritual games”, one of which was the Flower Game. Says Champaklal, “Mother would bring some flowers and keep them on a stool in front of her. We would sit in a circle around her, each in the place she had allotted. From the significances that she had given to those flowers each of us had to make a sentence and bring our chits to her the next day.” One of the offshoots of this game was the inspiration to paint flowers; it soon became an important subject for all aspirant artists. Champaklal again, “One day I got the idea of drawing flowers. I painted the flower Champa and placed the drawing along with the other letters in the tray, without saying anything to Mother. Imagine my surprise when she came out a little later, smiling, and a paper in her hand.... Underneath it [*my drawing*] she had written the significance of that flower. Ambu used to select beautiful flowers and bring them to me; it was not as easy to get them as it is today, one had to go very far in search of the uncommon varieties.”

“In the early thirties,” Jayantilal tells us, “the Mother trained quite a few people.... Just as you give a child a piece of chalk in his hand and, holding his hand, make him write letters of the alphabet, the Mother taught these people. There were Anil Kumar, Sanjiban, Chinmayi and one or two others including Tajdar. Those who were serious about art, the Mother used to instruct them and guide them. You will find it very amusing to hear today that she used to cut out pictures from newspapers and send them, to begin with, to put colours on them. On the result of this work Sri Aurobindo used to remark, perhaps as dictated by the Mother.... In this way these people were not only encouraged but there was a force put forth so that they could develop their art more thoroughly.” [*Mother India*, June 1992, p. 399]

The youngest artist then was Romen Palit. He was only 9 years old on his first visit to the Ashram in September 1929. When he returned in July 1930, Mrs. Nag was asked to look after him. But being, in his own words, “a spoilt boy, undisciplined in habit, and erratic in temperament,” he was finally given a separate room. When, along with his letters to Mother, he began to send up a picture he had drawn, she encouraged him to develop his capacities in drawing.

Anil Kumar Bhattacharya arrived in June 1931, a young man of 28, from Bathuli, Tangil, Bengal. Circumstances forced him to leave in March 1938, but he returned in 1944 and stayed for almost two years.

20-year-old Sanjiban Biswas came from Chittagong in February 1933. He had done some drawing and also had a deep inclination for music. Mother gave him the work of drawing flowers and preparing designs for the embroidery work done by the

sadhikas. So fast was his progress in drawing that in December Sri Aurobindo wrote to him, “You can learn the song and sing—do it as the Mother’s work without desire, such as even the wish to sing before her—but simply as something to be done for her service....” “Only you must not allow it to interfere with your painting which is your main work....”

Krishnalal arrived on 10 August 1933, a brook which, enriched by two major currents from Bengal, discovered its destined place of fulfillment in the vast Ocean at Pondicherry. He writes, “It was then that my real journey began. There certainly had been some progress so far, but a life and progress in the true direction, according to my inmost vision, began only now. Here the pictures I made of birds and animals... of landscapes, of the sea, had an added element which I would never have obtained in Gujarat. But now I turned more towards symbolic pictures. In all this, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother helped me both externally as well as internally. They alone perceived my inner movements and began to turn me towards the true nature of Art.

“But it was not at all easy to turn that way. Outwardly I knew nothing about Yoga. I used to even think, ‘I am an artist; spirituality is not for me.’ It was difficult to pull me out of this, but it was because of the devotee in my nature that it was finally made possible. Gradually, I immersed myself in the atmosphere of the Ashram. But the difficulty of progressing in my art still remained. I managed to accept the new lifestyle of the Ashram within, but to bring out its influence in my art took a long time. The *sanskaras*, thoughts, techniques, etc. with which I had begun my training had established themselves inside and kept swallowing up whatever new things were coming in. How much of an obstacle the narrow viewpoints and methods one has learned can then become, can be known only by one who has to go through this experience. Things that had made a home in my nature refused to leave. But under the influence of the new Force, it has been finally possible, and my pictures have, thanks to it, acquired a new element.... I may reproduce here the words of the one who has made it possible, and express my gratitude to Her.” Then Krishnalal gives three extracts from Mother’s talk of 28 July 1929:

“There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga, there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint.”

“The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things.”

“When a true artist, one who looks for his creative source to a higher world, turns to Yoga, he will find that his inspiration becomes more direct and powerful and his expression clearer and deeper.”

Says Vasudev: “Under Mother’s guidance, Krishnalal set off on a quest of his own. He did many portraits and landscapes, but came to be known especially for his

animals and birds; his sea-scapes are considered by some critics to be among the most striking depictions of the sea. Among the larger works he did are the panels in the passages on the first floor of the Meditation House, 'The Wave' which hangs behind Mother's Darshan Chair in the Meditation Hall on the first floor of the Meditation House, the series on the walls of the Reception Room, and his last major painting—a large mural in acrylic colours at the entrance of Golconde, which he did in the early 1980s."

Introducing Krishnalal's paintings exhibited in 1948, Jayantilal Parekh wrote: "Krishnalal has discovered in himself some vital affinity with birds and animals. Through his remarkable powers of observation, he has done some very true paintings of birds and animals; and this is all the more remarkable that they are done from memory. His decoration of the Mother's apartment is a huge work of one hundred and fifty square feet full of colour and life, and it is very successful as a mural in tempera.... Krishnalal has tried various subjects, including mythological and visionary themes. Some of his visions have the atmosphere and touch of the world to which they belong, which is the most important aspect in such paintings. From the body of his paintings of visionary themes, however, only a few are successful, while his figure drawings lack inner life and are stereotyped. Another important part of his work are his sea-scapes done from memory; they show power of observation both of detail and sea-rhythms, and they bring an element of decoration which is new and satisfying. His landscapes done directly from nature should also be mentioned; some are most successful and embody the atmosphere of freshness and life, which should always appear in paintings from nature."

*

On 10 August 1933, Ambubhai sent Pujalal and Vishnuprasad to the railway station to receive Krishnalal. He was put up in the Chettiar Hotel and asked to write a letter to the Mother. This letter is the first one of his correspondence reproduced below. Along with Krishnalal's, Ambubhai sent a note of his own, "...He has taken one month's leave from his post. But he would remain up to November if allowed—(and even longer if he is acclimatised to the life here, I think)." Sri Aurobindo replied: "He can remain. Mother will give him a room in the Ashram if he wants." And the Mother wrote underneath, "Approved."

We reproduce here Krishnalal's correspondence with Mother and Sri Aurobindo.



With my blessings to
Krobnal

Sri Anubando



Blessings

3-5-36
for —

10.8.33: Mother,

I pray you will kindly grant me permission for the pranam and dhyana ceremony from tomorrow.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. Mother has seen your paintings and is interested in them—but just now she has no time to write about them—she will say something afterwards.

18.8.33: Mother,

Will you kindly give me the permission to see the Japanese prints which you gave to the library?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. Mother has informed Nolini that they can be shown to you.

K: May I hope for your divine touch to my brushes which I send herewith?

Sri Aurobindo: The Mother has looked at them. She says they are just the same as those she brought back from Japan—of the finest quality. You can begin painting. The Mother expects that you will show her what you do.

K: I am sending a card done in coloured pencils which you will kindly accept.

Sri Aurobindo: The Mother is very much pleased with your card. She did not write about your paintings because she had no time. If you remain longer, the Mother will call you one day when the crowd is gone and go through them once with you.

26.8.33: Mother,

Last evening I saw a lotus in vision. First I saw it as drawn in position (1), after a short time as in position (2).

May I ask you about its significance?

Sri Aurobindo: The white lotus is the Divine Consciousness-Force; the red lotus is the Avatar, the Divine Descent upon earth. This seems to be a combination of the two. It looks as if the first position indicated the double Power above and ready to descend, the second the first outflowering below.

Mother [*on a chit*]: 31.8.33.

The falcon is the symbol of Perfect Vision.

Mother [*on a chit-card*]: The symbol of the vision is not very clear. The flower resembles a little the Champa (psychological perfection) although the form is not the same. Five being a number of “power” it should symbolise a powerful movement of progress or of expression.—3.9.33.

Mother [*on a white chit*]: Krishnalal,

I am sending you a reproduction of a Corean tiger.— 5-9-33.

6.9.33: Mother,

I hope to get solutions from you of my doubts concerning art.

Generally I am accustomed to depend upon nature for my inspiration.

How far should an artist depend upon nature?

If the source of inspiration is within the artist himself does it require nature's help to reach it? Does taking inspiration from nature hinder to go within one's self for beauty and inspiration?

Sri Aurobindo: There is no incompatibility between the inspiration from within and the dependence on Nature. The essence of the inspiration always comes from within but the forms of expression are based on Nature though developed and modified by the selective or interpretative sight of the artist.

[A small but relevant exchange between Nirodbaran and Sri Aurobindo on 10 September.

Nirod: May I go and see Krishnalal's paintings now and then?

Sri Aurobindo: Not now and then—artists usually do not care to be disturbed. You have not seen them already? I don't think he is painting his pictures now.]

17.9.33: Mother,

Today I send you the drawing of the vision done in pastel colours. Its colours are to be fixed with the fixative which I have ordered from Madras and will receive within a day or two. So, will you kindly return it? I will send it back after fixing it.

I saw this vision twice, once, day before yesterday and again yesterday during the Pranam meditation. Kindly let me know its significance.

Mother: The vision is beautiful. Here is its meaning: The flame of purifying aspiration burning on the rough sea of vital passions and desires.

P.S. For more safety I shall give you the picture back to-morrow morning at pranam.

18-9-33: Mother, yesterday between 10 and 11 a.m. I saw this vision. A road going high up on the side of a mountain. At the top there was something like a stormy cloud.

Sri Aurobindo: It is the inner ascent with occasional storm-clouds coming down across the road.

20-9-33: Mother,

I am sending "Mother's portrait" done in pastels. I began it 15 days back and finished it 7 days ago. I kept it with me since then with the idea of fixing it, which proved to be useless.

May I ask for your opinion, suggestions and criticism over it? If you find necessary to correct it you will be kind enough to do so. I have done it from memory. Do you think this portrait is successful a little?

Do you know any good fixative for pastels used in Paris?

It will be better on my part to write that the depression, about which I wrote yesterday, was not there during or after finishing it for four days.

Sri Aurobindo: The portrait does not seem to us to be successful. In the externals the long projection of the nose over the lips and the eyes close together modify the type of the face and give it another character. It is not a question of resemblance or external appearance, but the basis of character is affected. This however would not be so much of an objection—but for the inner expression as it comes out through the mouth and eyes. There is something introduced here from a vital world—undivine—which is not part of the Mother's vital. It has come in through that Influence of which the Mother spoke—it throws its own shadow and so changes the inner vision of the thing to be done, the face to be portrayed. There is no such element in your paintings of Nature which catch very finely the inner truth of what you paint.

It was not with this portrait that we connected what I wrote about the wrong Influence that brought the obstruction and depression. —Sri Aurobindo 21.9.33.

25-9-33: Mother,

I send three of my visions. Two of them (of Krishna) were seen day before yesterday in the evening. No. 1 was seen first and just afterwards the same kind of figure of Krishna as in No. 2.

No. 3 is the vision which I saw at my place [Ahmedabad] in last July. Sri Aurobindo's feet with a rose on the left foot. I do it after a long time and so I do not remember the then seen form of the feet. General colouring and the arrangement I think I have been able to reproduce. Will you kindly let me know your suggestions?

Sri Aurobindo: The appearance of these visions seems to be that of mental images—they have not the vividness and force of those that are parts of an experience.

28-9-33: Mother,

Can I go to station to-morrow night, as Chandulal is going?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

1-10-33: Mother,

I will require some stamps. I have to write to my brother for some family matters and for some of my things which I have left there. I want to write to my friends also about selling some of my pictures. You will kindly permit me for that.

Mother: Ask Amrita for the stamps.

K: Can I take my dinner in the dining hall? [*The D.R. was then in the Ashram main building.*]

Mother: Yes.

Undated: Mother,

I send these photographs for the favour of signatures.

What should I do for their framing?

Sri Aurobindo: You should ask Purani to make the frames.

Undated: Mother,

Can I go to station to-night to see Natwar off?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, but there is no car.

K: Will you kindly allow me to have some pegs for the photos and picture-frames in the room upstairs? Also permit me for two wires to be tied in the common passage between two rooms.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Mother [*on a white chit*]: 3-10-33

Krishnalal

I find that Champaklal is progressing very much since you are teaching him. He would like to have a lesson every day. Can you do it?

3.10.33: Mother,

Last night I felt sleepy earlier than usual. But when I went to bed the whole body began to suffer from acute pain. Each and every joint and muscle pained as if it was being hammered from inside.

This lasted nearly for three hours. Then I slept.

Sri Aurobindo: Would you like to ask Doctor (Banerji) about these pains?

7:10:33: Mother,

To-day I send the picture of the vision, which I saw before three months on the day of my birth-date. I did its drawing on the second day.

I have changed the form of the lotus. In the vision it was decorative and had about eight petals.

The background was not very clear to me and so I have left it unfinished. In the upper part of the background there was something like the folds of a red sari.

I have tried to bring out the colouring seen in the vision. May I hope for its explanation?

Sri Aurobindo: The lotus must represent owing to its numerous petals the “thousand petalled” lotus above the head which is the seat of the higher consciousness above the thinking intelligence. The vision may mean the opening of the consciousness there and in it the adoration of the Divine.

12-10-33: Mother,

I send two pictures seen in the visions yesterday.

No. (1) I saw while I was in meditation during Pranam time, something like a figure of shining gold against the grey background.

No. (2), I saw in the afternoon while walking in my room concentrating for a picture. My eyes were open at the time, yet I saw it in the colours and the form. Can it be called a vision?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

K: Will you kindly let me know what they mean?

Sri Aurobindo: No. 1 is the way crossing the vital, the golden figure is a divine being or some consciousness entering the vital, the line across is the protection put along this way.

No. 2 is a symbol of the divine creation (white house on golden hill) on the physical (red).

17.10.33: Mother,

I send you two pictures, a landscape and a vision.

The vision I saw yesterday in the morning. A male figure is standing in a chariot drawn by some horses.

Sri Aurobindo: Possibly the Sun God.

Undated: Mother, since some days I feel as if somebody speaking at the time of going to bed. The words or sentences heard are irrelevant and not clear, but as if they are trying to disturb me.

Has this any meaning? What can be its nature?

Sri Aurobindo: Never rely on these voices—not only so but never listen to them, turn your attention elsewhere when you hear them and cut all connection. They are deceptive voices and are trying to disturb you.

29/10/33: Mother,

Last night I saw in dream a volcano of grey colour bursting out with loud noise and fire. I told to some persons who were by my side, “Our country has volcanoes, we will have earthquakes and our buildings will fall down.” What can be its significance?

Sri Aurobindo: It is difficult to say. It means a big turmoil somewhere—in the world, in the country or in something connected with one’s own life.

K: To-day I was reading a Gujarati novel. In it an incident is described that a young lady, whose profession is to sing in the public, leaves that life and runs away, and gets refuge in a temple of Rama. The priest is a real devotee and treats the lady kindly. The lady with great reverence bows to the image of God Rama. While reading this I also felt the pious atmosphere and tears began to flow. I could not check them. Weeping began very freely, nearly for 45 minutes I wept. I felt perspiring and weak. As I could not check weeping I got out of the room and any way managed to forget all.

What kind of movement can this be? Has it any connection with sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: It was an answer of an inner movement to the suggestion of spiritual emotion, but the vital intensity was too uncontrolled, hence the excess of weeping and weakness.

4.11.33: Mother,

Before some days I wrote a letter to Sjt. Nandalal Bose informing him about my stay here and asking him about a process for washing egg-tempera picture.

The reply, which I received today, I send to you. (In it [my letter (*inserted by Sri Aurobindo over K's "it"*)] he writes about love as the only thing for Art.) [*The parentheses were inserted by Sri Aurobindo to connect his own answer*] When I was at Santiniketan he talked about the same point to me. Is it quite correct or something supplementary is necessary with love?

Sri Aurobindo: It is a way of speaking, I suppose, in accordance with his own experience. It is the creative Force which he calls Love—others might call it by another name because they see it in another aspect.

K: I have mounted the cloth for the picture with the help of Champaklal.

To-morrow may I begin a picture 'The Wave' with your divine blessings?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

5/11/33: Mother,

I saw this vision while meditating before beginning the picture on cloth. The earthen lamp is just like the one I saw before, the background is different. I am not able to bring out the soft bluish green in this coloured pencil drawing.

Will you let me know what it signifies?

Sri Aurobindo: The bluish green would signify loving devotion, the lamp consecration—in the physical, (because the lamp is red).

12-11-33: Mother,

In one of the window-screens of my room white ants have come out.

May I inquire about what is to be done?

Mother: Inform Chandulal who will have them removed.

P.S. were you informed that I shall see you on Wednesday (15th) after 11.30.A.M.

20-11-33: Mother, now I will not require the picture about which you sent word with Champaklal. I am writing for the colours, ordered from Madras through a friend of Purani, to finish the picture on cloth. Anyway I want to finish it before the 24th inst.

Today I received from the store three Japanese sheets of wood. I am trying to do colouring on them. Are they specially meant for painting in water colours?

Mother: They use them like that in Japan, but I do not know if these are prepared.

K: It seems Anilkumar and Romen have stopped the classes. In case of Anilkumar I

had not the least intention of offending him or stopping him from the class. Was I wrong in insisting on his bringing some work for execution in the class for he did not bring any since last four classes?

Mother: No, you were not wrong.

Undated: Mother,

I have nearly finished the picture on cloth. Before I take it off the board I would like to show it to you and take your suggestions for the finishing touches.

Will you oblige me by sparing a little of your time if possible?

Sri Aurobindo: Mother will find out a time for it.

28.11.33: Mother, since three days I cannot keep myself conscious of your atmosphere. At times there are gaps when some idea of ordinary occurrence continues in the mind. I can reject it after some effort. Like this it goes on, and so I am not able to sit at work steadily. When I try to read I feel sleepy.

Sri Aurobindo: It is a lapse into the ordinary consciousness. Remain very quiet and let the former condition come back.

K: Last night I felt sleepy a little earlier and so went to bed. I did not get sleep but was in such a condition that I felt that all my senses had stopped working. No thought was there in the brain nor was I conscious of my limbs. With great effort I was trying to remember you now and then. I do not know how long I remained in that condition, may be half an hour to one hour.

Will you kindly explain me all about this?

Sri Aurobindo: The last experience was a passing into a state of trance.

(To be continued)

S. V. BHATT

References

1. *The Indomitable Sardar* by K. L. Punjabi, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962, p. 26.
2. Krishnalal, Kumar, No. 618, June 1975, p. 234.

If Art's service is but to imitate Nature, then burn all the picture galleries and let us have instead photographic studios. It is because Art reveals what Nature hides, that a small picture is worth more than all the jewels of the millionaires and the treasures of the princes.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 440)

OF SAINTS, SAGES AND ANGELS

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

SAGES too I have been fortunate to meet many. For obvious reasons here I shall omit the well-known ones such as Nolini-da, Amrita-da, Pavitra-da about whom much has been written. And even of the rest, I shall confine myself to only a few. One benevolent face with a cherubic smile that comes floating before my mind's eye after almost five decades is that of Nolini Sen-da. His surname became an inalienable part of his first name (or Christian name as it was in current usage, though anomalously, even for the non-Christians during the British Raj) in order to distinguish him from Nolini Kanta Gupta, the Ashram Secretary and Nolini Kanto Sarkar, the singer.

An eminent mathematician, Nolini Sen-da was a classmate and peer of such stalwarts as Dr. Satyen Bose (of the Bose-Einstein theory fame) and Dr. Meghnad Saha. He had given up his lucrative position in the Railways to join the Ashram in 1941 with his highly intellectual family. Nolini Sen-da taught us mathematics and taught geography to our juniors. He was so full of the milk of human kindness that it was beyond him to scold a child for any misdemeanour and most of the children took full advantage of his goodness.

In those days the Mother gave a special Darshan to the children at about 12.30 in the afternoon. In the beginning the children gathered in the Hall upstairs in front of the Darshan Room, i.e. just above the present Meditation Hall. Later, when our number increased, the Mother saw us in the Meditation Hall downstairs. At first this Darshan was over by one thirty at the latest, leaving us plenty of time to attend the afternoon classes punctually. But came a time when owing to her pressure of work the Mother used to be late. Even then, if we wanted we could have gone to her first and reach our classes, which were then held in the Playground, on time. But the little devils that many of us were, we would go to the Mother in a leisurely manner, dawdle as much as we could on the way and invariably be late for our class. We were secure in the knowledge that most of the teachers would accept our ironclad excuse, and they did. But in Nolini Sen-da's class we were in for a surprise. Very quietly but firmly he explained to us that as students our first duty was to attend our classes without fail and to be punctual. To fulfill this obligation if we had to miss going to the Mother, even that should be preferable. Our eyes almost popped out of our head when we heard this. Then he said something which was indelibly imprinted on my mind. He said, "When you do anything with total concentration you come very close to the Mother. When you are fully absorbed in solving even a problem of mathematics it is as good as being in a state of meditation. Self-forgetfulness is all, for then you are one with the Divine, your true Self."

Sisir-da, the well-known historian Sisir Kumar Mitra, was the head master of our school. He was a very self-effacing person in spite of holding such an important

position. Fair, clean-shaven, well-built, of medium height, clad in spotless white *dhoti* and *chaddar*, Sisir-da always reminded me of a Roman senator in his toga. His fringe of short white hair surrounding a shining tonsure further enhanced that image. Incidentally, often he spoke of Cicero. Could it be that he himself was Cicero in a past incarnation?

Formerly from Shantiniketan, Sisir-da was a historian and had authored, among others, two well-known books, *The Vision of India* and *The Liberator*. In the Ashram School he taught history and English to the senior students. The soul of gentleness, he let us get away with many minor infringements of rules. Once in a while he asked us to do a little something for him, such as posting a letter. But when we came back to report to him that the work was completed, there would always be some eatable waiting for us as a token of his appreciation.

While I am on the subject of my teachers, I must mention the teacher par excellence to whom I am indebted for my deep love and whatever little I know of English poetry. An excellent teacher and a strict taskmistress, Tehmi-ben taught us with utmost diligence. Herself a brilliant scholar and a perfectionist in everything that she did (her poems and paintings bear witness to that) she insisted on perfection in our work. And most of her students, including the habitual shirker that was me, strove hard to come up to her expectations. Whether she taught us Shakespeare or Shelley, Francis Thompson or A.E., she could generate such an enthusiasm in us that I for one learnt great swaths of poetry by heart. The subjects that she chose for our essay writing were always so challenging that many of us burnt the midnight oil and worked for hours on end to produce our masterpieces. Oh, how proudly we would announce to the world that we were Tehmi-ben's students! And when she introduced us to Sri Aurobindo's poetry—the shorter and longer ones to start with, culminating in *Savitri*—

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.

More than for everything else that I received from her, I shall be eternally grateful to her for opening this particular door to me

Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.

Another sage whom I knew, but not intimately, was Pujalal-ji. A short, thin, quiet man, Pujalal-ji was a Sanskrit scholar and one of the foremost poets of Gujarat. Although I did not have the opportunity of studying under him, I have heard from his former students of his intense love for Sanskrit with which he could enthuse them. Apart from writing an introductory Sanskrit grammar for adult learners, he compiled two books of Sanskrit shlokas, *Sarala Shloka* and *Sarasa Shloka*. They are easy to

memorise but at the same time they contain the essence of Indian philosophy.

Anilbaran Roy, who lived in the Ashram Main Building just above the present Reading Room, was well known as a firebrand political figure of Bengal in the post Sri Aurobindo-Barindra Kumar era. After joining the Ashram he attained more fame for his Bengali translation of the *Srimad Bhagavat Gita* with commentary, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's exposition. Sri Aurobindo did him a signal honour by superbly rendering into English Anilbaran's Bengali poem, "Mahalakshmi", the first line of which Sri Aurobindo immortalised as

In lotus groves Thy spirit roves: where shall I find a seat for Thee?

Professor of English and Economics, Anilbaran Roy had joined the Revolutionary movement inspired by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. When he was arrested and lodged in the Presidency Jail, he began corresponding with Sri Aurobindo. With Sri Aurobindo's approval he started translating Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* into Bengali. Whenever he needed any clarification he wrote to Sri Aurobindo who, in his turn, dictated his answers either to Nolini-da or Amrita-da and these were later posted to Anilbaran. Based on these answers the book *Yoge Diksha* (Initiation in Yoga) was published.

Anilbaran Roy was a handsome man, clean-shaven with sharp features. Tall, well-built, very fair in complexion with a reddish tinge, he was almost totally bald with a fringe of longish white hair covering the sides and back of his head. Always clad in white *dhoti* and *chaddar*, he cut a fine figure. I came in contact with him under rather unusual circumstances. Although not strictly relevant to this article, I shall mention them because I feel that the readers may find them interesting. In the evening of August 15, 1947 when the whole of India was celebrating her Independence, the Ashram was attacked by a violent mob, instigated by a local political party to carry out this nefarious deed. A young disciple, Mulshankar, was fatally stabbed. For a few days after this tragic incident, the Ashram was put in a state of alert. Guidelines were put up on the Ashram Notice Board regarding our code of conduct during those tense times. I still remember a few of them: always to be calm, never to get excited; to behave in a dignified manner; to remain within the Ashram area and to have a companion while going anywhere; always to be conscious and be specially alert while turning a corner, etc.

Every night male inmates of the Ashram were posted in strategic areas around the Ashram to observe and report on the hostile activities, if any, and to guard the various Departments. Udar-da and Pranab-da went patrolling in Millie's famous Jeep (the old war horse is still giving service in Gloria Land), moving from check-post to check-post. To coordinate all these activities, Headquarters were set up in the present Ashram Reading Room (the Ashram Library in those days) manned by Anilbaran with myself, then a lad of fourteen, as his secretary. My task was to write down in

long hand all the reports as they came in and put them in order according to the date and time of their arrival. But I encountered my first and biggest hurdle when I had to write the word “suspicious”. I did not know the spelling and was ashamed to expose my crass ignorance to such a learned man as Anilbaran Roy. And the gods took a perverse pleasure in my discomfiture, for the blasted word occurred in every report. I had never dreamt that the adjective “suspicious” was so ubiquitous and could qualify so many different nouns. There were “suspicious characters”, “suspicious movements”, “suspicious noises”, even “suspicious signals”. As during the battle of Waterloo the Duke of Wellington, sore beset by Napoleon, was praying for either Blucher or evening to come, so was I praying either for a lull in the reports so that I could consult a dictionary, or for ten o’clock to strike so that we could close office for the day. There was no lull but eventually ten o’clock did strike. Next day as soon as the Library opened, I got hold of the trusted *Chambers’* and corrected all my suspect spellings which I had deliberately made illegible on the previous night.

* * *

After having seen so many angels with their wings aflutter, helping people in distress, I can vouch for the words of the poet, who declared,

The angels keep their ancient places
Turn but a stone and start a wing!

I shall talk of only a few of them and for once keep their identity a secret. This is a safety measure, for people in general have a bad habit of exploiting the goodness of angels.

Once I had to accompany Mrs. M. to another city to get her admitted to a hospital. As I had spent all my life in the protected environment of the Ashram where everybody knows everybody and formalities are nonexistent, I was feeling quite lost in this big city where everything was unfamiliar and one had to follow strict procedures. But suddenly a hand on mine was laid and I heard the familiar voice of a Pondicherrian maid, “Hello, what are you doing here?” I looked up to see the radiant face of U. smiling at me. After that it was all plain sailing, with her assuming control of the rudder of my hitherto rocking boat. U. knew just about everything and everybody in that big hospital, beginning with the doctors and the nurses to the humble canteen waiters who bent over backwards to serve her. Since then I have had the opportunity of observing her in many different and, sometimes, difficult situations and have always been struck by her selfless and sweet nature and quiet efficiency.

Z. is another such angel always ready with a helping hand. Any time of the day and the night you may call him and he will be there to look to your needs. I myself have witnessed him late at night when he just got into bed after delivering a patient

in a serious condition to the Nursing Home. His cell phone rang and he was up and about in a minute taking the Ambulance van once more out of the garage, ready to take care of another ailing person. No shadow of annoyance marred the cheerfulness of his disposition. So comforting was his presence that the patient got some relief almost immediately. This kind of situation is more of a routine than an exception with him and yet nobody has ever heard him complain.

I consider myself very fortunate that I have had the privilege of making the acquaintance of P. She has come to us from across the seas and she has indeed been a godsend for many of us. A highly qualified nurse, she has herself been the victim of a very serious road accident. But in spite of her apparently frail looks she can be a tower of strength when the need arises. I have seen her passing night after sleepless night nursing a patient, dictated by no other obligation than her inherent kindness. And she does her work so quietly, so spontaneously, as an offering to the Mother! If at this point the readers assume that she forms part of the staff of the Nursing Home, that will indeed be “folly wide the mark”! No, Sir, she has her work cut out for her, requiring her special expertise, in another Department. It is only after attending to her usual tasks that she looks after the sick and the ailing, sacrificing in the process her own rest, comfort and convenience.

Convenience! The word brings to mind another angel who goes out of her way to see to others’ convenience. She is B. Her work is such that she can carry it out mechanically with nobody faulting her. But because her duties concern other people and she is sensible to their particular needs, she organises her work to accommodate those very needs.

In India we have a very special word—*satsang*. It is widely used in connection with spiritual practices, being often recommended as essential for one’s sadhana. The literal English translation of the word as “good company” falls far short of its real significance. It actually means the company of holy or spiritually awakened people. In their company their spiritual aura automatically permeates into one’s being.

I am very grateful to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, apart from all the other innumerable gifts that have always showered on me and are still showering on me, for accepting me as a member of their family and letting me live in the Ashram and imbibe its spiritual atmosphere. How otherwise could I have come into close contact with so many good, wise and angelic people? Their very existence proves, in the teeth of all appearances and all arguments to the contrary, that God indeed is growing up while the so-called wise men talk and sleep.

(Concluded)

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

SONG OF HER BROKEN HEART MADE WHOLE

My heart is deeper than I know.
I dammed it up and wouldn't let it flow.
I dammed it up for many years
And shored it up with unshed tears
At little hurts and taunts as well as arrows of outrageous fate.
And day by day I made it strong.
I taught it how to hate.

I built a skeleton of twisted wire
And steeled myself, tempered in fire.
I garnered rocks and driest sand.
Forever and ever it should stand.
Nor time nor elements should daunt it.
In the world's face I planned to flaunt it.
I lent all energies to preserve it.
No minute trickle should traverse it.
"My all I've given you" I was wont to say.
"Now never break or wash away.
Let nobody and nothing wear you down.
You are my edifice, You are my crown."

Until one day someone came by
And brushed my soul
And in a trice made my heart whole.
She smiled at me.
Her image was a mirror of eternity.

Made my heart whole?
Then it was broken all this while;
The dam was built with shard on shard of it?
But in its centre was this smile
Proof against sorrow and every trial
It needs no armour and no shield
For now it knows to bend and yield.

O fates you are my friends
All life towards you sweetly wends.
Within the heart is that one visage.
In everything there shines Her image.
My heart's an ocean deep and wide.
My heart is fathomless I know.
It's made to sing and smile and flow.

MAGGI

DOOM OF ANANKE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

Evil and Suffering: The Origin and Future of Necessity

Nature and Fate compel his free-will's choice.
But greater spirits this balance can reverse
And make the soul the artist of its fate.
This is the mystic truth our ignorance hides:
Doom is a passage for our inborn force,
Our ordeal is the hidden spirit's choice,
Ananke is our being's own decree.

(Savitri, p. 465)

Is Necessity inevitable? What governs Necessity? Could Necessity evolve to a higher Truth, and in the process become extinct through its transformation to its own opposite? In Indian philosophical literature, the manifested and physical world is recognised as part of maya or illusion by some yogi-scholars. Even if it is real, to the other group of yogi-philosophers, it is unalterable. Necessity is the fact of terrestrial world and life. Therefore a yogi seeks liberation from it by escaping the cycles of birth and death. From his station above mind, Sri Aurobindo observed Necessity as a stage in the development of consciousness from the primal Inconscience. To a reasoning and thinking mind that is limited by the sense-acquired knowledge, the universe appears as an inconscient automatic machine driven by a blind mechanical necessity without a will of its own. To materialist philosophers, of yore and of now, man is an automaton, his consciousness, mind and soul are merely epiphenomena of an inconscient material energy. They attributed all the supraphysical existences and phenomena to the blind physico-mechanical necessity.

All now seems Nature's massed machinery;
An endless servitude to material rule
And long determination's rigid chain,
Her firm and changeless habits aping Law,
Her empire of unconscious deft device
Annul the claim of man's free human will.
He too is a machine amid machines;
A piston brain pumps out the shapes of thought,
A beating heart cuts out emotion's modes;
An insentient energy fabricates a soul.

(Ibid., p. 20)

A loaded huge self-worked machine appears
 To her eye's eager and admiring stare,
 An intricate and meaningless enginery
 Of ordered fateful and unfailing Chance:
 Ingenious and meticulous and minute,
 Its brute unconscious accurate device
 Unrolls an unerring march, maps a sure road;
 It plans without thinking, acts without a will,
 A million purposes serves with purpose none
 And builds a rational world without a mind.
 It has no mover, no maker, no idea:
 Its vast self-action toils without a cause;
 A lifeless Energy irresistibly driven,
 Death's head on the body of Necessity,
 Engenders life and fathers consciousness,
 Then wonders why all was and whence it came.
 Our thoughts are parts of the immense machine,
 Our ponderings but a freak of Matter's law,
 The mystic's lore was a fancy or a blind;
 Of soul or spirit we have now no need:
 Matter is the admirable Reality,
 The patent unescapable miracle,
 The hard truth of things, simple, eternal, sole.

(*Ibid.*, p. 253)

Inconscience is inherent within matter and it taints in varying degrees the products that evolve out of matter including the mind, upto its highest level of development and purity—Overmind. According to Sri Aurobindo, the mind is unable to see the supreme Truth, whom Necessity serves. Necessity or Ignorance is the creative power of the Supreme. The lord of Death echoes a similar perception to Savitri.

Mind is the author, spectator, actor, stage:
 Mind only is and what it thinks is seen.
 If Mind is all, renounce the hope of bliss;
 If Mind is all, renounce the hope of Truth.
 For Mind can never touch the body of Truth...

(*Ibid.*, p. 645)

He questions and then states his own view-point:

How shalt thou bring the Everlasting here?
 There is no house for him in hurrying Time.
 Vainly thou seek'st in Matter's world an aim;
 No aim is there, only a will to be.
 All walk by Nature bound for ever the same.
 Look on these forms that stay awhile and pass,
 These lives that long and strive, then are no more,
 These structures that have no abiding truth,
 The saviour creeds that cannot save themselves,
 But perish in the strangling hands of the years....

(*Ibid.*, p. 644)

Evil, suffering and pain coexist with Ego and Ignorance. Sri Aurobindo describes the cause of evil and pain in the world in his essay, *The Riddle of this World* (TRW).

For to the how of the fall into the Ignorance as opposed to the why, the effective cause, there is a substantial agreement in all spiritual experience. It is the division, the separation, the principle of isolation from the Permanent and One that brought it about; it is because the ego set up for itself in the world emphasising its own desire and self-affirmation in preference to its unity with the Divine and its oneness with all; it is because instead of the one supreme Force, Wisdom, Light determining the harmony of all forces each Idea, Force, Form of things was allowed to work itself out as far as it could in the mass of infinite possibilities by its separate will and inevitably in the end by conflict with others. Division, ego, the imperfect consciousness and groping and struggle of a separate self-affirmation are the efficient cause of the suffering and ignorance of this world. Once consciousness separated from the one consciousness, they fell inevitably into Ignorance and the last result of Ignorance was Inconscience; from a dark immense Inconscient this material world arises and out of it a soul that by evolution is struggling into consciousness, attracted towards the hidden Light, ascending but still blindly towards the lost Divinity from which it came."

(TRW, p. 65)

On the other hand Sri Aurobindo calls the Ignorance a power of the divine, the Infinite. Thus the ego "is really a power of infinity; the boundless multiplicity of beings in the world is a result and signal evidence, not of limitation or finiteness, but of that illimitable Infinity." (*The Life Divine* [LD], p. 401). "All this imperfection is to us evil, but all evil is in travail of the eternal good; for all is an imperfection which is the first condition,—in the law of life evolving out of Inconscience,—of a greater perfection in the manifesting of the hidden divinity."

(*Ibid.*, p. 406)

In *The Riddle of this World* Sri Aurobindo further writes about the origin of the Necessity in mental terms.

But still what is the **purpose and origin of the disharmony**—why came this division and ego, this world of a painful evolution? Why must evil and sorrow enter into the divine Good, Bliss and Peace? It is hard to answer to the human intelligence on its own level, for the consciousness to which the origin of this phenomenon belongs and to which it stands as it were automatically justified in a supra-intellectual knowledge, is a cosmic and not an individualised human intelligence; it sees in larger spaces, it has another vision and cognition, other terms of consciousness than human reason and feeling. To the human mind one might answer that while in itself the Infinite might be free from those perturbations, yet once manifestation began infinite possibility also began and among the infinite possibilities which it is the function of the universal manifestation to work out, the negation, the apparent effective negation—with all its consequences—of the Power, Light, Peace, Bliss was very evidently one. If it is asked **why even if possible it should have been accepted**, the answer nearest to the Cosmic Truth which the human intelligence can make is that in the relations or in the transition of the Divine in the Oneness to the Divine in the Many, this ominous possible became at a certain point an inevitable. For once it appears it acquires for the Soul descending into evolutionary manifestation an irresistible attraction which creates the inevitability—an attraction which in human terms on the terrestrial level might be interpreted as the call of the unknown, the joy of danger and difficulty and adventure, the will to attempt the impossible, to work out the incalculable, the will to create the new and the uncreated with one's own self and life as the material, the fascination of contradictories and their difficult harmonisation—these things translated into another supraphysical, superhuman consciousness, higher and wider than the mental, were the **temptation that led to the fall**. For the original being of light on the verge of the descent the one thing unknown was the depths of the abyss, the possibilities of the Divine in the Ignorance and Inconscience. (*TRW*, pp. 66-68, *emphasis added*)

Sri Aurobindo calls the fall of the Divine to the Inconscient and then his progressive unfolding, a lila or a play. A “play of self-concealing and self-finding is one of the most strenuous joys that conscious being can give to itself, a play of extreme attractiveness.” (*LD*, p. 410) This play has two main partners, the first one is the Will of the Divine Purusha to make the cosmic creation possible and the second is the assent of the individual Purusha to make the individual manifestation possible. Our mind is oblivious of the truth behind our own manifestation. Why does our soul assent to this terrible play?

There is an attraction in ignorance itself because it provides us with the joy of discovery, the surprise of new and unforeseen creation, a great adventure of the soul; there is a joy of the journey and the search and the finding, a joy of the battle and the crown, the labour and the reward of the labour....

But, apart from this choice of the individual Purusha, there is a deeper truth inherent in the original Existence which finds its expression in the plunge into Inconscience; its result is a new affirmation of Sachchidananda in its apparent opposite. If the Infinite's right of various self-manifestation is granted, this too as a possibility of its manifestation is intelligible and has its profound significance. (*LD*, p. 411)

No one else has offered such a convincing explanation of the origin and purpose of falsehood, darkness, suffering, mortality and disharmony and their necessity in the cosmic plan of the Divine. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo explains that, "**A consciousness-force**, everywhere inherent in Existence, acting even when concealed, is the creator of the worlds, the occult secret of Nature. But in our material world and in our own being consciousness has a double aspect; there is a force of Knowledge, there is a force of Ignorance." (*LD*, p. 295, *emphasis added*) "In a sense, the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit." (*LD*, p. 129)

Savitri to Death:

These wide divine extremes, these inverse powers
Are the right and left side of the body of God;
Existence balanced twixt two mighty arms
Confronts the mind with unsolved abysms of Thought.
Darkness below, a fathomless Light above,
In Light are joined, but sundered by severing Mind
Stand face to face, opposite, inseparable,
Two contraries needed for his great World-task,
Two poles whose currents wake the immense World-Force.

(*Savitri*, pp. 656-57)

The Doom of Necessity in *Savitri*

One must remember that Sri Aurobindo does not accept Ananke as a finality. He does not accept the inevitability of Necessity. He writes,

On the other side from the Divine Oneness a vast acquiescence, compassionate, consenting, helpful, a supreme knowledge that this thing must be, that having appeared it must be worked out, that its appearance is in a certain sense part of an incalculable infinite wisdom, that if the plunge into Night was inevitable the emergence into a new unprecedented Day was also a certitude, and that only so could a certain manifestation of the Supreme Truth be effected—by a working out with its phenomenal opposites as the starting-point of the evolution, as the condition laid down for a transforming emergence. In this acquiescence was embraced too the will of the great Sacrifice, the descent of the Divine itself into the Inconscience to take up the burden of the Ignorance and its consequences, to intervene as the Avatar and the Vibhuti walking between the double sign of the Cross and the Victory towards the fulfilment and deliverance. (TRW, p. 68)

The man and earth are only transitional becomings in the process of development of the Being. Sri Aurobindo's yoga is to free the earth from the clutches of ignorance and death by bringing down and establishing a principle superior to Mind, i.e. Supermind. He envisions the Divine Mother's incarnation on earth towards the fulfilment of his goal.

Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul's issue thrown with Destiny's dice.

(*Savitri*, p. 17)

Necessity is presented as a formidable force in the epic, *Savitri*, the vision of Sri Aurobindo for the future of man and earth. The stark force of fate and death presents herself to Savitri. She is the *raison d'être* for Savitri's birth on earth.

Death speaks to Savitri:

Immortality thou claimest for thy spirit,
But immortality for imperfect man,
A god who hurts himself at every step,
Would be a cycle of eternal pain.

(*Ibid.*, p. 618)

He reiterates:

In my sovereign power of unreality
Obliging nothingness to take a form,

Infallibly my blind unthinking force
 Making by chance a fixity like fate's,
 By whim the formulas of Necessity,
 Founded on the hollow ground of the Inane
 The sure bizarrerie of Nature's scheme.
 I curved the vacant ether into Space;
 A huge expanding and contracting Breath
 Harboured the fires of the universe:
 I struck out the supreme original spark
 And spread its sparse ranked armies through the Inane,
 Manufactured the stars from the occult radiances,
 Marshalled the platoons of the invisible dance;
 I formed earth's beauty out of atom and gas,
 And built from chemic plasm the living man.

(*Ibid.*, p. 617)

The lord of Death further informs Savitri and counsels arrogantly:

A blind Force, not Truth has made this ignorant world,
 A blind Force, not Truth orders the lives of men:
 By Power, not Light, the great Gods rule the world;
 Power is the arm of God, the seal of Fate.

(*Ibid.*, p. 664)

The rule of Necessity rises from the confines of matter and accompanies life and Mind which evolve out of the former. The smoke of Necessity, the Inconscient, the Ignorance, billows upward and fades. Although in traces, it taints the outermost borders of Mind, the Overmind and its Gods, so far the highest wisdom that man has ever achieved. Savitri sees through Death:

O Death, thou too art God and yet not He,
 But only his own black shadow on his path
 As leaving the Night he takes the upward Way
 And drags with him its clinging inconscient Force.
 Of God unconscious thou art the dark head,
 Of his Ignorance thou art the impenitent sign,
 Of its vast tenebrous womb the natural child,
 On his immortality the sinister bar.

(*Ibid.*, p. 656)

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine* about the difficulty caused by Necessity

in the process of transformation of the physical world-nature,

The essential difficulty comes from the fact that the substance of our normal being is moulded out of the Inconscience. (*LD*, p. 960)

The substance of our surface being is nescient.

It is this substance of nescience that has to be transformed into a substance of superconscience, a substance in which consciousness and a spiritual awareness are always there even when they are not active, not expressed, not put into form of knowledge. Till that is done, the nescience invades or encompasses or even swallows up and absorbs into its oblivious darkness all that enters into it; it compels the descending light to compromise with the lesser light it enters: there is a mixture, a diminution and dilution of itself, a diminution, a modification, an incomplete authenticity of its truth and power. (*LD*, p. 961)

But even when the higher powers and their intensities enter into the substance of the Inconscience, they are met by this blind opposing Necessity and are subjected to this circumscribing and diminishing law of the nescient substance. It opposes them with its strong titles of an established and inexorable Law, meets always the claim of life with the law of death, the demand of Light with the need of a relief of shadow and a background of darkness, the sovereignty and freedom and dynamism of the Spirit with its own force of adjustment by limitation, demarcation by incapacity, foundation of energy on the repose of an original Inertia. There is an occult truth behind its negations which only the Supermind with its reconciliation of contraries in the original Reality can take up and so discover the pragmatic solution of the enigma. Only the supramental Force can entirely overcome this difficulty of the fundamental Nescience; for with it enters an opposite and luminous imperative Necessity which underlies all things and is the original and final self-determining truth-force of the self-existent Infinite. This greater luminous spiritual Necessity and its sovereign imperative alone can displace or entirely penetrate, transform into itself and so replace the blind Ananke of the Inconscience. (*LD*, pp. 961-62)

The mission of Savitri, the incarnation of the Divine Mother, was to assist and empower man to become That, for whom the necessities of Fate, death and Chance remain no longer the Necessity. Eventually she succeeds in abolishing the physical Necessity and sowing the seeds of new creation. Sri Aurobindo reassures humanity in *The Riddle of this World*:

It is only by rising toward a higher consciousness beyond the mental line and therefore superconscient now to him that he can emerge from his inability and

his ignorance. His full liberation and enlightenment will come when he crosses the line into the light of a new superconscient existence....

But in itself this would change nothing in the creation here, the evasion of a liberated soul from the world makes to that world no difference. But this crossing of the line, if turned not only to an ascending but to a descending purpose, would mean the transformation of the line from what it now is, a lid, a barrier, into a passage for the higher powers of consciousness of the Being now above it. It would mean a new creation on earth, a bringing in of the ultimate powers which would reverse the conditions here, in as much as that would produce a creation raised into the full flood of spiritual and supramental light in place of one emerging into a half-light of mind out of a darkness of material inconscience. (TRW, pp. 71-72)

Savitri through transformation, substituted Necessity of inconscient, evil, imperfection and ignorance, by a superior Necessity of Perfection and Immortality; which is one with and same as the Divine Nature. The true identity of Savitri, the Supramental Avatar who would banish Death is revealed at places in the epic *Savitri*.

Savitri gives hints of her identity to the Lord of Death in a veiled manner:

My heart is wiser than the Reason's thoughts,
My heart is stronger than thy bonds, O Death.

(*Savitri*, p. 635)

And thereafter she is no longer hidden:

A mighty transformation came on her.
A halo of the indwelling Deity,
The Immortal's lustre that had lit her face
And tented its radiance in her body's house,
Overflowing made the air a luminous sea.
In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil.

(*Ibid.*, p. 664)

Thus changed she waited for the Word to speak.
Eternity looked into the eyes of Death
And Darkness saw God's living Reality.

(*Ibid.*, p. 665)

The Seer sees the end of the empire of tyranny, Ananke, on Earth:

The great World-Mother now in her arose:
 A living choice reversed fate's cold dead turn,
 Affirmed the spirit's tread on Circumstance,
 Pressed back the senseless dire revolving Wheel
 And stopped the mute march of Necessity.

(*Ibid.*, p. 21)

Therefore, Beings of Earth hearken the Word. Rejoice!

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour,
 A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
 Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
 Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.

(*Ibid.*, p. 346)

(*Concluded*)

ANAND KUMAR

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3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970.
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The only free will in the world is the one divine Will of which Nature is the executrix; for she is the master and creator of all other wills. Human free-will can be real in a sense, but, like all things that belong to the modes of Nature, it is only relatively real.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vol. 23, CWSA, p. 96)

PANCHASSEE-MOUNTAIN

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

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

(2) The Rock-female ... Mountain-mother

...the phrase must either bear this sense that she is the mother or source of the physical rays of the daylight or else that she creates the radiances of the supreme Day, the splendour and clarity of the inner illumination.

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

Annapurna is both a mountain and a divine Mother. In a Benares temple she is a Hindu Goddess, to the Himalayan villagers she is the Vedic Mother. In the Puranic tradition She is a divine Female as an aspect of Lakshmi; in the Tibetan tradition She is still worshipped as the Mother Tara.

Milarepa is the famous Tibetan Yogi whose cave is on the Manang valley side (the northern, the Tibet side) of this Mountain-mother. It takes about three weeks to walk around Mother-Annapurna on a pilgrimage from Pokhara and Fewa Lake.

Panchassee peak is a 2000 metre-high holy Mountain, with maybe twenty kilometres, as the crow flies, to the southern face of Annapurna. This massif, Annapurna, consists of a 16-peak volcanic mountain plateau at about 8000 metres, high enough to stop the clouds from reaching Tibet, and is a symbol of the Universal divine Mother. One week's walk from anywhere, we can still climb to Milarepa's cave and surrounding Tibetan retreat dwellings, half a day's climb up from the Manang valley floor towards the edge of an Annapurna glacier. Panchassee is therefore more like a personal Mountain-mother symbol in comparison.

There are also female energies... the Deva is both Male and Female... either activating souls... [or] methodising energies. Aditi, infinite Mother of the gods, comes first; and there are besides five powers of the Truth-Consciousness....

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

When I first saw Panchassee from the roof terrace of the lakeside lodge in Pokhara, the beauty in the Nature-composition was inspiring. Standing above the end of the lake and continuing upwards into the sky, this mountain's distinctive notched peak has been explained by anthropologists studying ancient Greek and Cretan cultures.

Lodge-wife Savitri's perspective of the physical holiness associated with the

Himalayan divine Female symbol became obvious at the start of the annual nine-day celebration to the divine Mother as Nature. When I accompanied Savitri and her three children to a local temple of Kali-mother, I was expecting to photograph a statue of some sort.

This tiny one-roomed Goddess-temple is on the top of a local hillock of the Pokhara suburbs. There are hundreds of steps at 45degrees to climb from the roadside, through a thick and green jungle. One feels the relative dryness of the town become immediately humid upon entering this temple-forest, and perhaps this is why I acknowledged in the physical consciousness that something different was present.

At the top of the hill are a number of smaller temples around the central seat of Bhadra-Kali. About a metre above ground level and still completely surrounded by trees, this central temple sits inside a circle of smaller temples and a walkway. Her temple-roof is tiled (with up-pointing edges as in holy Thai temples) and topped by large steps and a door into a proportionately smaller one-roomed Mother-dwelling. But once inside the sanctorum of this Mother-as-strength-and-force temple, there was no statue to be seen. Inside I looked for a statue, for something to photograph, even out of the huge door, but there was only in front of me (raised perhaps half a metre above the floor-level) the hillock rock covered in red powder and flowers. Then it struck me, and I exclaimed out loud:

“Savitri, She’s a rock!”

The lodge-wife looked at me, not understanding what I meant. I supposed this rock was also the symbol of all Himalayan-mother mountains, including Annapurna and Everest.

Adri, the hill or rock, is a symbol of formal existence and especially of the physical nature and it is out of this hill or rock that the herds of the Sun are released and the waters flow. The streams of the madhu, the honey, the Soma, are said also to be milked out of this Hill or Rock.

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

But Panchassee is definitely the local Vedic Hill.

After visiting Panchassee for two years, the lodge-family where I stayed would still not agree to my planting rice with them. For the first year they would not even discuss it. I explained how rice is a symbol of Annapurna’s spiritual riches, and in the goddess-statues She is shown pouring rice from a clay pot: no one was moved at all by this explanation. But perhaps due to the quantity of wood I carried the following spring, when the rains came in June they agreed.

How about planting rice in the rain? The village has a unique woven-reed rain protection tent that is strapped to the forehead like a stand-up umbrella to keep the hands free. But still, planting for 10 hours is a long day even in the sun. And then

they had to teach me how to plant rice: in fact it is not so simple if one needs to finish planting a mountainside in a month. But this activity kept the divine Mother-Annappurna in view as a background all day long.

Seemingly at eye level to the Annapurna massif directly in front, Panchassee is related to the original Rock-mother tradition found in local temples and all over central Nepal. When we got to the terraced fields to be planted, I could not help but imagine the natural beauty as being draped upon a holy mountain-rock: when we dropped the fluorescent-green baby rice bundles around the field edges, the flooded terraces appeared in my imagination as multiple “laps of the Mother”.

Panchassee’s sister is in the Fewa Lake island temple, whose rock juts above the water-level by the southern lake-edge to form an island. In this temple just as in the Bhadra-Kali temple in the town suburbs, it is a rock that is also Her symbol. And both of these Rock-mothers are related to the magnificent Annapurna-mother mountain and to Her rock image in a Benares temple. Worshipped as various psychological aspects in the Hindu divine Mother tradition, these local Rock and Mountain-mothers are all related.

And when we stand on top of Panchassee mountain to see the Annapurna massif, it is as a single body of a Volcanic-mother that it appears. Western science with its determination to give everything a mental stamp, has separately named and categorised in height the various peaks of this massif-family. In the Vedic Age, the people who lived here surely saw this Mountain-mother as One.

To plant rice and look at the view at the same time proved to be impossible. I was given a 9-year-old girl named Shanti as my teacher, and watched how quickly she could roll the tiny rice-stalks from her left hand-storage-area and then in between the fingers of the right hand, thrust them separately into the muddy-liquid terrace-soil. A western educated individual like myself really is not of much help in this village-world, because my culture has replaced hard hours in the field with machines, and lost touch with many simple physical abilities like the one I was learning from Shanti.

Each ascent is thus a new birth of the soul, and the Veda calls the worlds “births” as well as seats.

Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda

Shanti had the same middle name Kumari as do all the other village girls: thus Shanti-Kumari is her complete name. In the Vedic Age the divine Female is described not only in the Mother symbol, but also as the Wife, Daughter and Yogini. In this upper Panchassee village where I was planting rice, all of the young girls are symbols of the spiritual Virgin Princess, Kumari, who resides in a palace in Kathmandu. Still today, this young Kumari-princess (or in Vedic-hymns terminology, the Divine Daughter), blesses the King at the beginning of each year before he can undertake

his duties. The Dawn is Mother-nature's Divine Daughter in Vedic imagery.

I chose to continue learning with my 9-year-old divine Daughter rice-planting-teacher, when once offered the reins of the ploughing bulls. The village men take turns pulling bullocks in a 180 degree angle at the terrace edges, where it is a metre to fall to the next flooded field below. My refusal made everyone laugh.

More in the feelings than in the mind, Shanti had a very quiet sweetness, and I was happy to be in her company. I had also been taught to babysit the youngest son's daughter, because when something had to be done nearer to home, around the house-fields, I also needed to be taught everything, so it was easier if I just stayed at home and looked after the baby. Looking after the baby was a real holiday compared to the 12-hour rice-planting days. But I felt blessed to be involved, as with no books to explain these Vedic symbols, it is necessary to live in the village to observe what happens.

On the second day of rice planting, at about 5:00 p.m. I was quite tired with still another two hours of daylight. Finishing up the only three rows around the outer edges that Shanti and I were allowed to plant on every terrace, I sloshed my way through the flooded field towards the nearest property wall, expecting to sit on it for a rest. But I never even got close: all the planting and ploughing stopped and everyone shouted for me to get away from that wall. I was so surprised that I looked more closely over the wall as I turned away, but only saw a smaller walled off portion of the very high compound wall, in which a tree stood.

The last hour before dark was reserved for the one-hour climb back up to the Panchassee lodge, on a rock-stepped angle of 60 degrees, then a shower and dinner and to sleep. When I finished eating I asked the divine Daughter nearest me what was all the fuss about when I approached the section of property wall just beside the last terrace we planted. She looked up from her plate and leaning closer exclaimed in sober tones,

“Inside is the Mother.”

On the Panchassee mountain top there is a major festival on the darkest day of the year, I was next told, where local people climb through the jungle to Her holy lake atop the summit, wearing bright red.

GARY

(To be continued)

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

1. Paripadal

THE prophet of future humanity, Sri Aurobindo, was also a researcher into the roots of antiquity. He felt that evolution had made sufficient progress even in ancient times. The foundations had been laid strongly by our forefathers leaving behind great civilisations that would be pathfinders for the future. For him Indian civilisation remained unique in this respect because it had been evolving continuously. The past has not been lost totally. What we have of it assures us that the ancient inhabitants of India had immense faith in the future humanity for they proclaimed, *pādo'sya viśvābhūtāni, tripādasyāmṛtaṁ divi*.

Bhakti poetry of India is one such area in this evolved culture where the stream has been flowing like a perennial river for millennia. When were the Vedas set down? Who knows? 5000 years ago? 10,000 years ago? What do they contain? How do they relate to Indian history? Stung by the immense havoc wrought upon India's spiritual unity by the Indologists, Sri Aurobindo turned to the Vedas first and poured withering scorn upon the babblers who were ready to set down conclusions, affecting the nod of an impenetrable academic. Ah, what conclusions!

The hymns of the Veda are the sacrificial compositions of a primitive and still barbarous race written around a system of ceremonial and propitiatory rites, addressed to personified Powers of Nature and replete with a confused mass of half-formed myth and crude astronomical allegories yet in the making. Only in the later hymns do we perceive the first appearance of deeper psychological and moral ideas—borrowed, some think, from the hostile Dravidians, the “robbers” and “Veda-haters” freely cursed in the hymns themselves,—and, however acquired, the first seed of the later Vedantic speculations.¹

I have been reading this interesting and arresting opening for more than half a century. As a Tamilian, I have often felt that if only Sri Aurobindo had had the time to plunge into the vasts of Tamil literature, the theory of Aryan invasion and Aryanisation of Dravidian/Dasyu India would have been quashed for ever. This agonising North-South split, this antagonism for Sanskrit in Tamil Nadu and the ignoring of the Dravidian component in the North would never have taken place. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo had already known the truth of the matter and had begun researches into “the origins of Aryan speech”. He had started translating Tamil hymns into English for he had come across a vast body of devotional poetry in Tamil which had been the harbinger of the Bhakti Movement in India since the 3rd century A. D. Already in his references to the Dravidian element in the Vedas propounded by the Western scholars (and the Indians who lapped it up) we know that he had grasped what was there in

the Dravidian (Tamil) heritage.

A study of the Tamil heritage shows that the spread of the culture was uniform throughout India. The people of the Dravidian South also performed Vedic sacrifices. Most of the ancient Tamil texts like *Tolkappiyam*, *Paripadal* and *Padittrupattu* mention such sacrifices. The very term, ‘Veda’ is used too. The Vedic riks are spoken of as *mudumozhi* (ancient sayings). The life of Brahmins who recited the Vedas (*marai*) get detailed references in the poems:

Son of a Brahmin! Son of a Brahmin!
 You carry a branch of the Palasa tree
 And a water pot. You beg in houses
 A limited amount of food and spend your time
 Studying the Vedas. Does the scripture
 Have a medicine for love?²

A careful study of ancient Sangam poetry shows that the Brahmin caste performed the fire ritual daily and conducted fire sacrifices. A poem in *Ainkurunooru* has the heroine pray for the destruction of the land’s foes and the non-stop recitation of Vedas in her land. The *Purananooru* describes the Vedic rites followed in consigning the body of a dead hero to the flames in a poem. There were even kings who had performed several great sacrifices by building sacrificial halls like Pandyan Palyagasalai Mudhukudumi Peruvazhuthi.

It is then obvious that granting a brief no man’s land for regional variations, Indian culture has been the springboard for Sri Aurobindo boldly advocating human unity. He realised that despite the enormous differences among the different races of the world, a unity based on a “spiritual religion of humanity” was possible. As he said in 1918:

A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a free inner variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.³

Each segment of Indian culture has shown that this is possible. The mantra of Sanatana Dharma has been co-existence. Persecuted Persians, Jews, Christians and Muslims have found ready asylum in India. Indian culture today is thus literally a living union reflecting all the cultures found in world’s spaces. Be it religion, art, sculpture, literature—India has allowed noble thoughts to come in and absorbed them all along with her own life-sustaining Vedic beginnings. From times unrecorded in tablets to the Mother’s conception of Auroville, we have this unique civilisation.

And we draw strength for our future endeavours from the Mother's Charter for Auroville given on 28.2.1968:

Auroville belongs to nobody in particular.
Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole.
But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the
Divine Consciousness.

A study of a single strand like "devotional poetry in Tamil" will reveal how India has pressed forward towards the Mother's ideal asking from the adherents of Bhakti Yoga only a willing servitorship to the Divine. It will also show how India has all the needed fundamentals to become the Guru of the world.

Tamil literature is, of course, as old as Sanskrit literature. Did the two languages have a common heritage? At least we know that the two have been friendly compatriots for several millennia. A verse in *Purananooru* speaks of an ancient Tamil Chera King as having fed both the Pandava and Kaurava armies in the Kurukshetra battle. There is a reference to three Ages represented by three academies (sangams) and that what we now call the Sangam Age is but the most recent. Even if we shy away from such eulogies, it is obvious that we have on hand a literature that goes back by 2500 years in recorded history. It may be noted that the works ascribed to the centuries before Christ have also a rare maturity. Poetic themes, grammar and historical recordings make it an astonishing area that still remains to be revealed in its totality to the non-Tamil world.

The literature of the ancient Tamils that has come down to us so far is in the form of poetry. The ancient Tamil or Sangam Age which we speak of now can be woven around the Dramila Sangha established by the monk Vajranandi in 470 A. D. The earliest script of the Tamil language could have formed the Brahmi inscriptions. The centuries prior to the Dramila Sangha must have marked an astonishing growth. Speaking of the first millennium, Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai says:

Development in language, script and literature must have been going at a rapid pace. Powerful influences must have been at work during this period as evidenced by the Brahmi inscriptions themselves. The words Kutumbika, Ila and the circumstances in which the inscriptions were written tell their own tale. Contact with Sanskrit and Prakrit languages and literature, with adjacent countries like Ceylon, and with the Buddhist and the Jaina religions must have been largely influential in shaping the Tamil mind. The continuous influx of people from the North also must have had its influence. The Tamil language must have received new tributaries in its stream. Thus the even tenor of the life of the ancient Tamilian was ruffled and invigorated, a desire was created in him to emulate the Sanskrit literature. The religious and moral side of the ancient

Tamilian was given a new turn by the influences noted above.⁴

R. Swaminatha Aiyar also avoids exaggerated pictures of a pre-Aryan Tamil culture. According to him the Sangam literature shows no Northern (Sanskrit) dominance or aggression. A friendly interaction with the Vedic culture seems to have been the order of the day. We find here a civilisation which stands by itself and amazingly enough, many of the concepts in this culture continue to sway the Tamils whether in their motherland or in the other countries where the language is spoken like Sri Lanka, Singapore and Mauritius.

Though it is obvious we have lost much of the significant Sangam literature due to the cruelties of Time, politics and communal fury, we do possess a sumptuous portion of it preserved in palm-leaf manuscripts in traditional houses and monasteries. In the 19th century, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar brought a missionary's zeal to the task of locating and publishing these old Tamil works. Two major anthologies, named *Ettutokai* and *Pattu-p-pattu* (mentioned as such in the 14th century commentary on the ancient grammatical treatise *Nannul*) contain within themselves much of these works.

1. *Ettutokai* (A List of Eight): *Nattrinai Nanooru*, *Kuruntokai*, *Ainkurunooru*, *Patitruappattu*, *Paripadal*, *Kalittokai*, *Ahananooru*, *Purananooru*.

2. *Pattu-p-Pattu* (The Ten Idylls): *Porunar-atruppadai*, *Perumpanatruppadai*, *Pattinappalai*, *Kurinjipattu*, *Malaipadukadam*, *Madurai Kanji*, *Nedunal Vaadai*, *Mullai Pattu*, *Sirupanatruppadai*, *Tiru-Murugatruppadai*.

A set of didactic works are also attributed to the literature of the Sangam Age. Some of them like the *Tirukkural* are definitely more than 1500 years old. The eighteen listed works are *Naladiyar*, *Nanmani Katikai*, *Inna Narpadhu*, *Iniyavai Narpadhu*, *Kar Narpadhu*, *Kalavazhi Narpadhu*, *Ainthinai Aimbathu*, *Ainthinai Ezhupadhu*, *Tinaimozhi Aimbathu*, *Tinai Malai Nutraimbathu*, *Nutraimbathu*, *Tirukkural*, *Tirikadukam*, *Acharakkovai*, *Pazhamozhi*, *Sirupanjamulam*, *Mudhumozikkanji* and *Eladhi*. There is also *Tolkappiyam* which is considered to be the most ancient extant text. It is attributed to Thirnadumagni (popularly known as Tolkappiyar), a disciple of Sage Agasthya and deals with phonology, syntax, poetic aesthesis and prosody. The epic age comes at the close of the Sangam Age. Of the extant works in this genre, *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekalai* are well known.

Almost all these works can be classified as dealing with love and war. The Sangam poets celebrated nature and life in a big way, and evolved their own poetics as well. But they also had a deep faith in the universal presence of the Divine. According to N. Raghunathan,

Sangam literature is predominantly secular in character. It sings of love and

war and is full of the *joie de vivre*. It observes nature with an acute and loving eye, the moving impulse being the desire to live in tune with it. It reveals a passionate attachment to the spirit of place, which is not at all incompatible with a generous humanity; it was an old poet of this age who proclaimed, “All the world is my home and all men are my kin.” But underlying this delight in the life of the senses was a profound faith in the Divine Providence and a devoutness of spirit which was nourished as much by revelation as by natural religion.⁵

Paripadal is the great devotional anthology of the Sangam Age. Here are poems exclusively devoted to the divinities Mayon (Vishnu) and Seyon (Subramania). There are also poems hailing the river Vaiyai (Vaigai). A good number of the original seventy “songs” are lost. The *Paripadal* songs were no doubt the precursor of the hymnology that flowered during the Bhakti Movement, and hence have a special place in Tamil devotional poesy.

Thirteen poets have contributed to this anthology. Most of them have also composed the music for the poems. It is obvious they were meant to be sacral music either in temples or during holy rituals at home. The Sangam Tamils seem to have been very enthusiastic about worshipping in shrines. Works like *Kalittokai*, *Nedunalvadai* and *Maduraikkanji*, refer to temples (Buddhist, Jain or Vedic) frequented by people for offering flowers in worship. The lines in *Maduraikkanji*, for example:

...attractive, graceful, middle-aged women being worshippers, having adored with flowers (and) incense (and) having made (it) splendid, they shall care for the godly *palli* of the *katavul*...⁶

Suniti Kumar Chatterjee feels that the Dravidian component in today’s temple worship is overwhelmingly large:

The word “puja” and the ritual it denotes are both peculiar to India; they are not found among the kinsmen of the Indian Aryans outside India. The nature of the “Puja” is as follows: The whole universe is filled with the spirit of the Divinity. By a magical rite, the Supreme Spirit is invoked into some special object—an image, a picture, a pot, a pebble or a piece of stone, a branch of tree, etc. When this ritual, known as *prana pratishtha*, is performed, the image or the object becomes a sort of abode of the Divinity, temporary or permanent. The image or symbol is then treated as an honored guest ... In fact, in the deeper aspect of religion, this Dravidian or non-Aryan ritual of “puja” conduces to a more intimate kinship with the Divine than can be postulated through the Aryan *homa*. The *homa* ritual is basically one of “take and give in return”. In “puja” we have an attendant spirit of abandon through devotion, which is absent in the *homa*. In

later Hinduism, these two rituals were combined, and both “puja” and *homa* have a place in Brahminical Hinduism.⁷

Playing the drum, flute, lute and other musical instruments was a part of Sangam worship. Music was used for praising the deity as well as seeking refuge from natural calamities. An anonymous poet in *Natrinai* uses such music as a striking simile when wondering about the whereabouts of the hero:

Is he sailing in the waters of the Ganges
Which abounds in swans, endowed the sweet voice
Like the melody of the small Yal
Which the panas play
Before a wrathful deity?⁸

Eight poems of *Paripadal* are exclusively devoted to worshipping the river Vaigai. The Sangam reverence for nature is remarkable. Apparently the people of those times had understood at the very dawn of their civilisation the importance of environmental health. As their prime living was from agriculture, the poems on Vaigai have a singular importance. The prayers to Vaigai are captivating descriptions of Nature and indicate how the Bhakti Movement would be a direct child of this approach to God. Vaigai in floods is a riot of blossoms:

The mountain Mastwood
And Gamboge trees on the banks,
Champaks with bees a-buzz,
The cool Clearing-nut and Bael trees,
The many-branched Kino,
The Red-oleander and Malabar-lily,
Gloriosa-superba that is fire red,
The *neelam* that has wind-swept petals;
All these flowers were gathered by water-falls
And brought to the river banks by the flood.⁹

The poet Nallandhuvanar welcomes the floods of Vaigai to flow gently to feed the fields. Along the banks are seen groups of lovers, divisions of army. Apart from these images of love and war, there are also clusters of devout people come to celebrate festivals on the banks of the Vaigai:

On the day of Tiruvadirai full moon,
Learned priests inaugurated the festival.
Brahmins with sacred threads carried

Golden vessels for worship,
 “May this vast world be safe from burning heat!”
 Said girls with bangles getting ready
 To commence the worship of the Goddess.

The girls, their clothes still wet from the Vaigai bath stand near the fire raised by Brahmins reciting Vedas and pray to the river for being united with good men as life-partners. Though their faith in the Divine is manifest, the devotional verses themselves are directed towards gaining secular ends.

Some supplicate: “May our husbands
 Ever embrace us close. Bless us so!”
 Some worship: “May our lovers not be
 Like bees that move from flower to flower”,
 Some pray: “May we not be called old people,
 May we remain young till forty years old
 And gain riches and relatives.”

While the Vedic Age seems to have had only fire-sacrifice, the Sangam Age took to image worship in a big way. The Chera coins found in Karur excavations reveal an abundance of holy images. We have also Pandyan and Chola coins of this kind. According to the eminent archaeologist, Dr. R. Nagaswamy,

...in some of the Pandyan coins that have an elephant, there are the symbols of swastika, kumbha, Srivatsa, fish, moon, conch and others known as the symbols of “ashta-mangalam”. Besides, there is also a trident in front of the standing elephant. On the stem of the trident one sees a battle axe. Midway there is a flag. We know that the trident and the battle axe are the armaments of Shiva... The *Purananooru* poems are considered to be the oldest among Sangam poems and we may remember that they praise Shiva.¹⁰

Here is a poem by Madurai Madurailanaganar in praise of the Pandyan king, Ilavantikaipalli Tunjiya Nanmaran, likening him to Shiva:

You surmount the two kings just as upon the forehead of that god
 with the blue black throat one eye glows alone very near
 the new moon that he bears in his hair, he who brought victory
 to the gods of great power when he shot a single arrow at three walls
 from his bow of a soaring mountain strung with a snake, O Maran
 You who wear
 A garland of flowers!¹¹

The ancient Tamils worshipped Vishnu as Mayon or Tirumal. His innumerable powers were related to Nature itself by the Sangam people, as in the brilliant vision of Kaduvan Ilaveyinar which assures us that God's presence is universal:

You are the heat within the fire!
 The scent in the blossom!
 The gem within the stone!
 The truth in the word!
 Love that aids Dharma!
 Strength that helps heroism!
 The mantra of the Vedas!
 Space among elements!
 The illumination in the sun!
 The coolth in the moon!
 You are everything! The core of all!
 Hence you do not reside anywhere
 Having no residence of your own!¹²

Paripadal has six poems on Vishnu. The opening itself is dedicated to him. The Lord is described as lying on a thousand-hooded serpent swaying in the milky ocean. Lakshmi (Maa) rests on His vast chest. He sports the Garuda flag. The familiar myths associated with Vishnu are enumerated in this prayer by an anonymous poet. One of the poems speaks passionately about the Narasimha manifestation where Prahlada (Bringalada) is described as "one with blossoming fame". Thus, devotional poetry was already a way of religious and spiritual aspiration for the people of the Sangam Age.

But it is obvious that it is Subramania who held the Sangam heart in thrall when it came to divinities. He is ecstatically designated as Tamizh-kadavul (Tamil God). The *Paripadal* refers to him as Sevvēl or Seyon (Red Lord). Eight songs to him in the anthology have survived. We hear of his victory over Indra and how he destroyed with his spear the Krauncha mountain and the rakshasa Surapadma who rose as an immense mango tree from the depths of the ocean. The poets of *Paripadal* also celebrate his marriage with Indra's daughter Devasana and a huntress maiden named Valli. He is the Lord to whom Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, the Ashwins, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the gods of the eight directions and other gods and demons pay homage in Tirupparankunram. Muruga is said to prefer mountainous regions known as the Kurinji area. In an evocative poem, Nallazhisiyar sings of devotees streaming towards the hill of Tirupparankunram to worship the Lord:

Adorers came to the temple of Muruga
 Carrying dew-fresh blossoms dripping honey,

Tender shoots, silky garments soft as flowers,
 Clear-toned bells, spears shaped like leaves
 As offerings; to the holy tree at the base
 They came where the earth was strewn
 With sandal-paste; others came too
 Carrying musical instruments....

The poet creates an audio-visual effect with his description of the instruments and sounds hailing the Lord in tune:

Here, the melodious lute-sounds of the Panar;
 Here, the hum of the buzzing bees;
 Here, tunes from the perforated flute;
 Here the airs spread by the beetles;
 Here, the weighty beat of the drum;
 Here, the resonance of waterfalls from heights...

It is an amazing orchestra produced by man and nature to hail God, and it is obvious the poet is undergoing a mystic experience in the very midst of the flora and fauna. He is hearing the *anaahata naada* heard by Guru Nanak a thousand years later, and he is trying to bring it to us through sensuous images and visual linkages. Such was the glorious opening of Tamil devotional poesy which has been streaming, unhindered till this day.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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WHO ART THOU

Thy Beauty!
There is nothing with which it can be compared.
Wherever my eyes glance
I only see
An infinitesimal manifestation
Of it.
This radiating peace
Is immaculate and indescribable.
 It enchants all that is,
 Hearts and infinity.

Thy Love!
It is beyond all expression.
It is the source of all creation.
Dispelling all sorrows,
Scattering all gloom,
It is bliss it brings
To all things.

Thy Grace!
It knows no bounds.
From the minutest speck
To the immensities of Space
Over all it spreads
Its absolute, all-embracing charm
 It holds everything
 In its embrace.

But who art Thou or what?
Grace! Love! Beauty!
Bliss mingled with moonlight!
Or these are but veils
Of something beyond them...
To grasp Thee
I have no skill...

But when Thou comest,
O Mother Divine,
I feel
Thy Beauty, Thy Grace and Thy Love
Surround me.

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 2005)

“THE Kingdom of the Little Life” deals with the fumbling life-force and the call of aspiration to break through the trance of matter in order to awaken the mind. Aswapathy is eager to mark the steps in the arduous evolutionary spiral and follow a course of evolution. He goes from matter to life, from life to mind, from mind to something he doesn’t know yet. There is a continuous striving, there is a progressive effort, the aspiration is followed by a partial achievement. There are random movements, circling advances; there is a progress surely, but along an exasperating zig-zag path of toil and difficulty. But the spirits of evolution press on further and further, towards newer and newer horizons.

Passing from thought to thought, from want to want;
Her greatest progress is a deepened need.
Matter dissatisfies, she turns to Mind;
She conquers earth, her field, then claims the heavens.
Insensible, breaking the work she has done
The stumbling ages over her labour pass,
But still no great transforming light came down
And no revealing rapture touched her fall.

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 134)

Now Aswapathy surveys the whole track of evolution from the beginning of the little life.

Along swift paths of fall through dangerous gates
He chanced into a grey obscurity
Teeming with instincts from the mindless gulfs
That pushed to wear a form and win a place.
Life here was intimate with Death and Night

(Ibid., p. 135)

Life here is subject to dull sensations and animal instincts. This lower aspect of life is crawling out from her “dumb darkness”¹. It is “a weird and pigmy world”², a world of automatic responses; a world of gropings, wrestlings, false starts, and a pale world marked by “meaningless suffering and a grey unease”³. Yet Aswapathy finds a meaning even in these obscure beginnings. At the very bottom life is intimate with death, indifferent alike to beauty and life, there are divers pretty kingdoms, each with its own badge of limitation. Even here the world is somehow charged with

the beauty of God. To Aswapathy the lower aspect of life did not appear as its chief characteristics. He saw in it rather the mighty beginnings of “some tremendous dawn of God”.⁴

The plane of the little life has given the law of craving to man. In spite of discontent, he has become an insatiate seeker. All the original fire is brought down here into the littleness of the material being; there is an urge towards unattained conditions.

She brought into Matter's dull tenacity
Her anguished claim to her lost sovereign right,
Her tireless search, her vexed uneasy heart,
Her wandering unsure steps, her cry for change.

(*Ibid.*, p. 134)

Aswapathy sees a purpose behind this seeming uselessness, a work being done in spite of all the apparent aimlessness. A force has been released from the dense sleep of Matter into the domain of life. There is a slow emergence, all moves under the irresistible urge for change, for the manifestation of what is concealed. The whole purpose of the movement seems to him to be

A fallen ignorance in its covert night
Laboured to achieve its dumb unseemly work,
A camouflage of the Inconscient's need
To release the glory of God in Nature's mud....
A mystic Presence none can probe nor rule,
Creator of this game of ray and shade
In this sweet and bitter paradoxical life,
Asks from the body the soul's intimacies
And by the swift vibration of a nerve
Links its mechanic throbs to light and love.

(*Ibid.*, p. 138)

M. P. Pandit explains: “At the root of all this play of light and darkness on the soil of earthly life which is characterised by the dualities of joy and pain and other contradictories, there is the Spirit that cannot be plumbed much less regulated. It is this Spirit that goads the whole Movement and works out its intention through a myriad processes. It vivifies Matter with its own breath and forces the physical body to tune itself to transmit the vibrations of the soul. It links up the material frame of the body to the consciousness of the embodied Spirit by means of the nerve which is the channel of the life-force.

“The nerve-channels—physical and subtle—form the connecting link between

the physical body and the consciousness embodied in the mind.”⁵

Next Aswapathy sees the level of vital creation where he finds the vast animal world—the primitive world.

And dragon raptures, python agonies
Crawled in the marsh and mire and licked the sun.
Huge armoured strengths shook a frail quaking ground,
Great puissant creatures with a dwarfish brain,
And pigmy tribes imposed their small life-drift.

(*Ibid.*, p. 142)

It was a very primitive organisation of nerves, which only fulfilled the primary function of life.

The Force that works by the light of Ignorance,
Her animal experiment began,
Crowding with conscious creatures her world-scheme;
But to the outward only were they alive,
Only they replied to touches and surfaces
And to the prick of need that drove their lives.

(*Ibid.*)

The human being living in that primitive stage was not troubled by thought or reflection. He lived on the verge of sensation, hunting and enjoying the elements of the earth. These human beings grouped themselves into friendly or hostile primitive societies, fighting against one another.

Aswapathy notices:

In war and clasp these life-wants joined the All-Life,
Wrestlings of a divided unity
Inflicting mutual grief and happiness
In ignorance of the Self for ever one.

(*Ibid.*, p. 145)

M. P. Pandit says: “This is how the several jets of the one Life, separated from each other, come together again—either in conflict or in association. Their pressing wants do not allow them to be by themselves. Each is obliged to have recourse to others, and in the contact experiences pleasure or pain. All the while they are not aware of the fact that they are one in their common Self and not really separate, divided entities.”⁶

Arming its creatures with delight and hope
 A half-awakened Nescience struggled there
 To know by sight and touch the outside of things.

(Ibid.)

The whole movement here is actually the struggle of Nescience (basic to Matter) in its state of semi-awakening to grow into a fuller awareness.

Aswapathy sees that

All was an impetus of half-conscious Force,
 A spirit sprawling drowned in dense life-foam,
 A vague self grasping at the shape of things.

(Ibid., p. 146)

Now Aswapathy marks

A third creation now revealed its face.
 A mould of body's early mind was made.
 A glint of light kindled the obscure World-Force;
 It dowered a driven world with the seeing Idea
 And armed the act with thought's dynamic point:
 A small thinking being watched the works of Time.
 A difficult evolution from below
 Called a masked intervention from above;...

(Ibid., pp. 146-47)

Aswapathy finds a third creation, which contained the capacity for thinking. There arose gradually a seeing power within the evolving nature, which tried to arrange everything round that inner point of light.

Aswapathy finds that

An instrument-personality was born,
 And a restricted clamped intelligence
 Consented to confine in narrow bounds
 Its seeking; it tied the thought to visible things,
 Prohibiting the adventure of the Unseen
 And the soul's tread through unknown infinities.

(Ibid., p. 148)

M. P. Pandit writes: "The inner soul puts forward a personality as its instrument to gain experience, to grow in evolution, to manifest. This instrument acts through its

nature, a complex of body-life-mind. Its mental intelligence, being narrow, is at first very restricted in its range. It depends and acts on the basis of the physical senses which take note only of objects that are visible in the material way. The pursuit of what is not physically perceptible, but what nevertheless exists, is not within its purview. It does not take cognisance of, much less participate in, the soul's experience of the Infinite Existence behind the veil."⁷

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

1. *Savitri*, CWSA, p. 135.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Readings in Savitri*, by M. P. Pandit, Vol. IV, pp. 391-92.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 485.

*In the ending of time, in the sinking of space
 What shall survive?
 Hearts once alive,
 Beauty and charm of a face?
 Nay, these shall be safe in the breast of the One,
 Man deified,
 World-spirits wide,
 Nothing ends, all but began.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 615)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Principles and Goals of Integral Education as pronounced by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and the experiment at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department. September 2005. Pages: 144. Price: Rs. 75.00.

THIS book by Shri Jugal Kishore Mukherjee answers an urgent need of the time for an exposition on Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision of Integral Education. As Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are known not only as great spiritual leaders but also as great educationists, there is a demand for a book that presents their vision of education and its principles and goals. In addition, this book presents a look at the issues and difficulties in the application of these principles and goals at the University Centre founded by the Mother and known today as the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE).

Shri Jugal Kishore Mukherjee (or Jugal-da as he is known at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) is eminently qualified to write this book. At 81 years of age, he is amongst the most respected senior sadhakas at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He was brought up as a sadhaka and teacher directly under the Mother's guidance. He has been with the Ashram school almost from its inception as a teacher and is in charge of the higher classes at SAICE known as "Knowledge".

"Integral Education" is quite different from the traditional understanding of the word "education". As Jugal-da explains:

Sri Aurobindo invites us to discard the lifeless "academic" notion that studying of subjects and the acquiring of this or that kind of information is the whole, or at least the central purpose in the undertaking called "education". No, the acquisition of various kinds of information from outside is only one and by no means the chief of the means and necessities of education. The central aim of education should be the training of the powers of the child's mind and spirit, the formation or rather the evoking of knowledge and will from within, and the developing of the capacity to use knowledge, character and culture for the highest all-round development of personality.

A crucial step in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work on Integral Education was the establishment of the University Centre at Pondicherry. In 1943, the Mother established a school in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to put into practice the principles of Integral Education. By 1953 this school was transformed into a University Centre, the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. The importance Sri Aurobindo and the Mother attached to Integral Education and to SAICE, is categorically shown by the Mother's declaration at the inaugural session of Sri Aurobindo Memorial

Convention held at Pondicherry:

Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the élite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life.

With such importance attached by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to SAICE, it is only natural for us to be curious about SAICE and its workings. And this book enables us to better understand Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's views on Integral Education and also gives us insight into the institute that endeavours to apply them.

This book addresses the needs of diverse categories of people. First, with the growing recognition of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as great educationists, many people in the outside world are interested in what is being done at SAICE. Also, there are educationists, teachers and other educational professionals who come to SAICE with a view to see what is done there that can be put into practice at their own institutions. These people invariably ask for some literature about SAICE. This book is a timely, if not long overdue, source of such information.

Then, there are the new teachers who join the SAICE faculty. Jugal-da notes the inevitable change that has occurred and will continue with the induction of new teachers due to the dwindling number of teachers brought up under the Mother's direct guidance as they retire or pass away. These Mother-trained teachers are replaced by new teachers coming from outside or students of SAICE who have just graduated. As Jugal-da notes:

Each one tries to follow his own *ad hoc* method. The result cannot but be confusion leading us slowly but surely away from all that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo wanted to be done through their International University Centre. These words are unpalatable but better to accept them if true, and take remedial measures in time. The present book is being humbly written and offered to these young novice teachers to partially fill the lacuna in their psychological training as teachers of SAICE.

Furthermore, students and present faculty of SAICE will also benefit from this book. During the last fifty-two years since SAICE was founded and thirty-two years since the Mother left her body, things have changed and issues have come up which call for attention. How, for example, to grapple with the change in life-outlook of those students of SAICE and their concerned parents who regard education as merely a stepping-stone to a career? The annual recess is another example. This recess was once primarily used to get ready for the cultural and physical education programmes of 1st and 2nd December. Nowadays, it has become an occasion for going outside for

a vacation. The returning students come back with an alien atmosphere that disturbs the atmosphere at SAICE and corrupts the other students. What to do about this? Many of these issues urgently await a solution. Throughout the book, Jugal-da is frank and blunt in pointing out these difficulties to the students, teachers and administrators of SAICE. He offers his advice or points to the guidance given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother so that the difficulties may be overcome.

Finally, one hopes that those who aspire to practise the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and have an interest in Integral Education for their own self-perfection will find this book helpful.

Let us now take an overview of the book. The book starts with a presentation of Sri Aurobindo's fundamental vision of Reality and how his views of education naturally flow from it. Then, the principles and goals of education as pronounced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are given largely through a wise and pertinent selection of passages from their own works. This is very useful for anyone interested in Integral Education because while Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were great educationists, they did not write a unified work on Integral Education and their views on education are scattered throughout their works.

This is followed by a review of the roles and responsibilities of the teachers and the method of teaching favoured by the Mother.

Next, follows a section on a key concept in the Mother's vision of education. The Mother called it the "Free Progress" system. In this system, the student is in charge of his own educational development. For example, the student has full freedom to choose the subjects of his study, the teachers whose help he will solicit, the way he would like to be taught a particular subject, to initiate the study of a new subject or to give up the study of a particular subject. When asked to define "free progress", the Mother replied:

A progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas.

But how many students are aware of their soul, much less guided by it? Here Jugal-da leads us from the principle to its practical application. As he explains:

To realise one's soul and be guided by it alone is surely the ultimate accomplishment, *siddhi*; but before that many more preparatory steps have to be taken which are within everybody's reach, if one is sincere and persistent in one's effort. One of these steps is to grow into a truly rational being who seeks after truth at any cost and whose reasoning intelligence is made really free and is no more under the subjugation of his physical and vital instincts, desires and passions...

Now once this preliminary psychological training (of knowing himself

and mastering himself) is well grounded in the psychology of the student, the teachers can well take the risk and grant him sufficient freedom to discover himself and govern and shape his own destiny following his inner urge; for he is marked for the future.

This presentation is punctuated with examples to show the students what it is to be free and to choose freely versus something one calls freedom but is actually a bondage to one's lower nature.

Other aspects of the "Free Progress" system at SAICE are also detailed here. For example, it is found that most students are not prepared to utilise the freedom and opportunity of the "Free Progress" System and therefore as a matter of practical necessity, a dual system exists at SAICE, one for the students prepared for the "Free Progress" System and a more conventional system for the remaining students.

The last sections of the book focus on SAICE. The topics presented include the aims and purpose of SAICE, its courses of study, the status of "certificates", the need of discipline for the students and the teachers and things that dilute the SAICE atmosphere. The book ends with a section titled, "SAICE: The Cradle of a New Humanity" which affirms Jugal-da's conviction that the current difficulties are just a passing aberration, that SAICE is an experiment launched by the Divine and has a glorious future.

This book will surely be of great value to students, teachers and educationists. It is both an informative handbook and a practical application manual. Especially the students and faculty of SAICE will appreciate it. Moreover, it will be enjoyable reading for individuals interested in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and Integral Education.

ANANT PATEL

PANCHA-KANYA: The Five Virgins of Indian Epics by Pradip Bhattacharya (Writers Workshop, 162/92, Lake Gardens, Calcutta - 700045. 2005. Pages: 131. Hardback: Rs. 200)

The take-off for the book's argument begins with the Publisher's note itself. Our veteran transcreator Purushottama Lal lists sixteen kinds of virgins found in India's ancient texts. Kanya is a girl of eight; Kanya is also the sign of Virgo. Why is the term "kanya" used in the "five virgins tradition", and not "stree" since all the five women cited in the tradition have borne children? Prof. Lal stops here. Our Professor knows when to be voluble and when to remain silent. This is "a quest in search of meaning" by his brilliant student. Let the student speak!

Pradip Bhattacharya is one of those intrepid scholars who also happen to be bureaucrats. I have known some of them like Iravatham Mahadevan who have nurtured

consciously the talent lodged within them, and saved it from being smothered by files. The results have been flattering to our culture. If Mahadevan has made brilliant strides in deciphering the Brahmi script, Pradip has been exploring the *Mahabharata* tradition with enviable tenacity. Naturally such investigations spill over to the entire cultural history of India. The findings are never final as almost all of them are wet with womanhood's ancient tears. Even today, sorrowing lies the space for women in this land of Dharma, Dharma-sankata and Adharma. All the same, in the hour when the gods awake led by Usha, the pious Indian intones the verse glorifying Indian womanhood:

*Ahalyā Draupadī Kuntī Tārā Mandodarī tathā
Pañca kanyā smarennityam mahāpātaka nāśanam*

At the outset it must be conceded that *Pancha Kanya: The Five Virgins of Indian Epics* is a mine of information. It must needs be so, for each woman in our epics (it could be even the self-effacing foster mother of Karna) has all the yesterdays encapsulated in her personality, while her unwound tresses still remain unavenged. Yes, Bhima destroyed Duhshasana, spattered Panchali's tresses with his blood and gathered it in a plait. That was in Dwapara. But Draupadi remains alive, still unavenged, as Mahashweta Devi's Dopdi and millions like her. So Pradip has taken up a cosmic canvas for his portraiture. His erudition lies in the ability to pick up a few intelligible details, send questions flying at himself, and seek answers from the reader. In effect, we become enthusiastic companions in this search in heroic India.

The germane question: Are these heroines relevant in this technological age? Again, where the man-woman relationship has lost its romantic connotation and mystery, where the female body has lost its pulsating mystery, who cares for the adulterous lady, for the princess who openly resided with several men, the helpless rakshasi, the monkey-queen who allowed herself to be buffeted to and fro by the monkey-brothers? The answer is recorded swiftly by Pradip. The Indian, whether in his motherland or in Norwalk or in Saigon is proud of his roots. Chandrakant Shinde's e-mail from Los Angeles quoted in the book tells all.

Chandrakant and others may discuss the heroines but will not cease to worship them. Of course, there are "courageous" voices (with half-baked knowledge of the myths) who try to make a stand as Varsha Pathak in her posting to Shaaditimes (Shaadi.com), criticising the blessing of "*sadā suhāgin ho*":

"It hardly matters if the man she is married to turns out to be a monster, à la Frankenstein.... Time to brush up our knowledge of popular Indian mythology and review the case histories of some of the more famous heroines of yesteryear. There is a very famous Sanskrit *shloka*, the chanting of which supposedly frees you from all your sins. You guessed it, this verse is dedicated to five great *satis*, immortalised by myth and legend. They are *Ahalya*, *Sita*, *Draupadi*, *Tara*, and *Mandodari*. All five are considered not just *saubhagyavatis* but are doubly exalted for having committed

the ultimate act of *sati*. Okay, by now you know from where phrases like *sati-savitri* have entered the popular Hindu lexicon.”

This confusion of categories in Sanskrit terminology which has led scribes like Varsha Pathak to speak of the Pancha Kanyas as the Five Satis has to be cleared, for apparently there is something contemporaneous about the life histories of the five virgins (as it is with the iconised *sapta matrikas*—the Seven Mothers) which evokes such strong feelings even today. The Pancha Kanya today? Swiftly Pradip takes us to the Singha Devi Sthal in Nepal set up in honour of five virgin deities, Dhrupadi, Tara, Kunti, Parwati and Manju (as in the *sapta matrika* concept, there are changes in names in Pancha Kanya concept as well) where there is a cave which could be the originating backdrop of Draupadi herself. A living inspiration even today.

To Ahalya then. In Valmiki she is an adulteress. After that one indiscretion, she has not been allowed a moment of peace by self-righteous moralists and theme-hungry artistes in all these centuries. Pradip’s approach is a feminist’s delight and could also be interpreted as an insinuation characteristic of patriarchy:

“Creation’s sole beautiful woman, she is the archetypal feminine responding to the ardent, urgent, direct sexual advances of the ruler of heaven who presents such a dazzling contrast to her ascetic, aged, forest-dwelling husband. Mortal woman welcomes the ultimate touch of heaven’s immortal, driven by that irrepressible curiosity for varied and unusual experience and a willingness to take risks for it which marks the feminine. It is a fine instance of the interlinking of the Anima and the Animus that Jung recognised to be unconscious elements of the psyche which the individual needs to develop, or make conscious, to maintain a healthy, balanced outlook in personal relationships and on the world at large.”

Pradip’s explanation sounds close to Virginia Woolf’s crisp phrase, “man-womanly”. But still one wonders whether all this gives an adequate explanation of a deliberate trespass. Pradip wanders to several spaces—*Uttara Kanda*, *Mahabharata*, *Shiva Purana*,—and we realise that the creative artiste is always drawn to exceptions. Ahalya was an exception to the rule. So the reteller of the original legend often sets up a legal defence. What right did Gautama have to curse her?

However, we must needs stand by the first Ahalya we see. We find her in Valmiki as indulging in the extra-marital connection even after recognising Indra. The latter-day Ahalyas are creatures of imagination. This Ahalya is *asli*, honest, and is remembered by us at dawn as witness to Sanatana Dharma which does not condemn anyone to eternal hell. Even when one has consciously committed a sin, one can gain redemption by tapasya, by melting in the heat of meditation and regret holding on to a firm decision never to commit the sin again. Valmiki speaks of her as “*yaśasvinī, tapo dirghamupāgatā*”. Gautama also is witness to Sanatana Dharma which is based on compassion and an understanding of ground realities, so eloquently noted by Valmiki’s Sita:

*Pāpānām vā śubhānām vā vadhārhanām plavaṅgama
Kāryam karuṇamāryeṇa na kaścid nāparādhyati*

Tara is a very significant term in Tantra Yoga. The second of the *Daśa Mahavidyās*, she is *Pasyanti* (*Vak*) and signifies the *Pranava*. According to Vasishta Ganapati Muni, she moves in the skies though she is no space power. She is the best among the powers that purify creation: *pāvanebhyascha pāvanī bhavatyeshā*. Has such a power been envisaged by Valmiki? Obviously yes because of the association with “movement in the skies”. Possessed of mature intelligence, she is praised by Vali as one whose opinions never go wrong: *nahī tārāmataṁ kiñcidanyathā parivartate*. Once again, let us not stray into the latter Taras or other Taras (like Brihaspati’s wife). We invoke Valmiki’s Tara as one who is intelligent and follows her tribe’s customs. Neither she nor we find it strange that she is dishabille when she comes from Sugriva’s bed to meet Lakshmana. Nor will we ever know whether it was an intelligent ploy on her part so that she could get back to the inner apartments and announce, “mission accomplished”! The Tara who meets Lakshmana in Kamban’s Tamil version is in widow’s garments which seems to prove that the treatment of widows in northern India started in Tamil Nadu that has given a raw deal to these unfortunate women since the Sangam times.

Mandodari is very much part of contemporary consciousness. There is the popular *Manduka śabdham* of Andhra Kuchipudi repertoire where the croakings of a frog are effectively synthesised in music along with the victory-gait of Ravana. A week or two after Holi, Meerut holds the Navchandi Festival to celebrate the building of the original Chandi temple by Mandodari who was born in a “devil’s house” in the city. But as with Ahalya and Tara, Valmiki shall be our Truth-visioning seer. If so, we would have Mandodari as a wife of great courage in spite of being married to one of the most powerful and arrogant rakshasas of all times. Why bother about the latter-day retellings of a Vali connection? Valmiki’s Mandodari-vilapa points out clearly that in a land which has men flaunting several wives at a time (with high-profile politicians leading the band), it is woman who has chosen to remain loyal to the family idea, a proud living legacy for humankind.

In his exploratory search remote-controlled by Jungian psychology, Pradip feels that Durvasa might have committed sexual abuse of Kunti when she served him. I have read a variety of criticism against Durvasa (being a patient listener of traditional Kathas that go on till late at night), but this is the first time I find the spluttery sage associated with such an outrage. There is a good deal of taxi-ing around before we come to Kunti and then another Pradip-twist: Kunti forced Draupadi to share her bed with the five brothers to avenge her own life that was used by four different people (perhaps five, if Durvasa is included)! There is then the Vidura angle (Iravati Karve) related by Pradip with apposite diction (one could write a thesis on Pradip’s diction in this monograph): “How pregnantly succinct is Vyasa’s account of Kunti’s encounter

with Dharma!” Did Kunti and Vidura hoodwink everyone in the *Mahabharata* and all of us who have come later?

Draupadi. Pradip’s account is sublime because the subject is sublime. One may not trifle with her. In this wonderful chapter bringing together Vyasa with a good deal of latter-day recreations of Draupadi’s personality, Pradip teaches us how to distinguish between a “kanya” and a “sati” by juxtaposing Taramati’s docility when Harishchandra sells her and Draupadi’s fierce independence. The Sati finds fulfilment in and through her husband, the Kanya “seeks to fulfil herself regardless of social and family norms.” Was this why Sri Aurobindo chose Savitri as his epic heroine? Did he think that by taking this independent stance, a Kanya is able to strengthen herself and become an achiever? Did Goddess Savitri’s boon to King Aswapati in the *Mahabharata* provide him with the clue to Savitri’s character: *kanyā tejasvinī saumya kṣiprameva bhaviṣyati*? “*Kanyā tejasvinī*” no doubt inspired Sri Aurobindo to write of Savitri:

An ocean of untrembling virgin fire;
The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.

Though *Pancha-Kanya* seems to be a slim monograph (and some of its space taken over by appropriate sketches and portraits, including some by Ravi Varma), it expands to Trivikraman proportions as we ruminate on the past sorrows, trials, triumphs of these five heroines. This is the precise reason why we have been asked to recite the sloka every morning. Remember! Remember! Avoid the line of least resistance, struggle forward, make life a tapasya. As Pradip says in conclusion: “The past does indeed hold the future in its womb.”

PREMA NANDAKUMAR