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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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BLISS OF IDENTITY

All Nature is taught in radiant ways to move,
All beings are in myself embraced.
O fiery boundless Heart of joy and love,
How art thou beating in a mortal's breast!

It is Thy rapture flaming through my nerves
And all my cells and atoms thrill with Thee;
My body Thy vessel is and only serves
As a living wine-cup of Thy ecstasy.

I am a centre of Thy golden light
And I its vast and vague circumference;
Thou art my soul great, luminous and white
And Thine my mind and will and glowing sense.

Thy spirit's infinite breath I feel in me;
My life is a throb of Thy eternity.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 142)

MIND OF LIGHT

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. Even, the highest manifestations of a mind of Light would be an instrumentality of the supermind, a part of it or a projection from it, a stepping beyond humanity into the superhumanity of the supramental principle. Above all, its possession would enable the human being to rise beyond the normalities of his present thinking, feeling and being into those highest powers of the mind in its self-exceedings which intervene between our mentality and supermind and can be regarded as steps leading towards the greater and more luminous principle. This advance like others in the evolution might not be reached and would naturally not be reached at one bound, but from the very beginning it would be inevitable: the pressure of the supermind creating from above out of itself the mind of Light would compel this certainty of the eventual outcome. The first gleamings of the new Light would carry in themselves the seed of its highest flammings; even in the first beginnings, the certainty of their topmost powers would be there; for this is the constant story of each evolutionary emergence: the principle of its highest perfection lies concealed in the involution which precedes and necessitates the evolution of the secret principle.

For throughout the story of evolution there are two complementary aspects which constitute its action and are necessary to its totality; there is hidden in the involution of Nature the secret power and principle of being which lies concealed under the veil cast on it by material Nature and there is carried in that Nature itself the inevitable force of the principle compelling the process of emergence of its inherent powers and characters, the essential features which constitute its reality. As the evolutionary principle emerges, there are also two constant features of the process of the emergence: there are the gradations by which it climbs out of the involution and manifests more and more of its power, its possibilities, the force of the Godhead within it, and there is a constant manifestation of all types and forms of its being which are the visible, indicative and efficient embodiments of its essential nature. There appear in the evolutionary process organised forms and activities of Matter, the types of life and the living beings, the types of mind and the thinking beings, the luminosities and

greatnesses of the spiritual principle and the spiritual beings whose nature, character, personality, mark the stages of the ascent towards the highest heights of the evolution and the ultimate largest manifestation of what it is in itself and must become by the force of time and the all-revealing Spirit. This is the real sense and drive of what we see as evolution: the multiplication and variation of forms is only the means of its process. Each gradation contains the possibility and the certainty of the grades beyond it: the emergence of more and more developed forms and powers points to more perfected forms and greater powers beyond them, and each emergence of consciousness and the conscious beings proper to it enables the rise to a greater consciousness beyond and the greater order of beings up to the ultimate godheads of which Nature is striving and is destined to show herself capable. Matter developed its organised forms until it became capable of embodying living organisms; then life rose from the subconsciousness of the plant into conscious animal formations and through them to the thinking life of man. Mind founded in life developed intellect, developed its types of knowledge and ignorance, truth and error till it reached the spiritual perception and illumination and now can see as in a glass dimly the possibility of supermind and a truth-conscious existence. In this inevitable ascent the mind of Light is a gradation, an inevitable stage. As an evolving principle it will mark a stage in the human ascent and evolve a new type of human being; this development must carry in it an ascending gradation of its own powers and types of an ascending humanity which will embody more and more the turn towards spirituality, capacity for Light, a climb towards a divinised manhood and the divine life.

In the birth of the mind of Light and its ascension into its own recognisable self and its true status and right province there must be, in the very nature of things as they are and very nature of the evolutionary process as it is at present, two stages. In the first, we can see the mind of Light gathering itself out of the Ignorance, assembling its constituent elements, building up its shapes and types, however imperfect at first, and pushing them towards perfection till it can cross the border of the Ignorance and appear in the Light, in its own Light. In the second stage we can see it developing itself in that greater natural light, taking its higher shapes and forms till it joins the supermind and lives as its subordinate portion or its delegate. In each of these stages it will define its own grades and manifest the order of its beings who will embody it and give to it a realised life. Thus there will be built up, first, even in the Ignorance itself, the possibility of a human ascent towards a divine living; then there will be, by the illumination of this mind of Light in the greater realisation of what may be called a gnostic mentality, in a transformation of the human being, even before the supermind is reached, even in the earth-consciousness and in a humanity transformed, an illumined divine life.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 585-87)

‘THOU ART THE SAVOUR OF ALL LIFE...’

January 2, 1914

THIS marvellous silence manifests Thee despite the mad human agitation—the immutable and constant silence so living in all things that one has but to listen to hear it, in contrast with all that is futile noise, vain agitation, useless dispersion of energies. Let it flower in our being as a source of light and peace; may its power radiate over all in beneficent streams.

Thou art the savour of all life and the reason for all activity, the goal of our thoughts.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 44)

A FUTURE ... WHICH HAS BEGUN

(Continued from the issue of October 2006)

61. From the Conversation of 1 January 1958

*O Nature, material Mother,
Thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate
and there is no limit
to the splendour of this collaboration.*

New Year Message, 1 January 1958

Sweet Mother, will you explain the message for this year?

It is already written! The explanation has already been written, it is ready for the *Bulletin* of February 21.

There is nothing to explain. It is an experience, something that happened, and when it happened I noted it down, and as it turned out, it occurred just at the moment when I remembered that I had to write something for the year—which was next year at that time, that is, the year which begins today. When I remembered that I had to write something—not because of that, but simultaneously—this experience came, and when I noted it down, I realised that it was... it was the message for this year!

(Silence)

I will tell you only one thing: you should not misinterpret the meaning of this experience and imagine that from now on everything is going to take place without any difficulties and always in a manner that favours our personal desires. It is not on this plane. It does not mean that when we do not want it to rain, it will not rain! that when we want something to happen in the world, it will happen immediately; that all difficulties will be done away with and everything will be as it is in fairy-tales. It is not that. It is something much deeper: Nature, in her play of forces, has accepted the new Force which has manifested and included it in her movements. And as always, the movements of Nature are on a scale which is infinitely beyond the human scale and not visible to an ordinary human consciousness. It is an inner, psychological possibility which has come into the world rather than a spectacular change in earthly events.

I am saying this because you might be tempted to believe that fairy-tales were going to be realised on earth. It is not yet time for that.

(Silence)

One must have much patience and a very wide and very complex vision to understand how things happen.

(Silence)

The miracles which take place are not what could be called story-book miracles, in the sense that they don't happen as in stories. They are visible only to a very deep vision of things—very deep, very comprehensive, very vast.

(Silence)

One must already be capable of following the methods and ways of the Grace in order to recognise its action. One must already be capable of not being blinded by appearances in order to see the deeper truth of things.

We could usefully, this evening, just take this resolution: to try throughout the year to do our best, so that the time may not pass in vain.

Appendix

Explanation of the New Year Message of 1 January 1958

In the course of one of our classes [30 October 1957] I spoke of the limitless abundance of Nature, the inexhaustible creatrix who takes the multitude of forms and mixes them together, separates them again and remoulds them, unmakes and destroys them, to move on to ever new combinations. It is a huge cauldron, I said: she stirs things inside and brings out something; it's no good, she throws it in again and takes something else.... One or two forms or a hundred have no importance for her, there are thousands and thousands of forms, and then as for years, a hundred years, a thousand, millions of years, it is of no importance, you have eternity before you! It is quite obvious that Nature enjoys all this and that she is not in a hurry. If she is told to rush rapidly through and finish this or that part of her work quickly, the reply is always the same: "But why should I do so, why? Doesn't it amuse you?"

The evening I told you about these things, I identified myself totally with Nature, I joined in her game. And this movement of identification provoked a response, a sort of new intimacy between Nature and myself, a long movement of a growing closeness which culminated in an experience which came on the eighth of November.

Suddenly Nature understood. She understood that this new Consciousness which has just been born does not seek to reject her but wants to embrace her entirely, she understood that this new spirituality does not turn away from life, does not recoil in fear before the formidable amplitude of her movement, but wants on the contrary to integrate all its facets. She understood that the supramental consciousness is here not to diminish but to complete her.

Then from the supreme Reality came this order, “Awake, O Nature, to the joy of collaboration.” And the whole of Nature suddenly rushed forward in a great surge of joy, saying, “I accept, I shall collaborate.” And at the same time, there came a calm, an absolute tranquillity so that the bodily vessel could receive and contain, without breaking, without losing anything, the mighty flood of this Joy of Nature which rushed forward as in a movement of gratitude. She accepted, she saw with all eternity before her that this supramental consciousness was going to fulfil her more perfectly, give a still greater strength to her movement, a greater amplitude, more possibilities to her play.

And suddenly I heard, as if they came from all the corners of the earth, those great notes one sometimes hears in the subtle physical, a little like those of Beethoven’s Concerto in D-major, which come in moments of great progress, as though fifty orchestras had burst forth all in unison, without a single false note, to express the joy of this new communion between Nature and Spirit, the meeting of old friends who come together again after having been separated for so long.

Then these words came, “O Nature, Material Mother, thou hast said that thou wilt collaborate and there is no limit to the splendour of this collaboration.”

And the radiant felicity of this splendour was sensed in perfect peace.

That is how the message for the new year was born.

(CWM 9: 245-48)

62. From the Conversation of 15 January 1958

[Mother reads a paragraph from The Life Divine continuing arguments from the point of view that each type of being, including man, is fixed in its type and does not progress, and that if a new creation is intended, it cannot develop out of man. (Vide SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 832.)]

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.

There are people who need the support and trust and certitude of others to feel comfortable and to be at ease—they are always unhappy because, of course, they will always come across people who do not believe, and so they will be upset and it will

trouble them. One must find one's certitude within oneself, keep it in spite of everything and go one's way whatever the cost, to the very end. The Victory is for the most enduring.

To maintain one's endurance in spite of all oppositions, the support must be unshakable, and *one* support *alone* is unshakable, that of the Reality, the Supreme Truth.

It is useless to look for any other. This is the only one that never fails.

(CWM 9: 255)

63. From the Conversation of 19 February 1958

[*Mother reads her comments upon an experience she had on February 3:*]

Between the beings of the supramental world and men, almost the same separation exists as between men and animals. Some time ago I had the experience of identification with animal life, and it is a fact that animals do not understand us; their consciousness is so constructed that we elude them almost entirely. And yet I have known pet animals—cats and dogs, but especially cats—that used to make an almost yogic effort of consciousness to reach us. But usually, when they see us as we live and act, they do not understand, they do not *see* us as we are and they suffer because of us. We are a constant enigma to them. Only a very tiny part of their consciousness has a link with us. And it is the same thing for us when we try to look at the supramental world. Only when the link of consciousness is established shall we see it—and even then only the part of our being which has undergone transformation in this way will be able to see it as it is—otherwise the two worlds would remain apart like the animal and human worlds.

The experience I had on the third of February is a proof of this. Before that I had had an individual subjective contact with the supramental world, whereas on the third of February I moved in it concretely, as concretely as I once used to walk in Paris, in a world *that exists in itself*, outside all subjectivity.

It is like a bridge being thrown between the two worlds. Here is the experience as I dictated it immediately afterwards:

(*Silence*)

The supramental world exists permanently and I am there permanently in a supramental body. I had the proof of this even today when my earth-consciousness went there and remained there consciously between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. Now, I know that what is lacking for the two worlds to unite in a constant

and conscious relation, is an intermediate zone between the physical world as it is and the supramental world as it is. This zone remains to be built, both in the individual consciousness and the objective world, and it is being built. When I used to speak of the new world which is being created, it was of this intermediary zone that I was speaking. And similarly, when I am on this side, that is, in the field of the physical consciousness, and I see the supramental power, the supramental light and substance constantly penetrating matter, it is the construction of this zone which I see and in which I participate.

I was on a huge boat which was a symbolic representation of the place where this work is going on. This boat, as large as a city, is fully organised, and it had certainly already been functioning for some time, for its organisation was complete. It is the place where people who are destined for the supramental life are trained. These people—or at least a part of their being—had already undergone a supramental transformation, for the boat itself and everything on board was neither material nor subtle-physical nor vital nor mental—it was a supramental substance. This substance was of the most material supramental, the supramental substance which is closest to the physical world, the first to manifest. The light was a mixture of gold and red, forming a uniform substance of a luminous orange. Everything was like that—the light was like that, the people were like that—everything had that colour, although with various shades which made it possible to distinguish things from each other. The general impression was of a world without shadows; there were shades but no shadows. The atmosphere was full of joy, calm, order; everything went on regularly and in silence. And at the same time one could see all the details of an education, a training in all fields, by which the people on board were being prepared.

This immense ship had just reached the shore of the supramental world and a first group of people who were destined to become the future inhabitants of this supramental world were to disembark. Everything had been arranged for this first landing. At the wharf several very tall beings were posted. They were not human beings, they had never been men before. Nor were they the permanent inhabitants of the supramental world. They had been delegated from above and posted there to control and supervise the landing. I was in charge of the whole thing from the beginning and all the time. I had prepared all the groups myself. I stood on the boat at the head of the gangway, calling the groups one by one and sending them down to the shore. The tall beings who were posted there were inspecting, so to say, those who were landing, authorising those who were ready and sending back those who were not and who had to continue their training on board the ship. While I was there looking at everybody, the part of my consciousness which came from here became extremely interested; it wanted to see and recognise all the people, see how they had changed and check which ones were taken immediately and which ones had to remain to continue their training. After a while, as I stood there observing, I began to feel that I was being pulled back so that my body might wake up—a consciousness or a person here—and

in my consciousness I protested, "No, no, not yet, not yet! I want to see the people!" I was seeing and noting everything with intense interest.... Things continued in this way until suddenly the clock here began to strike three, and this brought me back violently. There was a sensation of suddenly falling into my body. I came back with a shock because I had been called back very suddenly, but with all my memory. I remained quiet, without moving, until I could recollect the whole experience and keep it.

On the boat the nature of objects was not the one we know on earth; for instance, clothes were not made of cloth and what looked like cloth was not manufactured: it formed a part of the body, it was made of the same substance which took different forms. It had a kind of plasticity. When a change had to be made, it took place, not by any artificial and external means but by an inner operation, an operation of consciousness which gave form or appearance to the substance. Life created its own forms. There was *one single* substance in everything; it changed the quality of its vibration according to need and use.

Those who were sent back for fresh training were not of a uniform colour, it was as if their body had greyish, opaque patches of a substance resembling earthly substance; they were dull, as if they had not been entirely permeated with light, not transformed. They were not like that everywhere, only in places.

The tall beings on the shore were not of the same colour, at least they did not have that orange tint; they were paler, more transparent. Except for one part of their body, one could only see the outline of their form. They were very tall, they seemed not to have any bones and could take any form according to their need. Only from the waist down had they a permanent density, which was not perceptible in the rest of their body. Their colour was much lighter, with very little red, it was more golden or even white. The parts of whitish light were translucent; they were not positively transparent but less dense, more subtle than the orange substance.

When I was called back and while I was saying "Not yet", each time I had a brief glimpse of myself, that is, of my form in the supramental world. I was a mixture of the tall beings and the beings aboard the ship. My upper part, particularly the head, was only a silhouette whose contents were white with an orange fringe. Going down towards the feet, the colour became more like that of the people on the boat, that is, orange; going upwards, it was more translucent and white and the red grew less. The head was only a silhouette with a sun shining within it; rays of light came from it which were the action of the will.

As for the people I saw on board the ship, I recognised them all. Some were from here, from the Ashram, some came from elsewhere, but I know them too. I saw everybody but as I knew that I would not remember them all when I returned, I decided not to give any names. Besides, it is not necessary. Three or four faces were very clearly visible, and when I saw them, I understood the feeling I had here on earth when looking into their eyes: there was such an extraordinary joy.... People were

mostly young, there were very few children and they were about fourteen or fifteen, certainly not below ten or twelve—I did not remain long enough to see all the details. There weren't any very old people, apart from a few exceptions. Most of the people who went ashore were middle-aged, except a few. Already, before this experience, some individual cases had been examined several times at a place where people capable of being supramentalised were examined; I had a few surprises and noted them; I even told some people about it. But the ones whom I put ashore today, I saw very distinctly; they were middle-aged, neither young children nor old people, apart from a few rare exceptions, and that corresponded fairly well with what I expected. I decided not to say anything, not to give any names. As I did not remain until the end, it was not possible for me to get an exact picture; the picture was not absolutely clear or complete. I do not want to say things to some and not to others.

What I can say is that the point of view, the judgment, was based *exclusively* on the substance of which the people were made, that is, whether they belonged completely to the supramental world, whether they were made of that very special substance. The standpoint taken is neither moral nor psychological. It is probable that the substance their bodies were made of was the result of an inner law or inner movement which at that time was not in question. At least it is quite clear that the values are different.

When I came back, simultaneously with the recollection of the experience I knew that the supramental world is permanent, that my presence there is permanent, and that only a missing link was necessary for the connection to be made in the consciousness and the substance, and it is this link which is now being forged. I had the impression—an impression which remained for quite a long time, almost a whole day—of an extreme relativity—no, not exactly that: the impression that the relation between this world and the other completely changed the standpoint from which things should be evaluated or appraised. This standpoint had nothing mental about it and it gave a strange inner feeling that lots of things we consider good or bad are not really so. It was very clear that everything depended on the capacity of things, on their aptitude in expressing the supramental world or being in relation with it. It was so completely different, sometimes even altogether contrary to our ordinary appraisal. I recollect one little thing which we usually consider to be bad; how strange it was to see that in truth it was something excellent! And other things we consider to be important have in fact absolutely no importance at all: whether a thing is like this or like that is not at all important. What is very obvious is that our appraisal of what is divine or undivine is not right. I even laughed to see certain things.... Our usual feeling of what is antidivine seems artificial, seems based on something that's not true, not living—besides, what we call life here did not seem living to me compared with that world—anyway, this feeling should be founded on our relation between the two worlds and on how things make the relation between them easier or more difficult. This would make a great difference in our appraisal of what brings us nearer to the Divine or what separates us from Him. In people too I saw that what helps them to become supramental

or hinders them from it, is very different from what our usual moral notions imagine. I felt how... ridiculous we are.

(End of the February 3 experience)

(Mother speaks to the children:) There is a continuation of this, a kind of consequence in my consciousness of the experience of third February, but it seemed a little premature to read it now. It will appear later in the April issue, following this. [*Bulletin*: April 1958. The text is given in an appendix to this talk.]

One thing—I must insist on this—seems to me at the moment to be the most essential difference between our world and the supramental world—and it is only after having gone there consciously, with the consciousness which normally operates here, that this difference has become apparent to me in all its enormity, so to say—everything here, except what goes on within, very deep within, seemed to me absolutely artificial. None of the values of the ordinary physical life are based on truth. And just as to clothe ourselves we have to obtain some cloth and sew clothes to put on when we want to wear them, so too to feed ourselves we need to take things from outside and put them inside our bodies in order to be nourished. In everything our life is artificial.

A true, sincere, spontaneous life like the one in the supramental world, is a springing forth of things from the action of the conscious will, a power over substance which makes it harmonise with what we decide should be. And one who has the power and the knowledge can obtain what he wants, whereas one who does not have them has no artificial means of getting what he desires.

In ordinary life, *everything* is artificial. According to the chance of birth or circumstance, you have a higher or lower position or a more or less comfortable life, not because it is the spontaneous, natural, sincere expression of your way of being and your inner need, but because chance circumstances in life have brought you in contact with these things. An absolutely worthless man may be in a very high position and a man with a marvellous ability to create and organise may find himself toiling in an absolutely limited and inferior situation, whereas he would be a completely useful person if the world were sincere.

This artificiality, this insincerity, this complete lack of truth became so shockingly apparent to me that... one wonders how, in so false a world, we can have any true evaluations.

But instead of making you sad, morose, rebellious, dissatisfied, there is rather the feeling of what I was saying at the end, of something so laughably ridiculous that for several days I was seized with uncontrollable laughter when I saw things and people!—an uncontrollable laughter, absolutely inexplicable except to myself, at the ridiculousness of things.

When I invited you to a journey into the unknown, a journey of adventure, I did

not know I was so close to the truth, and I can promise those who are ready to attempt the adventure that they will make very interesting discoveries.

Appendix

[A few days after the experience of February 3, Mother had other experiences which were a kind of continuation of the first one:]

Each person carries with himself in his atmosphere what Sri Aurobindo calls the “Censors”; they are in a way permanent delegates of the adverse forces. Their role is to criticise mercilessly every act, every thought, the slightest movement of the consciousness, and to bring you face to face with the most hidden springs of your actions, to bring to light the slightest vibration of a lower kind accompanying what seem to be your purest and highest thoughts and acts.

This is not a question of morality. These gentlemen are not moralising agents although they know very well how to make use of morality! And when they are dealing with a scrupulous conscience, they can harass it without mercy, whispering to it at every minute, “You should not have done this, you should not have done that, you should have done this thing instead, said that thing; now you have spoilt everything, committed an irreparable mistake; see how everything is irretrievably lost now through your fault.” They may even take possession of some people’s consciousness: you chase away the thought, and there! it comes back two minutes later; you chase it away again and it is still there, all the time hammering away at you.

Every time I meet these gentlemen I welcome them, for they compel you to be absolutely sincere, they track down the most subtle hypocrisy and make you at every moment face your most secret vibrations. And they are intelligent!—their intelligence infinitely surpasses ours: they know everything, they know how to turn against you the least thought, the least argument, the least action, with a truly wonderful subtlety. Nothing escapes them. But what gives a hostile tinge to these beings is the fact that they are first and foremost defeatists. They always paint the picture for you in the darkest colours; if need be they distort your own intentions. They are truly instruments of sincerity. But they always forget one thing, deliberately, something that they cast far behind as if it did not exist: the divine Grace. They forget prayer, that spontaneous prayer which suddenly springs up from the depths of the being like an intense call, and brings down the Grace and changes the course of things.

And each time you have made some progress, have passed on to a higher level, they make you face once again all the acts of your past life, and in a few months, a few days or a few minutes, they make you go through all your exams once again at a higher level. And it is not enough to brush the thought aside and say, “Oh! I know”, and throw a little cloak over it so as not to see. You must face it and conquer, keep your consciousness full of light, without the least tremor, without a word, without the

slightest vibration in the cells of the body—and then the attack melts away.

But our ideas of good and evil are so ridiculous! So ridiculous is our notion of what is close to the Divine or far from the Divine! The experience I had the other day, on the third of February, was for me revelatory, I came out of it completely changed. I suddenly understood very many things from the past, actions, parts of my life which had remained inexplicable—in truth, the shortest way from one point to another is not the straight line that men imagine it is!

And all the time the experience lasted, one hour—one hour of that time is long—I was in a state of extraordinary joyfulness, almost in an intoxicated state.... The difference between the two states of consciousness is so great that when you are in one, the other seems unreal, like a dream. When I came back what struck me first of all was the futility of life here; our little conceptions down here seem so laughable, so comical.... We say that some people are mad, but their madness is perhaps a great wisdom, from the supramental point of view, and their behaviour is perhaps nearer to the truth of things—I am not speaking of the obscure mad men whose brains have been damaged, but of many other incomprehensible mad men, the luminous mad: they have wanted to cross the border too quickly and the rest has not followed.

When one looks at the world of men from the supramental consciousness, the predominant feature is a feeling of strangeness, of artificiality—of a world that is absurd because it is artificial. This world is false because its material appearance does not at all express the deeper truth of things. There is a kind of disconnection between the appearance and what is within. In this way, a man with a divine power in the depths of his being may find himself in the position of a slave on the external plane. It is absurd! In the supramental world, on the other hand, it is the will which acts directly on the substance and the substance is obedient to this will. You want to cover yourself: the substance you live in immediately takes the form of a garment to cover you. You want to go from one place to another: your will is enough to transport you without needing any conveyance, any artificial device. Thus, the boat in my experience had no need of any mechanism to move it; it was the will which modified the substance according to its needs. When it was time to land, the wharf took shape of itself. When I wanted to send the groups ashore, those who were to land knew it automatically without my having to say a word, and they came up in turn. Everything went on in silence, there was no need to speak to make oneself understood; but the silence itself on board the ship did not give that impression of artificiality it does here. Here, when one wants silence, one must stop talking; silence is the opposite of sound. There the silence was vibrant, living, active and comprehensive, comprehensible.

The absurd thing here is all the artificial means one must use. Any idiot at all has more power if he has more means to acquire the necessary artifices; whereas in the supramental world, the more conscious one is and the more in touch with the truth of things, the more authority does the will have over substance. The authority is a true authority. If you want a garment you must have the power to make it, a real power. If

you do not have this power, well, you remain naked. No device is there to make up for the lack of power. Here, not once in a million times is authority an expression of something true. Everything is formidably stupid.

When I came down again—"came down", it's a way of speaking, for it is neither above nor below, neither inside nor outside; it is... somewhere—it took me some time to readjust myself. I even remember saying to someone, "Now we are going to fall back into our usual stupidity." But I have understood many things and come back from there with a definitive force. Now I know that our way of evaluating things down here, our petty morality, has no relation with the values of the supramental world.

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These surface things have nothing dramatic about them. They seem to me more and more like soap-bubbles, especially since the third of February.

There are people who come to me in despair, in tears, in what they call terrible psychological suffering; when I see them like this, I slightly shift the needle in my consciousness which contains you all, and when they go away they are completely comforted. It is just like a compass needle; one shifts the needle a little in the consciousness and it is all over. Of course, it comes back later, out of habit. They are nothing but soap-bubbles.

I have known suffering also, but there was always a part of myself which knew how to stand behind, apart.

The only thing in the world which still seems intolerable to me now, is all the physical deterioration, the physical suffering, the ugliness, the inability to express that capacity for beauty which is in every being. But that too will be conquered one day. There too the power will come one day to shift the needle a little. Only, we must rise higher in consciousness: the deeper one wants to go down into matter, the higher is it necessary to rise in consciousness. That will take time. Sri Aurobindo was surely right when he spoke of a few centuries.

(CWM 9: 271-83)

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO AND GREECE

IF there is any figure in contemporary history who can be regarded as most profoundly, most perfectly an embodiment of India, it is Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). To make a special point of coupling Greece with him might seem to the average informed Westerner an ingenious irrelevance. And yet, within this Indian of Indians, Greece has lived with a power not only intimate but also creative as in few moderns of the West—and, starting with Greece, the cultural genius of Europe fused with his Indianness.

Even in physical appearance, one may discern something mightily Hellenic. If we look at the photographs taken on the morning he passed away, what is the final impression? The head, the face bring a grandeur as if they belonged to some religious statue by Phidias. Indeed, do they not surprisingly strike one as an Indian model for the Olympian Zeus?

Sri Aurobindo first caught the world's eye as a leader of the nationalist movement in India, a revolutionary of whom both H. W. Nevins and J. Ramsay MacDonald, visiting Bengal in 1907, took particular note in the impressions they published at the time. Sri Aurobindo made Indian Nationalism a religion and roused the entire country to a new sense of destiny, drawing fire and light from a vision of the native land as the symbolic body of an ageless Mother who is a Goddess-form of the Universal Spirit. On the practical side he laid down almost all the major lines of the struggle for independence, which developed in the next forty years. And, most significantly, the day of his birth—August 15—has come to be also India's Independence Day.

Thrice the British Government charged him with sedition: on each occasion he was acquitted. In 1910, not long after the third acquittal, he withdrew from the political field. But here was no desire to rest on one's laurels and pass a quiet life. His withdrawal was a supremely Indian gesture and the world's eye was again turned on him. In response to an irresistible "Call" he gave himself up wholly to the inner development of consciousness which is termed Yoga and which had been proceeding secretly side by side with his political activity. He became the greatest spiritual leader of his country, "the Seer of Pondicherry", "the last of the Rishis", as Romain Rolland once described him. Restorer of the secret of the Rig Veda, consisting in a symbolic sacrifice with a psychological discipline which sought to establish the godlike in the human—expositor of the original world-view of the Upanishads which had found the Eternal within the individual and within the universe no less than beyond them—discoverer of the message of the Gita as a triple synthesis of the mystic paths of Knowledge, Work and Devotion—Sri Aurobindo crowned his spiritual leadership by being the master of a new system of inner illumination and outer transformation, "the Integral Yoga".

The comprehensive philosophy of this system he has propounded in *The Life Divine*, a prose-work of monumental proportions which Aldous Huxley considered "a book not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably

fine as a piece of philosophical and religious literature”.¹ The various reaches of mystical experience laid bare by his system he has set forth in the blank-verse epic *Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol*, the longest epic in the English language—23,804 lines—and shorter only, in present-day world-literature, than Nikos Kazantzakis’s *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*.

Yes, nobody could be Indian with such deep thoroughness. But the very act of mentioning *Savitri* pushes us towards the fact that no Indian can be adjudged so totally Greek as Sri Aurobindo. For, if *Savitri* neighbours Kazantzakis’s poem by its sheer length, there is another creation of Sri Aurobindo’s which stands beside this Greek’s new *Odyssey* by being the most Hellenic work in English poetry: *Ilion*, a sequel to the *Iliad*, again an epic but written in Homer’s own poetic form, the dactylic hexameter, and not in the iambic pentameter which is the accepted form of the epic in English.

Nor is *Ilion* a splendid freak in a life of literary activity geared to non-Greek motives. It is only the massive consummation of the Greek soul that was “epipsychidion” to Sri Aurobindo from almost the very beginning. Born in India, he was taken to England in 1879 at the age of 7 and educated there till he was 21—in the Classical tradition. Going up to King’s College, Cambridge, with a Senior Classical Scholarship from St. Paul’s School, London, where he in 1889 won the Butterworth 2nd Prize in Literature and the Bedford Prize in History, he distinguished himself quite early in Greek and Latin no less than in English which, according to G. W. Prothero, Provost of King’s College, he “wrote much better than most young Englishmen”. At Cambridge in 1892 he won the Rawley Prize for Greek Iambics. In the same year he obtained First Class (Division III), Classical Tripos (Part I), the first Indian to get that honour. And in the open competition for the Indian Civil Service in 1890 he made a record in Greek and Latin: no candidate before or since has secured such high marks.

An English co-student at King’s College has left in a public letter a lively recollection of Sri Aurobindo at this time: “His interests were in literature: among Greek poets for instance he once waxed enthusiastic over Sappho, and he had a nice feeling of English style. Yet for England itself he seemed to have small affection; it was not only the climate he found trying: as an example he became quite indignant when on one occasion I called England the modern Athens. This title, he declared, belonged to France: England much more resembled Corinth, a commercial state, and therefore unattractive to him.”²

No wonder he mastered French. Although he had some familiarity with Italian and German—enough to read Dante and Goethe in the original—and a smattering of Spanish, it was France, among continental countries, whose literature and thought he knew as intimately as those of Greece.

Sri Aurobindo’s own early poetry breathed the Greek atmosphere. He made some free translations, two of which were from Plato and Meleager and still survive among his astonishingly fresh juvenilia, collected in 1895 under the caption, *Songs to Myrtilla*. We can immediately appreciate his talent on reading first his Meleager, “A Rose of

Women”, and then F. L. Lucas’s rendering. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Now lilies blow upon the windy height,
 Now flowers the pansy kissed by tender rain,
 Narcissus builds his house of self-delight
 And Love’s own fairest flower blooms again;
 Vainly your gems, O meadows, you recall;
 One simple girl breathes sweeter than you all.³

Lucas’s version is:

Now the white violet’s blooming, and that lover of the showers,
 Narcissus, and the lilies go climbing up the hill,
 And now, delight of lovers, spring-flower among the flowers,
 Sweet Rose of Persuasion, blossoms my Zenophil.
 Ah meadows, vain your laughter, in vain your shining hair:
 Than all your fragrant garlands the lass I love’s more fair.

Verbally, Lucas may be more faithful, but, though attractive, he is hardly as neat and compact with a happy balance between naturalness and artistry. To take one point in Sri Aurobindo: to say that “lilies blow” is absolutely natural; yet when they do so on “the windy height” we see the artistic felicity of the word “blow” in place of “bloom”: it is as if they were fused with the wind and their odour were all over the height.

Latin no less than Greek was a great love of Sri Aurobindo’s and in this early little volume we find many subtle dallings with Graeco-Roman themes. The way his own imagination exercised its magic may be shown by a passage from the opening poem which gives the book its name. Glaucus and Aethon are having a colloquy on nature’s moods and earth’s children and love’s gifts. Almost at the start Glaucus declares his heart’s pleasure:

When earth is full of whispers, when
 No daily voice is heard of men,
 But higher audience brings
 The footsteps of invisible things,
 When o’er the glimmering tree-tops bowed
 The night is leaning on a luminous cloud...⁴

This is at the same time truly Greek and truly Indian: we have lucid depth, waking ecstasy, measured and modelled mystery. Another touch of Sri Aurobindo’s youthful art is the manner in which he treats the lover’s lament of Damon for Nysa who has been snatched away by the uncouth Mopsus—the subject of Virgil’s Eighth Eclogue. Where Virgil makes Damon say only that when he was a little lad of 10 who, along

with his mother, was plucking dewy apples from the lower boughs in a garden when he first saw Nysa and a fatal frenzy swept him off his feet, the Indian student in his late teens adds a new turn to the story with a faint reminiscence of Sappho's "apple that reddens on a top branch" and concludes with an exquisite conceit:

She asked for fruit long-stored in autumn's hold.
 These gave I; from the branch dislodged I threw
 Sweet-hearted apples in their age of gold
 And pears divine for taste and hue.
 And one I saw, should all the rest excel;
 But error led my plucking hand astray
 And with a sudden sweet dismay
 My heart into her apron fell.⁵

Perhaps a bit of romantic embroidery may be felt here around the classic motif, a not unnatural development in the early nineties of the last century, but the wit is Attic. And surely a snatch straight from the Greek Anthology meets us in the eight lines composed in the same period though published much later:

Many boons the new years make us
 But the old world's gifts were three,
 Dove of Cypris, wine of Bacchus,
 Pan's sweet pipe in Sicily.

Love, wine, song, the core of living
 Sweetest, oldest, musicalest.
 If at end of forward striving
 These, Life's first, proved also best?⁶

One would hardly expect this happy doubter to be plunged in the dead-serious business of revolutionary religion-fired politics some years after his return to India. But the Greek in him was never submerged by the growing Indian who dedicated his life to the mother-country. The Sunday issue of the nationalist paper which he edited in Bengal—*Bande Mataram* ("Salutation, O Mother")—and which carried animated political controversy and counsel from his pen had room also for a "literary column", and there for months ran scene after scene of his first drama built on the Elizabethan model but with a Greek text: *Perseus the Deliverer*. This kaleidoscopic play, full of varied characterisation, adopts a well-known ancient legend to make a story, widely significant though Greek, about which Sri Aurobindo later explained: "the stage is the human mind of all times: the subject is an incident in its passage from a semi-primitive temperament surviving in a fairly advanced outward civilisation to a brighter intellectualism and humanism—never quite safe against the resurgence of the dark or

violent life-forces which are always there subdued or subordinated or somnolent in the make-up of civilised man—and the first promptings of the deeper and higher psychic and spiritual being which it is his ultimate destiny to become.”⁷ Some idea of the play’s poetic quality may be had from a speech of Polydaon, ignorant priest of a blood-thirsty form of the Sea-God Poseidon, when King Phineus calls him a superstitious fool. Polydaon warns him about the Gods:

They love not doubters. If thou hadst lived as I,
Daily devoted to the temple dimness,
And seen the awful shapes that live in night,
And heard the awful sounds that move at will
When Ocean with the midnight is alone,
Thou wouldst not doubt.⁸

The style of these lines has, one might say, an Aeschylean tone as against the semi-Euripidean of the earlier passage on “whispers” and “invisible things” and “night”. The words are even distantly related to those of the Chorus in *Agamemnon*:

But dark fear now
Shows me dim
Dreadful forms
Hid in night...
Black the spirits that avenge.⁹

Towards the end of *Perseus* the religious result of the transition which Sri Aurobindo speaks of “to a brighter intellectualism and humanism” is figured:

A noble centre of a people’s worship,
To Zeus and great Athene build a temple
Between your sky-topped hills and Ocean’s vast:
Her might shall guard your lives and save your land.
In your human image of her deity
A light of reason and calm celestial force
And a wise tranquil government of life,
Order and beauty and harmonious thoughts
And, ruling the waves of impulse, high-throned will
Incorporate in marble, the carved and white
Ideal of a young uplifted race.
For these are her gifts to those who worship her.¹⁰

Here we have Classical Greece hit off to a nicety. It is as if the spirit of Athene were brought by *Perseus the Deliverer* to India as part of her deliverance from the British—

a shining element in the new consciousness of a free country, which was meant to be a rich and plastic instrument for the earthward working of the supra-intellectual Power that has always been India's characteristic pursuit.

The Greek spirit seemed to continue being a subtle *dramatis persona* even when the play of patriotism on the Indian political stage reached its climax in the Sessions Court in Calcutta where Sri Aurobindo stood among the accused on trial for life. After a year's detention in Alipur Jail as undertrial prisoner he was brought into the presence of the Additional District Judge, Mr. C. P. Beachcroft. It was an ironic situation. If Sri Aurobindo had not deliberately kept away from the riding test of the Indian Civil Service he might himself have been in some such high seat of judgment as Beachcroft occupied. And Beachcroft had not only been his own colleague in the I.C.S. examination but had also been beaten to second place in Greek and Latin by the very prisoner he was trying! No wonder he was uncomfortable throughout and was indeed glad to acquit Sri Aurobindo on purely legal grounds at the end of seven gruelling months (October 19, 1908 to April 13, 1909).

Somehow Greek associations haunted the case in more than one respect. Even apart from the situation, as between Sri Aurobindo and Beachcroft, of "Greek meets Greek", there was the sensational incident of the shooting in jail of a treacherous approver by two young nationalist prisoners who, as martyrs in the cause of India's liberty, were compared by a British paper with Harmodius and Aristogeiton of Greek fame.

In the course of Sri Aurobindo's trial there was one further touch out of the Greek world. H. N. Ferrers, a barrister, passed through Calcutta on his way to Singapore where he had his practice. He wanted to contact Sri Aurobindo. About him Sri Aurobindo said years later: "He had been my classmate at Cambridge. He saw me in Court, sitting inside a cage with the other accused and was much concerned. We were put there lest we should jump upon the Judge and murder him! Ferrers did not know how to get me out; so he had to leave without meeting me. It was he who at Cambridge had given me the clue to the genuine English hexameter. He read out a line from Clough which he thought the best in tone and this gave me the swing of the Homeric metre as it should be in English."

Here it may be apposite to discuss *Iliad* briefly. But we may first add a few more glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's irrepressible interest in matters Greek and the vivacity of his knowledge of the Greek language and its literature.

Some years after withdrawing to French India—itself a movement towards the Athenian spirit at two removes, as we may infer from the early remark on France and England—Sri Aurobindo started a philosophical magazine, *Arya*, which he filled month after month—about 64 pages of close print each time—for nearly 7 years single-handed after a brief early collaboration. In one of the issues in 1916 he reviewed—appreciatively on the whole—an article by an Indian scholar of Greek and Sanskrit, but found some points for criticism. He dealt with them at good length and in some

detail. One of them concerned the writer's statement that "in Greek no difference is made between the dentals and the linguals and they are *fused* together".

Sri Aurobindo commented:

"If it is meant that the Greek language possessed both dental and lingual sounds but expressed them by the same characters, I do not think this can be correct. The distribution of dentals and linguals in the various languages is one of the most curious phenomena in the history of linguistic phonetics and deserves a closer inquiry than has been accorded to it. The Latin and Celtic languages reject the lingual and use only the dental; English on the other hand prefers the linguals, though it uses occasionally the dental *t*, *th* and *d*, all of which it represents by *th*, as in *with*, *thin*, *though*,—a desperately clumsy device thoroughly in keeping with the chaotic wildness of English orthography. Everyone in India knows the difficulty an Englishman finds in pronouncing the Indian dentals; he turns them resolutely into linguals. On the contrary a Frenchman who has not educated himself into the right English pronunciation, will turn the English lingual into a dental; he will say *feasth* instead of *feast*, *noth* instead of *not*, and pronounce *do* as if it were the English *though*. A similar peculiarity is one of the chief features of the brogue, the Irish mispronunciation of English speech; for the natural Irish tongue cannot manage the hard lingual sound in such words as *Peter* and *shoulder*, it mollifies them into true dentals. I have noticed the same peculiarity in the pronunciation of a Spanish actress playing in English on a London stage; otherwise perfect, it produced a strange impression by its invariable transformation of the harder English into the softer Latin sound. Now Greek must certainly have belonged to the Latin-Celtic group in this phonetic peculiarity; otherwise the difference would have been too striking to escape the sensitive ear of the ancient poets and scholars. It seems to me therefore that in the comparative scheme of the two alphabets the Sanskrit linguals should be marked as absent in the Greek and, not as Mr. Ranade represents them, correspondent equally with the dentals to the Greek *tau*, *theta*, and *delta*."¹¹

Another point bore on the question of compounds. The author said that Sanskrit was richer in compounds than Greek and that, although Greek had verbs compounded with prepositions, certain Sanskrit forms (for example, *dvandva*) were utterly missing here. Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"I am at a loss to understand how so sound a scholar can have come to make a statement so contrary to all the facts. The power of the Greek language to make compounds is one of its most notable characteristics and its rich though never intemperate use is one of the great beauties of the Greek poetical style. When the Romans came into contact with Greek literature, their earlier poets tried to introduce this faculty into Latin and even Virgil describes the sea as *velivolum*, sail-flying, i.e. with sails flying over it like the wings of birds through the air, but the usage was too contrary to the Latin genius to succeed. Not only did the Greek compound prepositions with its verbs, but it compounded nouns and verbs together. Thus from *nau-archos*, ship-ruler, i.e. admiral, they made *nau-archein*, to be an admiral; nor did they hesitate

before such forms as *paido-poiein*, to beget children, *paido-tribein*, to train boys, *mnēsikakein*, to remember wrongs, *neotto-tropheisthai*, to be brought up like the young of a bird. In fact with the exception of nominal *dvandvas* the Greek illustrates all the main varieties of the Sanskrit compound. For it is capable of such compounds as *pseudo-martur*, a false witness, *pseudo-christos*, a false Christ, *chauno-politēs*, a silly citizen; as *andro-phonos*, man-killing, *paid-oletor*, a destroyer of one's children, *phusi-zoos*, life-producing, *koruth-aiolos*, helmet-glancing, *lao-kataratos*, cursed by the people, *thumo-leōn*, heart-lion, as *anabadēn* and *katabadēn* answering to the Sanskrit *avyayībhāva*; as *oxu-thumos*, sharp-passioned, *oxu-schoinos*, having sharp reeds, *polu-teknos*, having many children, *io-stephanos*, violet-crowned. The language indeed pullulates with compounds. It is true that they are usually composed of two members only, but compounds of three members are found, as *tris-kako-daimōn*, thrice-evil-fated and Aristophanes even perpetrates such forms as *glischr-antilog-exepitriptos* and *sphragid-onuch-argo-komētēs*.¹²

What is striking about a passage like this is not only its insight into the Greek language and the enthusiasm with which it is shown, but also the keen memory at work behind it, for when Sri Aurobindo wrote it he was nearly a quarter century away from the groves of academe and had no Greek books at hand to dip into.

Evidently Greek literature was an organic part of his being. And from this literature it was particularly the poets that he had made his own. So we shall deal with them first of all.

[29.5.1965]

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

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Sri Aurobindo’s marginal comments

I have never said anything about how I choose people. I was answering the argument that what has not been or is not in manifestation, cannot be. That was very clearly the point in the discussion—that the Divine cannot manifest what is not yet there—even He is impotent to do that. He can only manifest what is either already manifest or else latent in the field (person) he is working in. I say no—he can bring in new things. He can bring it in from the universal or he can bring it down from the transcendent. For in the Divine cosmic and transcendent all things are. Whether He will do so or not in a particular case is quite another matter. My argument was directed towards dissipating this “can’t, can’t” with which people try to stop all possibility of progress.

These are not new points, they are as old as the hills.

Never! But beat—a lot.

Nirodbaran’s letter

[You say, if I understand you right, that since the inner being is open to the universal, anything can manifest through it even if it is not there latent;] and you further add that it is impossible to say what will or will not manifest once universal acts on it! But is it impossible for Yogis? You can’t say a man has capacity for yoga or anything else? You simple gamble with chance when you accept any one just to leave him on the universal. How freezing! Then why accept some reject others? O F in H, what more shall we hear from X on earth! What more surprise in store!

I write this to vindicate my position—otherwise people who read it will comment—what nonsensical fools are these fellows! What is not evident can be manifested can be proved by looking at oneself. But I am not, I hope, such a fool as all that.

You have raised another point of universal—let it go to the—for the present at least.

‘You can cut me or beat, Sir, but don’t forsake me.’ (allusion—a librarian of our former college was smoking when [the English professor caught him.]

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WORK IN THE ASHRAM

(Some Departments)

A peep into the Past which shows us the way to the Future (2)

(Continued from the issue of October 2006)

IN December 1943 the School came into being with about thirty young children who were already here. Soon others, men, women and children kept coming here and the number of inmates increased enormously. Sri Aurobindo's yoga encompasses all activities of life and uses them as a means for the growth of the consciousness in the individual and the collectivity: the Mother accepted this new development and took charge of everyone.

As far as I could see, these newcomers were divided into two broad categories: children up to 11 or 12 years old and, those who were 14 or more than 14 years old. A few examples chosen quite at random from many others that occurred around the same time will illustrate this.

Children of this young group joined the School immediately. What is interesting to note is that these young ones were soon given some work to be done along with their study and play. My sister who was about 10 years old when the School started, was among the first batch of students here. After her lunch in the Dining Room, she was given the work of arranging in a certain order the tiffin carriers which would be used for the evening meals by the Dining Room staff. As she was young, after her work was over, she would sometimes play in the Dining Room premises. But as it was a place of work and service, this was not encouraged. Till the physical education activities started in 1945, she worked in the wiping section of the Dining Room after her own evening meal was over. Right from that age, she says, she knew how to enjoy work and respect it; that there was a time to play and a time to work and study.

Aster remembers: "Perhaps She had already shown us a pathway of growth when one was ten years old, to be with 'flowers', working in the Flower Room which was in the Ashram courtyard. The work was to pick up the yellow flowers that showered down from the 'Service' tree—buds included!—sometimes on 'all-fours' on the cement squares! To count them—meticulously, flowers and buds separately—write the numbers on tiny slips of paper. Arrange them, one by one, in rows without a break—in big trays, round and oval, and get them ready to be taken up to the rooms of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by Jyotin-da, who had the charge of the flower service. The other flowers one remembered,—their feel and their form and their fragrance—were 'Sri Aurobindo's Compassion', in all its hues and the tiniest of buds, sacred as they were when it came to counting and noting the numbers on the slips of paper! And the white flower, head held high, of 'Transformation', which came with the season.

The fullness of the season such as the rains bring—the soil moist and the air crisp with the freshness of the heights.”

When Pushpa, Kumud and Lilou came they were about 12 years old. Every evening after their games in the Play Ground, they were given the work of washing, wiping and arranging the vessels used by the newly-organised boarding for the children. Sometimes, they remember, there would be urgent work to be done in the Press. Their dinner over, they would go to the Press and work there. Remembering those times, Pushpa says with a smile, “Oh, those were the days of so much joy. We would come back from the Press late at night. Sometimes even at midnight. We would then sit to complete our homework for the next day, go to bed and be ready again by 6 in the morning for the Balcony Darshan!”

By the time this batch grew up to be sixteen or so, the Mother allotted to many of them the responsibility of teaching some younger children. Many of them were given the charge of looking after some Play Ground activities. A few young boys who studied in the School used to work part-time in Pavitra-da’s workshop.

Here is an example of how our young boys were trained for heavy physical work by the Mother. In those days a railway line extended up to the present Gandhi statue on the Beach road and there used to be a Railway godown just beyond the present Park Guest House. Once, timber for the Ashram was brought in a railway carriage up to this above-mentioned point and the railway workers unloaded the timber in this godown, which had to be vacated within a few days. Our boys, aged 14-19, were given the work.

The consignment of about 200 logs had to be taken to two godowns of the Ashram. One was where the present School Laboratory is situated now. The second was in the Coco Gardens, quite a distance from the Railway godown! These boys had one low, long, iron trailer which they used as a handcart, and it was pushed by the boys. There was also one lorry for their work. After one or two days of work, a jeep with a small trailer attached to it was made available to them. Millie, Udar’s sister, used to drive the jeep.

These 200 logs had to be loaded on the vehicles and unloaded on reaching their destination. This work was done by the boys. Initially they attempted to load the timber on the lorry with the help of a crane. Unfortunately a log came crashing down due to some faulty manoeuvre—but luckily, no one was hurt. On getting this report, the Mother was displeased. She did not approve of the use of this mechanical appliance. So, all the work from then on was done manually. It was carried out at night. The first evening, they had to work all through the night, till about 9 or 10 a.m. the next morning. But, due to the objections raised by the authorities of the Railway godown, from the following day, the work was started in the evening and stopped at about midnight. This work continued till all the logs were removed from the Railway godown.

Mona Sarkar was the captain of D group [it was called C group in those days] and there were other young men with him. This whole task of loading and unloading

timber was entrusted to him and all these boys did the work as a harmonious team. Udar would come once every night to check the progress of the work. Only one girl was there, Lilou, who worked with the boys. After completing each night's job, the boys would rest for a very short while. By 6 a.m. everybody would be ready for the Balcony Darshan of the Mother. After that, they all attended their classes in the School. In this way the quality of obedience was inculcated in them. They learnt discipline and co-ordination in teamwork.

One more example of such heavy physical work done by the young students was harvesting. For a few years, during the paddy harvesting season, the school classes for this age group would be suspended. Girls and boys, along with some teachers and young Ashramites, would go for 4-5 days and do that job in our rice-fields in Cazanove, Rizière and High Land—harvesting the paddy, carrying the sheaves on the head and bringing them to the threshing floor.

The first day, the Mother Herself had come to Cazanove around 5 p.m. to distribute one "Mussambi" to everyone. All those who had worked in the fields went to Her one by one as in the Ashram blessings. Another year the Mother came to Cazanove where harvesting was being done. There was a bandstand. All the participants assembled there in the evening. The Mother sat on Her chair with Vasudha-ben sitting on the floor near Her. It was Vasudha-ben's birthday. The Mother distributed a piece of cake to each one. Most of the participants returned to the Ashram by the evening. The harvested paddy had to be threshed by hand the same evening. Only some young boys and a few girls would stay back there for the threshing work. The grains had to be immediately stored in a godown because of possible rain. All would be spoilt if left outside. This was a heavy and strenuous work which made them tough and strong. But all the children did it and enjoyed it thoroughly.

In 1943, when the Ashram School was about to start, the Mother asked for the list of names of all the boys and girls who were already staying here at that time. She selected about thirty children who would study in the School. The others who were mostly youngsters above 14 years of age would continue their work in the Ashram departments as before. For most of them, the first work given was full-time work in the Dining Room; they did this purely physical work for some time; later, they would be allotted work in some other department according to the need.

But even before the School started there were already some classes of science and mathematics with Pavitra-da which a few young inmates would attend. There were many people who also learnt French from different sadhaks. Part of their time was kept aside for study. But they had other work to do which was their main responsibility here. Some were working for the construction of Golconde, others in the workshop with Pavitra-da, still others spent their day doing beautiful embroidery for the Mother's gowns and sarees etc.

Life in the Ashram was very simple at that time. All the adults we saw were here for a special purpose. Everyone wore mostly white garments with no ornaments at

all. Children who made the place a little more noisy knew how to adjust themselves to the peaceful atmosphere. The younger generation who were not selected by the Mother for attending School were to join such a life with the other members of the Ashram.

We give here two examples from this group of people.

One is about Gayatri who came here when she was about 14 years old. She was working full time in the Dining Room. She got a chance to learn stitching in her off-hours. Now, as in our ladies tailoring department some helpers were needed she was asked to work there when she was free. So she started work at 6 a.m. in the morning up to about 8 a.m. in the Dining Room. Then she would be working in the ladies tailoring section (known as Sahana's Department) till it would be time again to join the Dining Room work at about 11.15 a.m. Soon, people were needed for the binding department of the Press. So she was asked to go directly from the Dining Room at 1.45 p.m. to the Press. After coming back home at about 5 p.m. she would attend the "group" activities in the Play Ground by 5.30 p.m. We should mention here that she was a very good all-rounder in sports—one of the best gymnasts and a first-rate Basketball player too. After her physical education activities were over in the evening, she, with workers of the Dining Room, would go to receive groundnuts from the Mother before the other group-members in the Play Ground. Their Dining Room work would be over only at about 8.15 p.m. She wanted to join some classes in the School, but, whenever she would mention this to Nolini-da, his invariable answer would be, "Why? You are doing the Mother's work. Why the School?—you are doing the Mother's work!" We must remember that such a comment implied she was already accepted as a member of the Ashram. Nolini-da used to say Mother loves much more those who chose to serve Her.

In 1943, Bela, Minoo and Jaya started working with Swarna-di who used to take care of the Mother's clothes. They stitched, washed and mended them. All of them were about 16-17 years old. Bela tells us:

The Mother was deciding as to who should join the classes in the School. We three used to sit on the steps of the Ashram staircase waiting to go up to the Mother. But, as he came down, Nolini-da said "You are so lucky the Mother did not include your names for joining the School. You are doing Her work. You are lucky She did not want to disturb you." But I wanted very much to study as well and join some classes!

All this shows the importance the Mother gave to work as service. She has said:

The difficulties in work come not from circumstances or outer petty occurrences,

they come from something in the inner attitude (especially in the vital attitude) which is wrong,—egoism, ambition, fixity of the mental conceptions regarding work, etc. etc. And it is always better to look for the cause for the disharmony in order to correct it in oneself rather than in the other or others. (19.4.1938)

We must remember that She always provided us with the opportunity to cultivate and develop the different parts of our being so that the mental and artistic side of our nature would grow at the same time. When I was about 15 or 16 years old She had told me, “Studying is necessary for the development of some portions of the mind, but one has come here to do something else—to know oneself. There are many ways through which one can express oneself.” So, we have, from the older group, many who have later become singers, artists or teachers and so on.

Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga is meant for the entire human being, the future man and the establishment of a new Consciousness in Matter. The work the Mother gave to all those who had gathered round Her, helped Her to show in each case how to tackle the gross material in the physical aspects of life. This must have been the first step towards making the recalcitrant physical consciousness and matter open to Her light and be more conscious and plastic to Her guidance. Thus the individual becomes receptive to the new consciousness.

Dyuman-bhai recounts:

The first thing the Mother did when she took charge of the Ashram (1926) was to allocate work to Nolini, Bijoy and others. She said she wanted a divine life on earth, not an individual transformation. The whole stress was on discipline and work.

And again:

... work was very important. Our only aim was to serve the Mother. We understood Yoga through works.

(How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by Shyam Kumari, Vol. IV, pp. 5-6)

This is a very important observation on the essential idea of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, which is the transformation of human nature into its divine self in life.

A few years later, from 1945 onwards, the Mother concentrated on developing the department of Physical Education in the Ashram. Her active interest in this work, Her encouragement led most of the Ashram inmates to participate in the various activities offered by this department. As in the case of work, so here, it became a regular aspect of life in this Ashram. It was the next step of Her work to gain control over the physical nature of man. She was giving a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo’s Vision.

In Her message of April 1, 1967, She had said:

I must tell you once more that for us spiritual life does not mean contempt for matter but its divinisation. We do not want to reject the body but to transform it. For this physical education is one of the means most directly effective.

It is true that we experienced, at that time, Her overpowering physical Presence which attracted and inexorably drew all of us to Her. It is Her Presence, Her Influence and the example of Her own daily life which guided us all. However, we cannot forget that Her work does not stop with the achievements of the past. Her work is for the future. She has laid the firm basis for Her work and has shown us the Path. Now, and forever afterwards, we on our part, have to strive more and more, to be in life what She wanted us to be in reality. We hope that these examples may serve as guidelines for the future also.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

To say that one enters the stream of sadhana through work only is to say too much. One can enter it through meditation or bhakti also, but work is necessary to get into full stream and not drift away to one side and go circling there. Of course all work helps provided it is done in the right spirit.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 537)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of September 2006)

Vande Mataram

ON every Darshan, after all the groups had reached their assigned spots during the evening March Past in the Playground, Pranab would shake heaven and earth with his resounding voice: *Victoire à la Douce Mère* (Victory to the Mother) followed by *Vande Mataram* (I adore the Mother)! It was on a 21st February Darshan, after the March Past honouring the Mother's auspicious birthday, that Pranab's voice very spontaneously gave out the cry of *Vande Mataram*. At that divine moment a profound mystery was unveiled in our life and in that of the world-citizens: for we, the children of the Mother, had uttered Her mantra in front of Mother Aditi Herself with all that joyous enthusiasm and every atom of the body had burst forth in happy singing of *Vande Mataram*! Quite indescribable, really, the wonder and rapture of that moment! In the presence of the Mother, we young boys and girls, why, even the elderly, cried out in a unanimous roar *Vande Mataram*! Like a war cry, as it were. *Vande Mataram*! We clearly felt at that moment that the day of victory was indeed near. The Mother was bringing down the light of the Supramental into the sunlit heart of the earth. It was to announce and usher in Her victorious advent that the Mother's children had cried out their hundred-throated mantra in one mighty voice *Vande Mataram, Vande Mataram*! Standing in the middle of the Playground, upright and dignified, the Mother accepted our salute. I just cannot describe how She looked then! This moment of history got indelibly engraved on the earth.

Vande Mataram in Sanskrit means 'I adore the Mother'. It is a mantra: these two words have an extraordinary, a divine power and their mere utterance enables man to offer his life in total fearlessness and joy.

Those who create mantras are called rishis. And it is because they are divinely inspired that they can visualise these extraordinarily potent mantras. This is why the rishi is also called *mantra-draṣṭā* or seer of mantras.

Rishi Bankim Chandra was the *mantra-draṣṭā* of *Vande Mataram*. The mantra incarnated itself in his meditation and was born out of his living experience.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

the... supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of our Mother.... It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born.

From what divine experience did Bankim receive the inspiration and élan to write this great song?

It happened on the night of *saptami*, the seventh day of Durga-puja. Bankim bent down to bow to the idol. And then all of a sudden he found himself face to face with the beautiful, golden figure of Mother Durga herself. An indelible, unforgettable divine moment! And it was from this rare instant that he got the inspiration to compose this song. And the great hymn took on a verbal body.

How did this great hymn get published for the first time in the *Bangadarshan*?

One day in the year 1875, Bankim was sitting in the *Bangadarshan* office. He was at that time its editor. Evening had almost fallen. The magazine had gone to press. Just then a worker came out from the printing-room and informed Bankim Chandra:

“Sir, we require some more matter.”

Bankim Chandra did not know what to do as he had nothing more in hand worth publishing. He started rummaging through the drawer of unfinished, incomplete manuscripts. All of a sudden his hand fell on a piece of paper. He pulled it out and looked at it. It was a song he had written. A *mantra-japa* that had come to him in a flash while in a state of meditation. It was a song watered with tears, coloured with the heart’s blood-red passion, a song to sway the entire being from within. Bankim read through the song again. There was a moment of hesitation: no, this cannot be published. For this was his heart’s secret innermost mantra of adoration. Would it be right to drag it into the ken of the common reader?

The press-worker stood there waiting. He absolutely needed something to fill the empty space in the magazine.

Then, very reluctantly Bankim took this piece of paper and handed it to him. The worker went back to the printing-room with that white sheet of paper containing a *maha-mantra*, the fire of Brahma.

And so in this way through an apparently insignificant event the seed of this *maha-mantra* was sown in the life of the Indian people. After the composition and publication of *Vande Mataram* in 1875, this mantra became known in the learned circles. However, the soul of the Indian people was not yet awakened. Even after the publication of *Anandamath* in 1882, it did not inspire much enthusiasm. In the 1886 session of the Congress held in Calcutta *Vande Mataram* was sung for the first time.

Two years after Bankimchandra’s passing in 1894, when the Congress session was held once again in Calcutta, Rabindranath himself sang *Vande Mataram*. But even then the country was not galvanised by the living mantric power of this song. (Amallesh Bhattacharya)

Balendranath Thakur wrote in 1887 in *Bharati* and *Balaka*:

On the power of *Vande Mataram*'s lyrics, the power of its heart and its dharma, this song of a Bengali set to music by a Bengali, will be sung by the whole of India as a triumphant call of Victory.

It was as if the inner soul of India was giving out its divine prophecy through Balendranath Thakur's utterance.

It was as though the Indians were through this song, for the first time, awakening a living India with their heart's fervour, devotion and adoration. The motherless country had after such a long wait found at last a mother. As if a child had called out 'Ma' for the first time.

And so the destined year 1905 arrived and transformed the life of India.

The Divine Mother had been waiting just for this moment.

It was known that even after the composition of *Vande Mataram* in 1875 and its subsequent publication, the song had still not awakened the Indian people in any considerable way. The littérateur Nabin Sen is said to have told Bankim Chandra:

Look, how a good thing written unfortunately half in Sanskrit, half in Bengali, has been reduced to a pot-pourri and has come to naught. Like those songs of Gobindo Adhikari and his travelling theatre troupe. That is why people haven't responded to it.

This great mantra of *Vande Mataram* was waiting like a sleeping fire for the right 'Mahendra' to ignite it.

In those days Bengal, or more rightly the Presidency of Bengal, was a huge state. Bihar, Orissa and Bengal were together called Bengal. It was not easy to administer such a large province. That's why in 1903 the British administration thought of a plan to divide the province of Bengal into two: Bihar, Orissa and the western half of Bengal on one side and the eastern part of Bengal and Assam on the other. The Bengalis were indignant. The real intention of dividing the Province of Bengal was to break the backbone of Bengali strength and will. In a flash, the whole of Bengal rose as one in rage. Curzon's plan for the partitioning of Bengal was opposed with vehemence and demonstrations broke out against it all over Bengal. In the towns and villages of Bengal, cries of *Vande Mataram* rent the air and shook heaven and earth. The moment of awakening had arrived in the life of the people.

Sri Aurobindo wrote:

It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself.

Simply astounding! Even from his deathbed, Bankim had told his daughter, “You will see, one day, twenty-thirty years from today, this very song of *Vande Mataram* will ignite the blood of the people of this whole country.”

With what firm, steady conviction had he breathed his last breath! And truly, in a flash, the people of Bengal as a whole were awakened by this great mantra *Vande Mataram*. This awakening was as unexpected as it was inevitable and happened in 1905.

A defiant united Bengal rose up as one. They refused to accept Lord Curzon’s partitioning of Bengal. No kitchen-fire was lit in any home. In an instant, every man was transfigured. As if a huge cyclone was passing over the entire country. Quite an unimaginable event it was.

Nolini-da writes:

Almost overnight again, how very different we became from what we had been as individuals! We used to be just humdrum creatures, most ignorant and inert; now we became conscious and alert; our lives acquired a meaning, an aim, a purpose. We used to move in the traditional ruts, dull and desperate. Instead of that our lives now got a cohesion, an orientation.

Bengal was up in flames. In parks everywhere there were posters spouting ire against the British. Every speech sought their expulsion. The cry for freedom rose: India must be rid of the British.

Rabindranath played an important role in this first agitation in 1905 against the partition of Bengal. He was a great proponent of the festival of *Rakhi-bandhan* (a festival of bonding between brothers and sisters). On *Rakhi-bandhan* day, on Rabindranath’s inspiration, everyone decided to celebrate this festival with much enthusiasm. Rabindranath set out from his house. Abanindranath and other members of the Tagore household followed him. A sea of people joined in. They were all heading for the bank of the Ganges. After bathing in the river they all began tying a *rakhi* to one another. The public roared in unison *Vande Mataram*! Along the entire stretch of the Ganges there resounded the cry of *Vande Mataram*. Rabindranath headed now for the mosque. There too he began tying *rakhis* to everyone. Nobody was left out. That day *Rakhi-bandhan* and fasting were both celebrated in the whole of Bengal with the utterance of the Mother’s mantra *Vande Mataram*. The people had at last woken up. Kumbhakarna’s long sleep was broken with the quickening cry of *Vande Mataram*. The people of Bengal rose as one in their opposition to Lord Curzon’s proposal of partitioning Bengal. There were protests everywhere. The cries of *Vande Mataram*, *Vande Mataram* reverberated in the land and in the skies of Bengal.

Nolini-da was then a second-year student of the Presidency College. Listen to Nolini-da recount it:

Loud protests had arisen on account of the Bengal Partition and there was going to be observed a Day of Fasting or Rakhi-day or something like that. In what manner did I register my protest? I went to college dressed as if there had been a death in my family, that is to say, without shoes or shirt and with only a chuddar on. As I entered the class, everybody seemed a little stunned. The professor cast an occasional furtive glance at me but said not a word. My action must have appeared as rather unconventional, perhaps even incorrect to many, but I felt at the same time there were quite a few who gave me an admiring look.

The Presidency College was then an institution for the children of the rich. The winds of swadeshi had not touched many here. Nolini-da, along with a few, was one among those who had been touched. The *matri-mantra Vande Mataram* moved Ullaskar, that same Ullaskar who by his own efforts and intelligence had managed to make bombs without taking anybody's help. That same Ullaskar who came to college one day with a slipper wrapped in a newspaper and made good use of it on Professor Russell as soon as he got a chance. Why? Because the professor had one day said something derogatory about the Bengalis, and this was Ullaskar's revenge. Nolini-da writes:

One of our classes had just been over, and we were going to the next class along the corridor, when all on a sudden there rang out all over the place from a hundred lusty throats shouts of Vande Mataram that tore the air with its mighty cry.

Professor Russell's spite for the Bengalis had been avenged. The band of fearless students went back to their classes, very quiet and still as if nothing had happened.

In those days when the Indian skies were turning red and the air was becoming hot, Sri Aurobindo lived in Baroda. He wrote a letter to his younger brother Barin from distant Baroda directing him not to lose this golden opportunity. The youth became disciplined and little groups began to be formed. No town was left out. The boys started preparing themselves silently. Many of them took a vow at the altar of Ma Kali with blood drawn from their chest: they would surely liberate their Motherland from the chains of bondage. Nolini-da was one of them.

Nolini-da recounts:

I had already taken a vow about a year ago, in front of a picture of Kali at a secret ceremony at dead of night, a vow written out in blood drawn from the chest, that I should dedicate my life to the whole-hearted service of the Motherland.

And so in this way, one after another, the boys began to gather at Muraripukur Gardens. Barin Ghosh, on Sri Aurobindo's instructions, started their training. And the *matri-mantra Vande Mataram* was on all their lips.

Then Sri Aurobindo quit Baroda for good. Now the boys of Muraripukur followed his instructions with newfound enthusiasm and became absorbed in work for their country. As if the whole country had been waiting for him. Ceaselessly *Vande Mataram* rang out everywhere now.

This is how Amalesh recounts:

The country seemed to have been waiting for the appropriate priest for this *mahamantra*, someone whose inspiring touch could infuse this mantra with conscious Power. And thus arrived into the life of the race Sri Aurobindo, this great sterling Voice of the soul of the country. He came and announced:

‘Vande Mataram is not just a song, it is the mantra of its awakening created with the life-breath of the race. This mantra belongs not just to Bengal, not just to India but it is the inspiring mantra of the liberation of the whole of Asia, the chorus of Asiatic liberty... the religion of Patriotism.’

Sri Aurobindo called *Vande Mataram* “the gospel of fearless strength and force”.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

Disciple: There are some people who object to “Vande Mataram” as a national song. And some Congress men support the removal of some parts of the song.

Sri Aurobindo: In that case the Hindus should give up their culture.

Disciple: The argument is that the song speaks of Hindu gods, like Durga and that is offensive to the Muslims.

Sri Aurobindo: But it is not a religious song. It is a national song and the Durga spoken of is India as the Mother. Why should not the Muslims accept it? It is an image used in poetry. In the Indian conception of nationality the Hindu view would naturally be there. If it cannot find a place there the Hindus may as well be asked to give up their culture. The Hindus don’t object to “Allah-ho-Akbar”.

(From a conversation of 30 December 1939, as recorded by A. B. Purani
in *Evening Talks*, p. 696)

NARAD REMEMBERS

(Continued from the issue of September 2006)

THÉMIS—THE POET

On Poetry

July 13, 2004

Tehmi: (On *Savitri*) The very first line. What a tremendous opening. It says so much. You have to read it differently. It is simple. Nothing dramatic. You imagine it. It is very powerful. It gives the sense of transition from the night to the dawn. I can hear it.

...

The word “eyeless” (in the phrase “eyeless muse”). Not blind, but there is no faculty of sight.

...

The opening page and a half is full of light.

...

“Perturbed”—not in the ordinary sense. A quiver is sent through, a vibration. He [*Sri Aurobindo*] uses some of the words so sensitively—not as we use them.

...

“Scattered on sealed depths”—i.e. sealed to light.

...

“Her luminous smile kindled to fire...” One could see the whole universe ablaze.

...

Narad: Does rhyme add to the richness of poetry?

Tehmi: (Referring to the sonnets) They are musical sonnets and built in a different fashion. They have a different strength of their own.

N: Iambic pentameter?

Tehmi: Yes, it is the most powerful force of poetry.

...

Blank verse means unrhymed iambic pentameter. It is called blank verse because it is unrhymed.

N: I wanted to ask you about the centuries between Shakespeare and the 19th century.

Tehmi: The 19th century started reviving but until then everything went down very low.

N: Would you say then that the only epic voice after Shakespeare is Sri

Aurobindo's, with *Savitri*?

Tehmi: Shakespeare was a phenomenon, far above Dante, Homer and the others. You could put them all together and they wouldn't equal Shakespeare.

N: Vyasa, Valmiki? Sri Aurobindo puts them at the top as well. Have you read them?

Tehmi: No, you have to read them in the original language.

N: And before Shakespeare?

Tehmi: A big gap. In the 14th century Chaucer was a great poet.

N: What about Persian poetry, Rumi, Hafiz and others?

Tehmi: Hafiz is both mystical poetry and love poetry. Rumi is definitely mystical. Rumi is deeper and more mystical but Hafiz is considered the better poet. Jahann (not sure of this name—Narad) was also mystical. Persian poetry has a sweetness and rhythm and melody. They were wise and could say so much with small gestures or words.

N: I have been strongly attracted to poetry.

Tehmi: Me too. My father used to read us a lot of Persian poetry. He knew quite a few things by heart and like that he used to go on repeating.

N: Did your mother like poetry?

Tehmi: Not particularly. My father used to recite when he was in a good mood.

N: What do you feel about Tagore's poetry?

Tehmi: I don't know. I don't like him. I didn't take to him. He took a lot from the Upanishads.

N: Would you put Sarojini Naidu above Tagore?

Tehmi: I don't know, I couldn't rank them but some of her poems are very beautiful.

...

You have to love poetry in order to teach poetry well.

N: Byron's poetry?

Tehmi: More sonorous—it is good but quite superficial, without much depth.

N: Coleridge and Wordsworth?

Tehmi: The last passage of *Kubla Khan* is almost transcendent. There is some real enchantment there.

(Then Tehmi quoted the last lines:)

Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

(Then Tehmi quoted the opening passage:)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
 A stately pleasure-dome decree;
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
 Through caverns measureless to man
 Down to a sunless sea.

Tehmi: “The Ancient Mariner” is also superb. They (Coleridge and Wordsworth) have only a few great things but very nice poetry.

N: What about 20th century poetry?

Tehmi: 20th century poetry goes down but Robert Frost is good. It is simple but it is good lyrical poetry.

...

(Tehmi then quoted from Hafiz, “The Lady Poverty”)

N: What do you feel about Gerard Manley Hopkins?

Tehmi: A difficult poet. I have not read him much but he is a very good poet.

N: What did you think of “The Lotus Eaters”?

Tehmi: Lollipopish—He has better things than that.

N: What about Walter de la Mare?

Tehmi: Very good poet, lyrical poetry.

N: Did you read a lot of French poetry?

Tehmi: Plenty, plenty. A lot of French literature also. I knew French well and that is why I could translate Mother’s works and *The Adventure of Consciousness* so easily. I used to like the Symbolists, Rimbaud... I liked the Symbolists but the French Romantics are not very good, really sloppy.

N: Baudelaire?

Tehmi: He was the first of the Symbolists but the later ones were better.

N: Mallarmé?

Tehmi: Mallarmé is good. He is the first among the Symbolists.

N: What about Paul Verlaine?

Tehmi: He was one of the chief French Symbolists.

Tehmi: (quoting a passage from *Savitri*)

Linger not long with thy transmuting hand
 Pressed vainly on one golden bar of Time...

This is the image of Dante’s Beatrice whose hand is on the golden bar of heaven.

N: Would you say there is any difference in the way one should read *Savitri* vs. other English poetry?

Tehmi: No. I often asked Nirod-da how Sri Aurobindo used to read and he would always say, “Just like you.” English poetry is not to be read with overtones and extra ho’s and ha’s. English poetry is not to be read like that, it has its own inner music. We

should not add ours. That would be false.

N: I notice that when you read your voice drops on the last word.

Tehmi: Yes, if there is a stop there, either a comma or a full stop, otherwise we carry on.

N: No emphasis or accent on any word?

Tehmi: No, unless the meaning demands it.

Tehmi: (*Illustrating*) Sometimes... (*Lines from Savitri*)

My light shall be in thee, my strength thy force.

Let not the impatient Titan drive thy heart...

That needs a little emphasis, doesn't it? Otherwise English poetry's own inner music is enough. It doesn't demand any external emphasis.

...

There shouldn't be any added external influence, lalts and such. Indians always feel that they have to add accents. In India I suppose there are all different fashions of reading but you can't apply that to English poetry.

N: What about flatness in the voice when a reader drones on and on?

Tehmi: There must be a midway. The undertones and all must be brought out. [*Quoting Savitri again.*] It is not a forced accent but the bringing out of its own music. [*Quoted many lines from Savitri as an example.*]

One should feel the inner music that poetry contains and bring it out. Most of our people add their own so-called music. I find English poetry has sufficient inner music if one knows how to read it.

N: How much attention do you pay to the metre?

Tehmi: I don't pay any attention to the metre. In music it is alright to beat the rhythm but in poetry you can't make it so regular.

N: And Mother's reading?

Tehmi: Hers is a different way of reading. She was all into the real meaning of the thing, absorbed in that inner meaning. She used to read in a different way. The inner meaning was the main thing with Her. It was not just words. So much that you could feel the reality of the thing She wanted to bring out. Every line used to speak of some reality—it was not just poetry like that.

(*To be continued*)

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

MYSTIC FIRE

Rising flames of Colour in being's chamber of gold
Hues singing of Spirit renewing all that's old.
Laughter in gurgling currents that ceaselessly flow
In mystic tones enwrapping the quiet inner glow.

Breath of forms so delicate, tinged in silence blue,
Quickening cells of truth, with energy ever new,
Murmuring secrets unravelled from Wisdom's coat of sky,
And inner dialogue dipped in soul's innocent dye.

Draping in reds intense, a world of whispering shadows,
Swaying figures green, reflections of blues and yellows,
Ochre, orange and magenta tracing the fire ablaze
Of unflickering aspiration like the sun's piercing rays.

O Spirits of Colour, painting dreams of delight,
Of a new world afloat in the soul's deepest height,
Promising Earth with songs of your future golden Dawn,
As the world's bosom waits for the Light to be born.

GOPIKA

PAINTING AS SADHANA

Krishnalal Bhatt (1905-1990)

(Continued from the issue of October 2006)

13

[Krishnalal's correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo]

1936

Mother [*on a thick, ruled chit paper*]: 6-1-36

Krishnalal,

I forgot to tell you that the two pictures for the Governor have to be signed before they are framed. Will you inform Nishikanta of this?

The exhibition seems to have been a great success.

With our blessings.

6-1-36: Mother,

To-morrow we shall take down the pictures and put them in the rooms decided for them. To cover them some good cloth like oil-cloth is necessary, to prevent dust and insects.

Mother: You can ask from the B.S. If they do not have, it will be bought.

K: There are four pictures with gloss excluding one from Cocotier which I think can be again put in its place. But what to do with 4 glass-pictures? Should they be put in the same room in which all the pictures are to be put?

The rooms in which the pictures are to be put seem more damp. I do not know if that will affect the pictures which will be on the wooden benches.

Mother: What is damp in the rooms? the floor or the rooms themselves because of a lack of ventilation?

K: I have asked Nishikanta to sign the picture which he is to touch [*up*] also in some places.

May I ask Chandulal to prepare two planks to be put at the back of the pictures for Governor?

Mother: Yes—glasses also are required.

K: Mother,

May I request to have some talks with Mother as blessings on behalf of the artist group. We are all eager to have an interview with Mother.

Mother: I will let you know as soon as I have some time.

Blessings.

Mother: 7-1-36.

C. Vishnu

D. E. Anil kumar

B. G. pictures

A. F. work for the Mairie

H. Nishikanta.

7/1/36: [end] I would like to have two curtains from that if Mother can spare.

Mother: Yes, you can have them.

9.1.36: Mother,

Myself and Jayantilal have begun the work of the decoration of the Town Hall. At present we will do the work from 8 to 12 in the morning and some study work from nature for that in the afternoon.

Who is to be in charge of the pictures which will be kept in the exhibition house? I think they will require fly-tox at certain intervals.

Mother: It seems to me that the same arrangement as before the exhibition can continue.

K: We occupy the central hall (A) and the room (e) (in which Nishikanta lived during the exhibition) as it is nearer to the bath room.

10.1.36:

Sri Aurobindo: What you write about the expression of beauty through painting and the limitations of the work as yet done here, is quite accurate. The painters here have capacity and disposition, but as yet the work done ranks more as studies and sketches some well done, some less well than as great or finished art. What they need is not to be easily satisfied because they have put their ideas or imaginations in colour or because they have done some good work, but always to see what has not been yet achieved and train the vision and executive power till they have reached a truly high power of themselves. Nandalal's saying is true, but the three have to be combined and developed and harmonised in their combination to a sufficient degree before they bear the fruit of finished or great art.

[*This is a type-script with corrections done by hand. Underneath is pencilled a triangle with "Inspiration" written on top, "Nature" at bottom left, and "Tradition" at bottom right.*]

18-1-36: [end] ...my painting work comes in the way; then shall I have to leave painting to be always in the Mother's touch?

Sri Aurobindo: Of course everybody is here for Yoga and not for painting. Painting or any other activity has to be made here a part of Yoga and cannot be pursued for its own sake. If it stands insuperably in the way, then it has to be given up; but there is no reason why it should if it be pursued in the proper spirit, as a field of and for spiritual growth or as a work done for the Mother.

22-1-36: Mother,

As we have begun the first panel of the decoration work we find that both of us can't work on the same picture because of different methods of executing it. If we do separately, pictures of one wall each, and then there is the possibility of a marked difference in execution of the pictures on opposite walls.

In this matter how should we work?

Sri Aurobindo: Mother thinks that if you are careful to use the same set of colours, then each could do the pictures on one wall without creating any impression of disharmony.

27-1-36: Mother,

Since some days I remain in a condition which I don't understand. In the beginning I felt very good, quiet and with constant aspiration to be under the Divine's influence. It would go away for some days, but again be resumed after some days.

But for four or five days I am not able to keep the aspiration but on the contrary I have headache. Generally I am quiet during all these days. But I don't understand the reason for my headache.

I find that I cannot do the work of decoration with the concentration as it ought to be done. I do that work but not with much of interest in it.

May I know from Mother what this is due to? Is there anything wrong with the decoration work that brings the headache or is it my inner condition that does not allow me to remain concentrated?

Sri Aurobindo: There is no reason why the decoration work should cause headache. Mother has put much force into it.

7-2-36: Mother,

In the Painter's House there are many insects, such as, silverfish, white ant, red ant and many others. Red ants are moving in all the rooms. When we are working they come over to eat the colours because they are mixed with eggs they move over the pictures continuously even when we are working over them, to eat the freshly applied colour. The ants get over our bodies and bite us also.

We do not know what to do with them.

Mother: If you can find out from what hole they come out, place every day near that hole some sugar or some crumbs of bread (not always the same thing), it will save you much of the trouble.

K: The two decoration pictures that are finished are kept on the cot which was in the room which I temporarily occupy. I don't use the room so I wanted to return the key of the room to Nolini, but as we have need of a cot and there is none in the stores I take out the cot and return the key to Nolini.

Mother: It is all right.

K: I want to study water-lily and ducks which can be found at some distance from

here. If Mother can permit me to use the cycle it will be convenient for me to go.

Mother: I enclose a chit for Benjamin.

K: If Mother has got any books in which there are good photographs of different kinds of birds I would like to study from it also.

Mother: I shall see if there is any that I can lend you.

By the way, Dayakar had a good number of fine photographs of birds. You might ask him to show them to you.

9-2-36: Mother,

I intend to do the decoration work (of my part) in my room. As we are already doing the work quite independently, except preparing the colours, there will not be any inconvenience to us.

Mother will kindly allow me to do so if there is no objection to Her.

Sri Aurobindo: There is no objection. Only you must be careful that the colours are the same.

24.2.36: [*end*] If Mother has no objection and if She can permit me I may go for three weeks.

Sri Aurobindo: But what of the Town hall work? How can you go leaving that undone?

Mother: 14.3.36

Krishnalal

It seems that the two ducks are destroying the plants and the flowers in the "painters house". I suppose you need them no more as you have finished that panel. So it would be better to get rid of them in a way or another, either giving or selling them away.

Mother: 15.3.36.

Krishnalal,

I am sending you back your sketch book. The sketches are indeed very good, quite interesting, all of them.

3. Apr. 36: Mother,

Since some days I feel much tired even though I don't work heavily at anything.

I feel the nerves tightened up sometimes so much that I cannot keep myself steadily at any work and I cannot keep quiet and call down Mother and have peace; I even cannot relax, to try to do that means more tightening of the nerves. I cannot sleep easily. Last evening I felt much tired and so tried to go to sleep early but for two hours the head remained as if blocked up and no control over myself except to while away the time moving this side and that side.

Generally while doing the painting work I am in inner delight and free from

disturbances but in doing this last panel I can't get into that condition; though the panel I am doing but I am tired after working for a short time.

There seems to be some rigidity in some part of the nature. During Pranam I find that I find myself stiff before Mother.

Now-a-days I remain constipated also. I don't understand what the difficulty is and how to remove it.

Sri Aurobindo: Have a strong will to open entirely to the Mother so that this may go. Also try to put yourself into your work—if you can take pleasure in the work, that will help to get rid of the rest.

21.4.36: Mother,

What is to be done of the materials bought in the decoration (Town Hall) account?

There are following things: Brushes, a pair of mortar and pestle, 3 mats, and earthen vessels.

Mother: Those things that can be of use for you and Jayantilal, you can divide among you. The other things can be kept for general painting use.

29-4-36: [end] ...pensable in the remaining work of fixing the decoration pictures or about that time.

If at all I go I shall return in about a month's time.

Sri Aurobindo: I suppose it depends on whether the fixing can be done in time.

30/Apr/36: [end] ...has no objection.

I am sure to return before the fixing work can begin.

Sri Aurobindo: Very well.

[*Underneath is pencilled*, "(permission to go to Ahmedabad)"]

1.5.36: [end] N.B. I may start latest on Monday.

Sri Aurobindo: Mother can see you for a few minutes only after 1 o'clock on Sunday.

3 May-36: [end] ...contained in my trunk they may like to see them (pictures without frames).

I may take them with me and bring them back also with me with care.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, you can do that.

[*The next day, Krishnalal left for Ahmedabad. He returned on 29 June after holding exhibitions at Ahmedabad and Baroda.*]

(*To be continued*)

AGRICULTURE AND SADHANA

ATTRACTED by the great Ideal of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I came to the Ashram in 1975. I was given work on a farm. This was a new field for me. But ever since I have been tilling and toiling in the fields with the hope of transforming my being, endeavouring to be Her true instrument. Observing myself and trying to correct the imperfections has been my sadhana on the farm.

Being an indolent boy with a tamasic nature, my progress has not been quick or sudden. Cultivating crops, taking care of cows and calves has made me prudent and vigilant. I have glimpsed the secrets of these fields by unceasing work in the school of experience, in the outward physical life. At times it was so back-breaking that I literally fell at the Feet of the Divine Mother and wept for Her protection. Later I realised that it was the ignorance of my being that made me weep rather than ask for Her guidance. But gradually, through Her Grace and by its influence I have begun to understand the essence of work through my many “life-partners”: Mother earth, paddy and other crops, cows and calves, vegetables and flowers, fruit trees and, above all, the farm and its inmates. This is what I have learnt from them.

Love and care

Through farming I have learnt to love Mother Earth in the same way as I love my human mother.

Yes, Mother Earth also needs a lot of love and care. Therefore, I love the earth and look after her fields. I care for her good health by enriching her with good compost and manure. I till the soil to allow her to breathe freely and keep her clean and fertile. I quench her thirst with the water that she requires, make bunds to hold the water for as long as she needs and then cut them to keep her fields dry. In return I get generous, happy crops, the sweetest coconuts and fruits and delightfully colourful flowers.

Patience

I have learnt patience from my paddy fields and the various crops. For these 32 years, I have not been able to force my paddy seed to germinate in just six hours. It takes three days to pip. I have not been able to make my paddy flower in fifteen days. It takes roughly sixty days to bloom. Then during the harvest season, when the crop is in danger of getting ruined by the rain I have not been able collect the grains in a single day. It takes three days of cooperation from the labourers to lift it from the fields. This is how I have learnt to be patient and to wait quietly.

Sincerity

I have learnt so much from our cows and calves.

I have worked earnestly and wholeheartedly with cattle. I have fed them sincerely and taken care of them. They are docile and give us good, plentiful milk. I love these cows and calves and clean their stable and collect cow-dung—the brown gold which enriches our fields! The calves are my playmates who remove my boredom. This sincere and tender caring for the cows results in the pure healthy milk they yield.

Faithfulness

I have learnt so much from vegetables and flowers.

I scatter the seeds in the soil after tilling it and nurture them with water and manure. They grow into happy fruit-bearing plants and give us back their produce in plenty. Never have I been disappointed when a crop fails. How can I then be unfaithful to my flower-beds of *New Creation*, *Power* and *Immortality* and other flower-plants? No, I need them as we all do. So I faithfully take care of them and learn to imbibe their sweet fragrances and inherent virtues such as love, humility, generosity and plasticity.

Gratitude

How shall I express my heartfelt gratitude to the Mother? I do not know, but I have learnt so much from all the new-grown mango trees that stand today so tall and majestic in the Rizière farm. They were once just seeds of the fruits I or my friends had eaten. I buried them in the earth with the hope of that magical transformation happening in them and in me. Yes, we ate the mangoes and from their seeds grew more fruit-bearing trees and these fruits named “knowledge” kept multiplying. This rhythm of nature makes me thoughtful and my gratitude to the Mother knows no bounds, my gratitude to Her for turning me into a worker worthy of Her protection and Her love.

Harmony

The fabric of life should be woven in harmony with the whole. The smallest disharmony anywhere disturbs the whole fabric and the ‘integral path’ becomes fragmented. This I learnt from agriculture. Yes, there is need of perfect harmony with the labourers if the work is to be done happily and smoothly; harmony with my fellow-farmers so that all may benefit from the mutual goodwill, encouragement and all the pool of experience and knowledge. I need to be in harmony with the Mother’s representatives because it is my duty to obey them and carry out whatever instructions I get from them. I have learnt about harmony from the soil itself, from the seeds, from

the crops, from the plants and even from my pet dogs who watch over the farm. There is such an incredible harmony in nature, so spontaneous and effortless! If only we could express this same harmony in our lives all the time! Then there would be no problem that could not be solved.

The truth behind farming has opened my eyes to the Force at work, guiding us towards the integral and collective sadhana of the Ashram for a complete transformation that will finally make our human life divine. With hope and certitude in my heart, I journey on this sunlit path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and I humbly walk towards the goal They have set before us. So no more weeping along the path.

I offer my humble love and gratitude at Their Lotus Feet through this simple expression of my thoughts and feelings.

Let Their will be done.

SURENDRA MOHANTY

Even if I myself had had the command to do business as I had the command to do politics I would have done it without the least spiritual or moral compunction. All depends on the spirit in which a thing is done, the principles on which it is built and the use to which it is turned. I have done politics and the most violent kind of revolutionary politics, ghoram karma, and I have supported war and sent men to it, even though politics is not always or often a very clean occupation nor can war be called a spiritual line of action. But Krishna calls upon Arjuna to carry on war of the most terrible kind and by his example encourage men to do every kind of human work, sarvakarmāṇi. Do you contend that Krishna was an unspiritual man and that his advice to Arjuna was mistaken or wrong in principle? Krishna goes further and declares that a man by doing in the right way and in the right spirit the work dictated to him by his fundamental nature, temperament and capacity and according to his and its dharma can move towards the Divine. He validates the function and dharma of the Vaishya as well as of the Brahmin and Kshatriya. It is in his view quite possible for a man to do business and make money and earn profits and yet be a spiritual man, practise yoga, have an inner life. The Gita is constantly justifying works as a means of spiritual salvation and enjoining a Yoga of Works as well as of Bhakti and Knowledge. Krishna, however, superimposes a higher law also that work must be done without desire, without attachment to any fruit or reward, without any egoistic attitude or motive, as an offering or sacrifice to the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga , SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 675-76)

HOW “THE QUIET HEALING CENTRE” QUIETLY CAME TO BE

WHEN did it start being? It could be said that this strip of beach was waiting since the beginning of time. We know that Mother had told Gautam, who owned that plot of land, that She wanted it reserved for a therapeutic centre. She Herself had gone there for walks in the early days and felt its special energy. Mother gave it the name “Quiet” and wrote it in Her own hand on the back of a photo of the beach with palm trees and a view of the sea. She never mentioned it to me in all the years that I was seeing Her every day, though She told me more than 35 years ago that She had seen, in fact that She was seeing, a wonderful project in Auroville which I would be responsible for realising. She was seeing it even as She spoke to me and was obviously charmed and delighted by it. It was “Quiet”. I would like to say a little about Mother’s great interest in healing about which She spoke to me on many occasions, especially concerning Auroville.

Mother asked me to write the first brochure of what Auroville wanted to be, as though it were a being, which of course it is, an entity with its own soul. She would say, “Auroville wants to be the City of Light” or “Auroville wants to be the city that heals” and this was a function that She felt as very central to Auroville, a healing at many levels.

It may surprise many that in those very early days She was even thinking of bringing out an Italian scientist who seemed to have found a cure for cancer from goat serum. It is known that goats never contract cancer, just as ducks never catch cold. In spite of the fact that She was always very much against injections She spoke of the possibility of letting him continue his research in Auroville because of the difficulties he was encountering in Italy. The Italian architect, Paolo Tommasi remembers this since Mother asked him to contact the man when he returned to Italy. Auroville would have supported him and his research. In the event nothing came of it. Mother also paid for the passage of a French healer that She had Satprem invite to the Ashram, as readers of the *Agenda* will know. I quote these two instances to show how much Mother felt that it was a function of Auroville to heal. She once said that emotional and other suffering was all drama, and She waved Her hand to dismiss it. There was still only one suffering and that was physical suffering. Of course this is what She said to me at a certain time and in a certain context, and as we know She must have said other things at other times.

It was long after, in 1983, that in the course of a long illness Nata had a very painful experience, both psychologically and physically, at a hospital in Europe. He had recovered splendidly from double pneumonia, with the help of a homeopathic remedy and visited a hospital for a check-up. His lungs were found to be clear, but he was given a diuretic I.V. which landed him in the intensive care ward. In this particular

experience he found the doctors and nurses so cold and uncaring (one nurse even threatened him) that he who had never ever complained about his long illness actually wept, not for himself but for the condition of the world. It was probably here that the seed was planted for "Quiet".

Here in the Ashram with the ever available and compassionate help of Dr. Dilip we were able to nurse Nata lovingly. Dr. Dilip only had to put a hand upon Nata's arm for him to feel better. Like all true doctors, Dr. Dilip is a healer. Nata felt he was a shaman. One evening, some weeks before he left his body while I was feeding him he said suddenly, "There should be a hospital of love like this." There was such a warm yearning aspiration in Nata's voice that the words must have been mantric. I was filled with an unexpected knowledge and power and I kept on repeating, "There will be such a place, there will be such a place, we will build it." A certain reasonable part of myself looked on in smiling disbelief. It had no intention of getting involved in this madness, but the words kept on coming out of my mouth, "We will do it, it will be done." Nata too smiled, refusing to take the words seriously. He knew he had only a short time left in his body and patted my hand reminding me of this. But all I could do was to repeat what I had already said, that we would do it. If Nata's words had been mantric, my voice must have carried so much conviction that the next day Nata got up and, dragging his oxygen cylinder with him, made a few crude drawings at his desk. He was an engineer, but those very rudimentary sketches were all he was able to manage before crawling back into bed. Those sketches brought "Quiet" one step nearer the physical plane. The most important part of this story has been told. Nata left his body on the 28th of March 1985. Perhaps there is not so much to add.

I had intended never, never to leave the Ashram again. Vishwajit predicted that I was going to have to visit several countries, which made me laugh in disbelief, but before the end of the year two factors joined to make his predictions come true. I had to find funds to finish Udavi school which Nata had started, inspired by Mother's wish that he do something for the village of Edayanchavadi. I was told that there was a foundation in America that would probably give us the money if I went there to explain what we were doing in Udavi. And that very year I received an invitation out of the blue to present a paper at a Congress on spirituality, very near the headquarters of the Foundation. All my expenses were to be paid from the moment I left Pondicherry. I prepared a paper for the science section on the spiritual implications of homeopathy and it was accepted. This invitation came as a first indication that things would happen to help the "Hospital of Love" if I could remain open to the possibilities. I already knew that in the States I would research as much as possible into whatever lay on my path, the therapies which supported the intelligence of the organism and indeed one possibility after another opened up, mainly through people that I met at the Congress. The Native Americans have an astonishing knowledge and a cosmic comprehension of the causes and cures of disease. They understand that the disease itself is medicine. Everything is medicine.

Friends were ever eager to drive Ishita and myself to centres of healing. It was in Mexico that I remembered Mother’s deep desire to find a cure for cancer. There is a centre just over the border from the States where cancer is actually cured through diet, coffee enemas to stimulate the liver plus a vitamin which is extracted from the apricot kernel. I spoke to people in the clinic set amidst lovely grounds. Their tumours had begun to shrink after three weeks. One of the nurses there had originally come with a tumour the size of a grapefruit and had stayed on after her cure. This is the Gerson therapy named after the German physician who prescribed it. His daughter Charlotte explained that it was banned in the States because of the pharmaceutical industries. My interest in homeopathy was growing apace. I had already attended the courses of the Argentine master Professor Masi in Florence and now, as predicted by Vishwajit, I followed the teachings of George Vithoulkas in Greece and several other countries. I returned to India with the conviction that the “Hospital of Love” was unfolding. George Vithoulkas had agreed to come to Auroville and the Ashram and so, around his acceptance, developed the first alternative healing multi-disciplinary Congress in India which was held in Auroville and Pondicherry in January 1987. It was on this occasion that the intention of building a complementary healing centre was announced.

I better go back a few months. When I returned from my homeopathic courses in Greece Gautam caught me on my way to the Ashram one day. “Didn’t anyone tell you that I’ve been wanting to see you?” he said. He had heard that I was looking for a piece of land on the seafront for the “Hospital of Love” so that we could have hydrotherapies. Friends and therapists had donated a modest sum to acquire land. When I understood that he was trying to sell the piece of land on which Mother had wanted a therapeutic centre a deep silence descended on me.

Of course.

It was Mother all along. All remaining doubts evaporated. The money available was very little, certainly much too little for such a prize plot right on the beach, but faithful to Mother’s wish, Gautam let it go for whatever was there.

For seven years it was slow uphill work creating an infrastructure, the enclosure, borewell and a windmill, persuading the villagers that “Quiet” was no longer the place for their toddy shop and that the coconut trees could no longer be tapped. And then suddenly there was enough money to start the building. On the day the foundation stone was laid a blessing packet was placed under it, one of the two blessing packets that Mother had given Nata when he had in 28 days to complete the amphitheatre for the inauguration of Auroville in 1968. An enormous amount of earth had had to be moved with mumpies, but somehow, working three shifts, around the clock, the whole thing including underground toilets was finished in 26 days. There was certainly something in that packet.

Designed by Popo, the actual construction was finished in record time. And just before the inauguration Popo told me that in all his years of construction work in

Auroville it was the first time that there had been no problems. Every time he came to the site and asked if there were any difficulties he was told, “No. No difficulties”—something totally new in his experience. I myself was convinced we had an Italian engineer pulling strings from other planes as well.

The story doesn't end there.

One day shortly after “Quiet” had been inaugurated but before the Healing Retreats had started a burly and very excited Russian by the name of Joseph (I wouldn't dream of trying to write it the way it is pronounced in Russian) knocked loudly at our door.

“I have to talk you Maggi”, he said, “I know that you are very reclused. People have told but they told also you can speak me about Temple. I want to speak you also about Temple”, he pointed at the chairs in our little enclosed garden for permission to sit. We sat and he closed his eyes obviously much moved about what he wanted to say and something in his vibration communicated itself to me. He wanted to ask me about the Temple in Auroville and how it had started. Now it was true that I had been in what must have been the first conversation ever held regarding the Matrimandir when Paolo Tommasi the Italian architect came to speak to Nata (who was in those days still in charge of all Auroville construction work) about his inspiration for a Temple which was to be the centre and force of cohesion for the new city. But there were now many others in Auroville who could speak to Joseph about the Matrimandir.

However I tried to re-evoked for him how stirred we had been by Paolo's inspiration that day and how inspired we had been by Mother's vision of the Inner Chamber complete with pillars. Which pillars? He asked me questions which didn't at all fit in with what I was telling him and it became clear that we were speaking at cross-purposes. In the end we sorted it out: he was talking about the Temple of Healing. He was talking about “Quiet”, about Mother's “Quiet Healing Centre”. It is true that with its multiple shiny white domes gleaming in the sun and even more by moonlight “Quiet” does look like a temple, a precious little temple set among palm trees with the sound of the sea and the rustle of palm fronds inviting to meditation.

This is what Joseph told me: He was a healer and ten years earlier he had been meditating one day in America when he had a clear vision of a Temple of Healing on a beach front with its white domes and palm trees. The vision had touched him with its quiet beauty and the special energy that he had felt emanating from it. He had known, had been “told” during his experience that it was still on another plane and that it would take ten years to be realised but he hadn't been told where it would be situated. He had come to visit Auroville with his French companion Tara and since all the guest houses were very full and he was a healer they had been directed to “Quiet” where...he had found his Temple.

For the second time in ten years an enormous silence descended on me blocking out all irrelevancies.

We sat without speaking for a long time. I recalled Mother’s smile of musing delight as She saw “Quiet” and told me of a project I would be responsible for in Auroville. I heard Nata’s mantric words, “There should be a hospital of love, ‘*un ospedale de l’amore*’”—and all the toil and moil, the turmoil to bring things down from that plane where they already exist—ten years of planning and anxieties and frustrations (though never doubts) and how many years for the enormously more complex construction which the Mother had seen thirty-five years ago. That meditation room had been there all ready and waiting thirty-five years before and so was the whole Matrimandir with all Mother’s projects not yet realised on this plane, but waiting for action to be taken in the physical.

I remembered when in 1965 Mother wanted us to go and visit Auroville, and had us driven out to the area, eroded land and a few palm trees on the horizon. One had to use a lot of imagination and faith. And then something else came to me with stunning force. Yes “Quiet” ...the Matrimandir ...Mother had seen them. They were all waiting ...where? Not up there as we always like to think since our minds are committed somehow to layers of space, as well as linear time, but waiting somewhere embedded in the present itself, and “Quiet” and the Matrimandir and all Mother’s promises are only a tiny part of the whole in which we have the enormous privilege of participating in, participating in a special way, for the whole world is participating in the huge change. The whole world is in transition towards that other promise and vision of Mother’s; the world of the Supramental.

Like “Quiet” was in 1985 when Nata uttered those words and even before when Mother saw it and spoke of it and how long before that! The Supramental world is embedded in the present and has been since the beginning of Time.

We are living out the Divine Plan. To remember that all the day-to-day difficulties will inevitably be resolved hastens the realisation. There are so many things that have been left to us to help us remember, like Mother’s declaration of 13th April 1962 which She dictated to Pavitra —

And there was the certitude that what is to be done is done and that the Supramental Manifestation is realised....

The certitude that what is to be done is *done*.

All the results of the falsehood had disappeared: death was an illusion, sickness was an illusion, ignorance was an illusion—something that had no reality, no existence. Only Love and Love and Love and Love—immense, formidable, stupendous, carrying everything.

And how to express it in the world? It was like an impossibility, because of the contradiction. But then it came: “You have accepted that the world should know the Supramental Truth... and it will be expressed totally, integrally.” Yes, yes....

And the thing is *done*.

which brings us back to the inspiration for this article.

Nata was a man of enormous conviction which is a sort of power in itself.

I can still hear that aspiration in his voice, "There should be a hospital of love." It was like a prayer, and it wasn't for himself since he knew the days left to him were very few. The result of that aspiration has often been an inspiration for me. It is as though there exists a wanting that is true wanting, not desire, something quite different from desire, which has great strength, enormous potential, when you put your whole heart into something you move mountains and... a "Quiet Healing Centre".

Well "Quiet" was finished in 1987. Even when I learnt that Mother had wanted a Healing Project on Gautam's land I had no idea of exactly what She had in mind or rather above mind, and I don't know why it never occurred to me to ask Gautam if She had said anything to him on the subject but it didn't. When it was all finished Gautam came to visit "Quiet" and said, "Well what has been done is very much like what Mother wanted." Some years later he fished out an old piece of paper on which he had written down Mother's ideas for "Quiet", and I was amazed, though I shouldn't have been at how almost exactly "Quiet" conformed to Mother's vision. But why was I amazed? Hadn't She been building it all along? Sometimes our amazement seems a lack of faith. We can't get rid of that "I am the doer." Though goodness knows Mother sowed enough hints all along the road. First She said, "I'm seeing this place in Auroville", then She got Nata practically on his deathbed to prompt me, then Gautam stood barring my way one day to say Mother wanted this Healing Centre 20 years ago, then She sent Joseph to say it was all already done before you laid the foundation stone, so why should I have been amazed when finally Mother's plan surfaced in black and white on the paper Gautam handed me?

Oh Unbeliever! Finally what remains to amaze me is the tenacity of the ego we harbour which forgets who is doing the work.

Well never mind. Mother got around it and built "Quiet" in spite of it all.

At last at the beginning of 1997, exactly 10 years after the conference at which the project was first announced the lights went on, the telephone connection was given, all two days before the opening which Nirod came to grace. Dr. Diwan Harish Chand, the homeopath who had once saved Nata's life very appropriately came down from Delhi to preside. He had planted the first tree 10 years before at the time of the multi-disciplinary Congress, and now cut the ribbon for "Quiet".

"Quiet" was all ready and waiting for patients like the bride waiting for Her groom.

And he was not long in coming. In fact he arrived immediately, "Quiet's" first patient: a youngish Westerner in his thirties. (I don't give his nationality to allow him to remain anonymous even though he likes to tell his story.)

He was habituated to cocaine and he came sad-eyed and desperate and penniless with a letter from a friend asking me to do something to help him, in fact to save him. He had been through detoxifying treatments in hospital, and was taking methadone to

ease him out of his craving but nothing helped.

“Quiet”... where Mother was waiting for him in the guise of a whole team of caring therapists, did help.

Afterwards when telling of his experience there he placed his hands on his chest to show us how his first therapist had approached him. It was like feeling the hand of love and healing for the first time. It was what had started to make him relax, his first massage. All day for many days he was lovingly subjected to mud packs, whirlpool baths, massages, physiotherapy, homeopathy and whatever treatments “Quiet” offered at the time, including just friendship and caring. Someone was detached to be with him all the time.

Slowly he emerged from his nightmare. Not only did he emerge into Mother’s Light but he found in himself the makings of a therapist. Through deep suffering he had found his vocation and his spiritual path. He has since studied and elaborated his own therapy, helped several young people on hard drugs to come out of their agony and has written a book about it all. He is an Aurovillian.

That was the very beginning of “Quiet”.

And what of Nata’s vision? How far did that correspond to the final result? Well as far as those first little plans so laboriously drawn by him, not at all. Though there is no doubt that they did bring “Quiet” down one step so that it became more believable and concrete per se and for me. In fact initially “Quiet” for one reason and another went through three different architects before the final plans were drawn up. One of the reasons was that it was believed by some that there would never be enough funds. Another was that many people were of the opinion that the beach should be developed with houses for individuals. Mother’s vision prevailed.

And as for the “*Ospedale de l’Amore*” it changed its name to what Mother had decided many years earlier and it really couldn’t be called a hospital at all. “Healing Centre” was much more appropriate. And yet...

Not long after “Quiet” was inaugurated it was decided to hold ten-day Healing Retreats at regular intervals. These retreats offered a variety of healing and releasing therapies including yoga which Mother had specifically mentioned, mud packs, oxygen immersion baths, jet baths, meditations, gem therapy, meditation music, work on the consciousness of the cells, homeopathy, various kinds of massages, dance therapy, back adjustments and even past life recall by an extraordinarily gifted and very lovely, compassionate Englishwoman, Jean.

The beach with its palm trees and the sound of the sea were themselves a therapy and people were asked to be as quiet as possible with as few preoccupations about their normal lives and work as possible and no contacts with the outside. The Mother had wanted “Quiet” to be a place where people could be still to recover from the jars of life.

At the end of ten days all the participants and therapists met to share their

experiences and we were invited. As we walked in one of the participants, Shradhdhavan, our *Mother India* poetess, embraced me. Her eyes were shining. I looked around at the circle of participants and therapists. They were smiling.

Many of the participants were known to me. They had spent time in the Ashram before going to Auroville. Others had come for homeopathy. Some like Bhavana were old-timers for whom I had carried messages to Mother. They were all beaming quietly. All had a look I didn't remember seeing in them before. The tensions produced by riding their great black bikes over the difficult Auroville roads had smoothed out.

They had had an "*Ospedale de l'Amore*" ten-day treatment.

We all sat around in a circle and one participant after another gave an account of his/her ten days, its result, its impact on his/her life, the resolutions it had provoked for changes in lifestyle, exercise etc. Almost everybody spoke of their sense of increased well-being and release of tensions, both physical and psychological, which was to be expected but each and everyone of the participants without exception spoke with wonder or deep emotion about the caring and love they felt they had received as an important part of their healing experience. And then one of them, Guy of the Auroville Land Fund said something which brought tears to my eyes. He said that he had heard that "Quiet" had been conceived as "The Hospital of Love" and that was what it was. It had fulfilled exactly that function, and so also after all, exactly Nata's aspiration had been realised.

Then, just as I was putting the finishing touches to this piece of writing and with a sort of synchronicity I love and which Mother tells us is the hallmark of the incoming age, I read a little piece in the latest Auroville "News and Notes" with the heading of "Thank You for Another Quiet Retreat":

I would like to thank all the wonderful friends at Quiet Healing Centre for a very lovely retreat. There is a great power in love which heals, and I felt all week totally immersed in this loving kindness.

(Signed) Jill

So nine years after that first "Quiet" retreat, the flame of the "*Ospedale de l'Amore*" was still burning.

And in case any confirmation was still needed concerning the aspiration of a very loving man about two weeks later there was another small piece by Dianna concerning the following retreat from which I quote:

Mother used to walk on this beach and actually visualized and named it "Quiet". She mentioned many times that Auroville should be a place of healing on many levels. And Quiet has beautifully manifested Her vision with its glittering white domes and gentle caring atmosphere.

I personally cannot imagine Auroville without Quiet's support to aching

limbs and spirits. To go down to that vast ocean and beach after the dense leafiness and even denser emotions of Auroville is to travel a long journey away. I felt they are truly offering us a gift on a silver plate with great warmth, love and a high level of professionalism.

May many people be able to receive your love through Mother's dream.

And here, to finish this piece, is something else embedded in our present, a vision, a reminder, a promise.

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,...

Sri Aurobindo
 (*Savitri*, pp. 343-44)

MAGGI

MYSELF AND THYSELF

My devotion and delight
Frame Thy form...
But Thy true Image
Surpasses all norm!

The ultimate aim of my life
Is to attain Thee—
The law of Thy creation
Evolves me...

The Light of my love
Is a flickering firefly.
The cosmic glow of Thy compassion
Radiates from the supernal sky...

Limited is the base and scope
Of my artistic creation;
Infinite is the field
Of Thy manifestation...

I am an earthly child
Afflicted by sorrow and suffering!
Thou art Almighty and All-blissful
With capacity unending...

Thou dwellest in the inmost heart
Of all, big and small,
And expressest Thy presence
By subtle inner call!

O Thou, king of kings,
I consecrate my little self
For Thee to pour forth
Thy transforming power as help...

To deliver baffled humanity
From hostile hatred and strife
And enhance thereby the advent
Of the age of Divine Life...

DEVOTIONAL POETRY IN TAMIL

(Continued from the issue of October 2006)

9. The Gardener, the Siddha

THE Bhakti Movement in Tamil Nadu had among its exponents devotees who believed only in the grace of god. As such, they did not take recourse to miracles to prove their point. There has always been an element of the miraculous in the lives of these saints, but these miracles may be no more than crystallisation of distant memories to prove a transformative moment. For Tirumangai it was the encounter with the Lord dressed up as a bridegroom; for Andal the vision in the sanctum of Srirangam. But none of the Alwars had a turn for enacting miracles just to impress their flock. Their yoga was the way of divine love mainly through service, *kainkarya*. The worship of the Lord in the image led naturally to such service associated with temple worship. Perialwar chose *pushpa kainkarya*, offering flowers to the deity. That was also the choice of Vipranarayana, now known as Tondar Adippodi Alwar.¹

Vipranarayana (the Brahmin Narayana) was born in the village of Tirumandangudi and was brought up in a pious atmosphere. He settled down in Srirangam where he laid out a garden and tended it with maternal care, offering the flowers and tulsi leaves for daily worship at Ranganatha temple. The years sped by while he had no thought for anything else in his mind except the Lord. Many hymnologists speak of having wasted their youth in carnal pleasures and other evils. This was more of a poetic conceit. Apparently it was not so in the case of Vipranarayana.

One day, a local courtesan, Devadevi, happened to see the young man at work. Handsome, with eyes that seemed to look into the beyond, Vipranarayana had already become a local legend. He was totally given over to Lord Ranganatha and it was well known that he could never be tempted into the corruption of the flesh. For Devadevi it was a challenge, as she was considered the most beautiful, accomplished and scholarly of the courtesans of the place. Dressed in the garb of an abandoned and homeless girl, she went to Vipranarayana and begged him to give her the job of sweeping the garden and watering the plants.

Innocence incarnate, Vipranarayana agreed. Then came the rainy season and one day Vipranarayana found Devadevi completely drenched and shivering in the garden. He invited her into his cottage and gave her one of his dry garments. Before long, Vipranarayana had become hopelessly infatuated with the girl. Even after knowing she was a courtesan, he could not give her up. He began frequenting her house till all his riches were laid out at her feet. He became a pauper. Devadevi rejected him now, but he would not go away. One day, a gold plate of Lord Ranganatha was missing and it was traced to the courtesan's palace. She told the guards that Vipranarayana had himself brought it to solicit her attention. Vipranarayana denied

it. It was then that the Lord appeared in a dream to the chief of the guards and said this was his trick to reclaim Vipranarayana to temple service. The Lord had come to Devadevi's house as Vipranarayana! Chastened, Vipranarayana went back to his service. Even Devadevi had a change of heart and turned to the path of piety.

From now onwards, the glow and freshness of the flowers in his garden entered Vipranarayana's creative fibre and the gardener became a great hymnologist. He could not think of any other divinity except Lord Ranganatha. And he called himself the dust of the devotees of the Lord as he thought of himself as still very lowly in the ladder of perfection. His matin song to the Lord, the first of its kind and forerunner of all the "Suprabhatam" literature and the forty-five verses of his honeyed *Tirumalai* have been the favourites of Vaishnavites all these years. Periavachan Pillai, the Mani-pravala commentator of Tondar Adippodi's works describes the effect of the transformation wrought on him by the Devadevi episode:

He had a promised existence that is equal to that of the Immortals. Not knowing this, the Alwar had for long considered the material body as the soul and the material pleasures as the cause of joy. The Supreme Lord with no apparent cause has now shown him the greatness of His Name that indicates his nature, image, qualities and riches. Finding this, Tondar Adippodi enjoys the same and leads others to such enjoyment and concludes the work by pleasing the Lord.²

Tirumalai opens with a verse on how the Name has given the Alwar the self-confidence to face the hosts of Yama. He then says that caught as he is in the soulful web of Ranganatha's presence, he would not care even for the joys of heaven.

The figure of a large, emerald mountain;
Coral lips; red eyes; Achyuta!
Lord of Immortals! Babe of the cowherd clan!
I want nothing but this sweet experience.
Not even the temptation to be the Chief
In Indra's heaven can lure me away.
O Resident of Srirangam city!³

Verse after verse spring up from the devotional heart of Tondar Adippodi to express his gratitude to the Lord, and the enchantment cast on a devotee by a personal god, the very basis of the yoga of divine love. One may peregrinate the world over and see the Lord everywhere. One may spend a lifetime within the confines of a small area and yet gain the vision of the Divine in an equal measure. Srirangam-on-Kaveri is his heaven and he needs this divine oxygen to live on:

Our wondrous Lord rests in Srirangam
 Of flowering groves in the middle of Kaveri
 Whose waters flood all over,
 The river which is holier than the Ganges.
 Having seen this supernal sight,
 Can I ever forget the image and live on?
 Ah me! The lowliest on earth!⁴

There are verses on his own weaknesses. He is no doubt regretting the waste of precious time in ephemeral pleasures in the company of Devadevi that he had sought earlier.

The Alwar's *Tirupalliezhuchi* (suprabhatam) in ten verses is a trailblazer. It was certainly presumptuous of a mere mortal to dare to wake up the Supreme Lord who is always awake and guarding his flock! But such are the spaces of bhakti yoga that there are no screens between the deity and the devotee.

Love is the key of this relation, and this service, *dāsyam*, is in Indian yoga the happy service of the divine Friend or the passionate service to the divine Beloved. The Master of the worlds who in the Gita demands of his servant, the Bhakta, to be nothing more in life than his instrument, makes this claim as the friend, the guide, the higher Self, and describes himself as the Lord of all worlds who is the friend of all creatures, *sarvalokamaheśvaram suhṛdam sarvabhūtānām*; the two relations in fact must go together and neither can be perfect without the other. So too it is not the fatherhood of God as the Creator who demands obedience because he is the maker of our being, but the fatherhood of love which leads us towards the closer soul-union of Yoga.⁵

It is the anxious love of a child waking up the mother to look after his needs that makes Tondar Adippodi Alwar write this matin prayer. This is also an instance when the Alwars trans-utilised existing poetic conventions for spreading bhakti. From times immemorial the Indian royalty has been woken up in the early morning by the songs of the *vaitalikas*. This convention is used by the Alwar now to wake up Ranganatha through mellifluous chanting:

The sun has hugged the mountain spires
 In the east; the dark night is gone,
 With the coming of lovely dawn.
 Flowers have blossomed and stream honey.
 Heavenly denizens and the kings of earth
 Have come crowding into your presence.
 With them have come elephants with their dams.
 As the drums also add their sounds,

It is like a wave-tossed sea all over.
Rise, O rise, Lord of Srirangam!

In the following verses the Alwar speaks of the manner in which the Lord saved Gajendra from the crocodile; rural scenarios of cowherds playing the flute as they go out with their charges, and the sound of bells tied to the neck of bulls; the presence of Vibhishana from Lanka; other deities like the twelve Adityas, the eleven Rudras, the Maruts and Subramania; Indra is here and the vidyadharas and gandharvas; the heavenly cow Kamadhenu. It is a magnificent evocation and the prayer is sung even today for the dawn darshana (Vishwarupa darshana) in Srirangam temple when an elephant and a cow are brought to the sanctum while the hereditary veena player of the temple plucks the strings musically.

The matin song's sweetness and popularity enthralled the famous Tamil patriot-poet, Subramania Bharati (1882-1921), who knew Sri Aurobindo very well in Pondicherry. Finding the Indians lost in the dense sleep of the "foreign maya", Bharati sang a matin song to Mother India which became a very popular marching song for patriots during the Quit India Movement:

But Mother, knowest thou not your child?
Can the mother sleep when the child awakes her?
Is there mother's heart unmoved by the cries of the child?
Mother! Great Bharat's Queen!
Knowest thou not that in eighteen languages sweet
We sing your praises in manifold ways?
Come, come, and give us the blessings of your reign!
Rise, O rise, Mother mine!⁶

This one poem of Bharati is enough to tell us how deeply influential the hymns of the Alwars have been for Tamilians in all walks of life. If Tondar Adippodi charms us by the sheer innovativeness and music of his limpid Tamil, Tirumazhisai Alwar places the intellect to the fore and shows how one can ascend to the spaces of spirituality by first mastering the occult through the mind. Of the twelve Alwars, he alone is known as a Siddha which shows that the occult was also considered a valid means to ascend to higher consciousness.

Tirumazhisai Alwar's life is completely shrouded in the mazes of hagiology. Born Bhaktisara to the sage Bhargava and the apsara Kanakangi, he was abandoned in a bamboo forest near Tirumazhisai. A basket-maker found him and brought him up with great affection. Soon a son was born to the cowherd couple and was named Kanikannan. Bhaktisara left home at an early age to practise yoga, gathered knowledge of various philosophical systems like Nyaya, Vaisheshika and Sankhya. He became a follower of the siddha cult and hence a devotee of Shiva. In time, Bhaktisara became

well known as an expounder of Saiva philosophy.

During one of his wanderings, he chanced upon Pey Alwar who was busy working in his garden. Bhaktisara was amused that Pey was planting his seedling upside down, with the roots above the earth. He laughed at the mad gardener. Pey smiled and said: "I am mad, is that it? Now I worship the Original Cause and you worship his grandson. Tell me, who is mad!" In a trice Bhaktisara understood that Narayana was the original cause. He had created Brahma who had in his turn, created Shiva. Henceforth he used all his intellectual abilities in expounding the greatness of Narayana through brilliantly-phrased Tamil verses.

After his conversion, Bhaktisara became almost a militant evangelist of Sri-vaishnavism. Many occult performances have been attributed to him to silence his denigrators. He would never compromise on his principles and his younger brother Kanikannan had imbibed the teachings well. Once, the king of Kanchipuram wanted Kanikannan to sing his praises. Kanikannan refused and was at once banished from the land. He came to take leave of Bhaktisara who was in the temple of Tiruvehka where the deity is seen resting on Adishesha. Bhaktisara addressed the deity:

Deity of lovely Kanchipuram!
 Kanikannan is going. Don't you stay here.
 I, the brave poet, am leaving too.
 Come, pack your handsome snake-bed!

It is said that the deity obeyed instantly and in no time the city was being drained of its citizens. Realising his folly, the king sought forgiveness and the Alwar sang in the same rhythm, using almost the same words:

Deity of lovely Kanchipuram!
 Kanikannan is staying back.
 I, the brave poet, have stopped going.
 Unpack your handsome snake-bed!

Normalcy returned to the temple of Tiruvehka where the deity is now known as Yatokthakari (One who obeyed the command)! Such is the power of a devotee's claim.

Another apocryphal legend stands witness to the way erudite Brahmins have constantly tried to put down casteist pride from immemorial times. A Dikshitar of Perumbuliyur who was the leader of the Brahmin community, invited Bhaktisara to a yajna he was conducting. When the Alwar came, the other Brahmins objected, decrying him as the son of a lowly basket-maker. On the request of the Dikshitar, Bhaktisara revealed his inner glory. As he stood there shining brilliantly like the Lord's discus, the assemblage realised that he was indeed an incarnation of Narayana's sudarshana chakra.

The most charming of all the legends is Bhaktisara's face-to-face encounter with

the Lord in Kumbakonam. In the ancient Sarangapani temple the Lord is seen resting on Adishesha. When Bhaktisara prayed to him, the Lord gave no sign of recognition. A quiverful of questions flashed from the Alwar:

Are your feet in pain due to all the walking?⁷
Is the body tired having lifted up the earth
As the Boar? Beyond hills and vast tracts
Is Kudanthai-on-Kaveri where you rest.
Get up and talk to me, O Keshava!

Today when we go to the sanctum, the priest shows us how the Lord is in “uthana sayana”, the posture of resting even as He is getting up. The universes of the Bhakti Movement are built on faith, and not one of them can be rejected as a bizarre play of imagination. It is the result of mankind’s anxiety to move upward, to reach out to new powers, to exceed the limitations of the present:

For knowledge gropes, but meets not Wisdom’s face.
Ascending slowly with unconscious steps,
A foundling of the Gods she wanders here
Like a child-soul left near the gates of Hell
Fumbling through fog in search of Paradise.⁸

Two verse clusters, *Nanmukhan Tiruvantadi* and *Tiruchanda Viruttam* stand witness to Bhaktisara’s firm commitment to his deity, Narayana. As Bhaktisara was a contemporary of the first three Alvars, his *Nanmukhan Tiruvantadi* is generally seen as continuing their work though more forthright in stating the ultimate causality of Narayana. The opening verse makes this clear:

Narayana created Brahma of four faces; Brahma himself created Sankara; I have announced this on my own in this *antadi*; receive the deep significances without losing any of it, by meditating upon the same.

Bhaktisara’s drift is clear. He has no objection to the presence of any number of gods. Only, it must be remembered that all creation, including these gods have been created by Narayana who pervades everything. When one uses one’s intelligence, it becomes clear that there is only one Supreme Being: *therungaal dhevan oruvane!* Though karma is active, it is the Lord who decides on the fruits of action for individuals. For it is He who presides even over the karmic Law. Can this be proved by any scientific equation? No! Mind has no place in recognising the Supreme, for the intellect’s logic can get us nowhere. Only a personal vision when one leaps beyond the mental consciousness can reveal the true nature of the Supreme. Bhaktisara assures us that

he has achieved such a leap of transcendence and found Narayana everywhere. He is the object referred to by all words, *epporutkum chollān*, the creator, sustainer and destroyer, the closest to the individual. If we surrender to Narayana, we need fear no more.

If you surrender to Madhusudana,
You will have nothing to disturb your mind;
The sustainer of the seven worlds
Has entered my mind and made it rich.⁹

What was it that Bhaktisara meant when he said the Lord had made his mind rich, *onri ninra tiru*? Obviously it is the treasure of aspiration and the ability to keep the remembrance of God steady all the time, says the 79th verse. He notes with gratitude the compassion of the Lord who incarnates repeatedly to make the jivatman bound in its material body remember God.

You have incarnated as milk-white, golden hued,
Yellow-sheened and dark-complexioned;
You destroyed the two; you praised Sveta
For concluding the terrible war as the commander
The way you wanted it to go.¹⁰

This approach naturally yields several verses on the various incarnations of the Supreme. If incarnations like Varaha, Rama and Krishna are referred to with awe and affection by the Alwar, his references to the iconic presence of Srinivasa in Tiruvenkatam¹¹ comes with charming views of the nature around. He is anxious to go to this holy hill where waterfalls rumble down bringing pearls with them, elephants try to catch the moon to offer it as a lamp to the Lord, and there is an abundance of flora and fauna. The beauty of the place so ravished the heart of this Siddha Purusha that he even indited a verse cast in the mode of bridal mysticism, probably the first of its kind to occur in Alwar (and hence bhakti) literature:

I call out to the Lord of Tiruvenkatam
I play the Koodal game¹² to see him;
And join the Lord of the mountain
That has huge waterfalls showering gems,
And caves to which elephants and snakes turn
To guard themselves from the heavy rains.

Generally speaking, the Alwars used the least complicated designs of thought in their poems. Very rarely do we come across deliberate word-structuring or convoluted

philosophical statements in their works. *Tiruchanda Viruttam* is an exception for Bhaktisara settles down here to explain the cosmic categories that lead to the Supreme, the Para Tattva. No wonder the work defies all translators! The opening verse:

How can one know your True Nature,
 You who have become the five on earth,¹³
 Four in water, three in the fire, two in the wind,
 One in space? How can we distinguish you
 From all this?

After using such cryptic language (which was no doubt easily understood by his contemporary audience) to explain how all these categories have their source in the Brahman, Bhaktisara shows how the Lord is the compassionate giver of all that we have and then lists the powers that mark His suzerainty. Dr. K. C. Varadachari, in his crystalline analysis of *Tiruchanda Viruttam* tells us how the Lord has a close relationship with his creation:

Mythological theology reveals two things: firstly, the transcendence of God over the created world, which means that it is not opposed to His own immanence. This we have seen already was established by the Alwar in his earlier work *Nanmukhan Tiruvantadi*. Creatorship on his part does not imply non-creationship of Himself through descent or self-manifestation or self-creativity (svayambhuva). The descent is, to use the very excellent expression of Sri Aurobindo a “coming down of the Divine below the line which divides the divine from the human world or status”. This is the divine birth which is different from the birth that happens to mortals out of karma results or for enjoying them.¹⁴

The *Tiruchanda Viruttam* with its galloping metre tells us how the Supreme manifests even as a lowly creature for the aim is to help all levels of creation rise upwards. In fact, does the Supreme have any enemies even if we speak of incarnations destroying evil personalities like Hiranyakashipu, Ravana and Shishupala?

Even for those who have cursed you,
 Maligned and battled against you
 Thereby getting cindered in your anger,
 It is possible to attain you. O wondrous Lord,
 Take my evil deeds to be good!
 All-pervading One!¹⁵

Somehow, the legends concerning Bhaktisara as also the difficulties one encounters with some of his verses which have a philosophical cast, have created an

Alwar who seems somewhat difficult, too intellectual, rather remote. Yet, getting immersed in his poems, we suddenly realise that here is an aspirant like ourselves, a man of faith in a complex world, one who is swimming against the tide of worldly life all the time holding on to the All-Beautiful as the Way and the Goal. The Tamil words have not lost their gentle associations even after a millennium as we wonder at the mystery of the Divine that envelops our being:

As father, mother, my liege-lord,
 He destroys my good and bad births
 And grants grace. Pearl-sweet Mukunda,
 The sweet child has entered my being.
 My poor heart, why need you lie down
 In a sea of sorrow anymore?¹⁶

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. The Tamil term means *bhaktāngri renu* or the dust of the feet of devotees.
2. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
3. All translations from the poetry of the Alvars are by Prema Nandakumar.
4. Verse 23.
5. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Part III, chapter iii.
6. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
7. The 'walking' is a reference to Rama walking in the forests to Lanka; as Varaha, the Lord had saved earth from Somukhasura by lifting it up.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book II, canto iv.
9. Verse 61.
10. White, gold, green and black are the colours of the incarnations that take place in Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali yugas respectively.
 The two: the demons Madhu and Kaitabha.
 Sveta: A name of Arjuna whose horses were white in colour.
11. Popularly known as Tirupati.
12. An ancient game of Tamils in which the lady awaiting her beloved used to draw a huge circle and cover it with small ones. If the number of small ones tallied, the indication was that she would soon join her love.
13. Five on earth: sound, touch, form, taste and smell.
 Four in water: sound, touch, form and taste.
 Three in the fire: sound, touch, form.
 Two in the wind: sound and touch.
 Space: sound.
14. *Alvars of South India* (1966), pp. 52-53.
15. Verse 111.
16. Verse 115.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: A Pure and Manly Life by Manoj Das Gupta.
Published by New House, Kolkata, 2006. Pp. 63. Price: Rs. 50.

(1)

A Memorable Tribute *(A Review Article)*

THIS is an extremely valuable and timely publication, well-researched with views that are forthright and insightful. It straddles many worlds: history, literature, internationalism, spirituality and power politics. The subject of this fascinating study is Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the great intellectual, patriot and internationalist whose memory is currently relegated to the national backburner thanks to the prevailing ideological warfare and partisan politics. Professor Manoj Das Gupta's talk on Syama Prasad was delivered on 6 July, 2001 at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, marking the birth centenary of the great soul. The author narrates the story of the man and his mission with rare sympathy and objectivity. In so doing, he does full justice to the spirit of Dr. Mookerjee who never yielded to opportunism and expediency in his whole life. The present publication is largely based on the earlier talk.

The immediate occasion of the talk was the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention of April 24 and 25, 1951 held at Pondicherry. Dr. Mookerjee, it must clearly be noted, was chosen by the Mother to be the Chairman of the Convention. This fact by itself should be enough to commend Syama Prasad to our attention. What Manoj Das Gupta has done is to build a narrative on the important declaration of the Mother and the writings of Sri Aurobindo. He records Syama Prasad's life and career and draws pointed attention to those aspects that make the latter occupy a special place in the history of modern India.

It is appropriate that the book opens with relevant extracts dealing with the opening of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre and the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention, including a news item from *Amrita Bazar Patrika* dated January 9, 1951, a copy of the invitation sent out by Dr. Mookerjee, the Mother's inaugural message for the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention, and finally the Presidential address by Dr. Mookerjee himself.

In his address at the convention, Syama Prasad shows great understanding of Sri Aurobindo. While some perceived a disjunction between Sri Aurobindo, the political person and Sri Aurobindo, the yogi and visionary, Syama Prasad saw these two selves as part of an integral personality. As he observed eloquently:

The two Aurobindos merged with each other, the political fighter and the yogi. Even then his earlier patriotism was tinged with a spiritual penumbra. He was thus a true Indian. When we read from his books, he seems to appear out of the pages of our ancient sacred lore, the representative of all their wisdom made dynamic by an awareness of the present spiritual crisis. I am sure the proposed University will symbolise the world's urge for a new spiritual rebirth; it will stand out as an oasis amidst the barren tracts that breed jealousies, suspicions and petty conflicts. (p. x)

Aside from some of these underlying aspects, Syama Prasad made two further remarks that go to the heart of a truly liberal temper. The first, according to him, is that in the proposed University Centre, "Men and women selected for training must be carefully chosen because they must be able to absorb cent percent the ideology for which the institution will stand." (p. xi) And secondly, "The policy of our Government should be to encourage experiments of the type being made here so that the work may be carried on without hindrance or difficulty." (p. xi)

Indeed, these noble traits of Syama Prasad's personality were not accidental. They were part of his family background and upbringing. He was the son of the legendary Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (1864-1924) known as the "Bengal Tiger", the well-known Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. As Manoj Das Gupta spells out, Syama Prasad's family had an impressive pedigree and track record in social service and patriotism. A brilliant graduate student, he wrote a long letter to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. After a successful academic career, he became the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University in 1934. He married in 1922 and had four children. But unfortunately in 1934 he lost his wife. As the youngest Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University he introduced many reforms, including a new course in Islamic Studies, which were well appreciated.

In the second part of the tribute, Manoj Das Gupta recounts a significant phase of modern India's political history. He narrates the role played by the British in the "divide and rule" policy in the pre-independence period and the rise of communal politics. He shows that Syama Prasad was a staunch nationalist who believed in the ideal of a unified India where people of the various faiths could live without fear and favour. He points out that several movements that were espoused by the Congress Party, such as the Khilafat Movement, basically weakened the secular fabric of the country. Das Gupta's assessment of Syama Prasad's politics is admirably frank and forthright:

Syama Prasad's joining the Hindu Mahasabha has been the root cause of much misunderstanding and malignment. Both the Congress and the Communist party, out of frustration and envy, dubbed him a Hindu fundamentalist. Indeed, it is shocking and disgraceful to note that even after five decades of his passing away,

the communist regime of his home province, West Bengal, should refuse to celebrate his Birth Centenary under the pretext that he was a Hindu fundamentalist! (p. 13)

In this context, Das Gupta quotes Sri Aurobindo's observations in *The Karmayogin* to underline the fact that Hindus and Muslims were both children of Mother India. Mookerjee, Das Gupta argues, saw the strength and weaknesses of organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha. Unfortunately it was the trajectory of political events such as the failures of the Fazalul Haq Ministry in 1937, the Progressive Coalition Experiment in 1941 with Syama-Haq in charge, that gave in to the British-Muslim League machinations, the demand for Pakistan, the failure of the Congress Party to accept the Cripps Proposal, the call for "Direct Action" on 16 August, 1946 that resulted in the great communal killing at Calcutta that pushed him into the "Hindu" camp.

Syama Prasad fought steadfastly against partition, and later, after independence, as a Minister in the Nehru Cabinet, always sought to protect the interests of India. He opposed the government's policy of appeasement and capitulation to political blackmail.

Based on documentary evidence, Manoj Das Gupta shows that it was not a conscious political will but largely circumstances that led Syama Prasad to be one of the founders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. He needed a political platform counter to the Congress and the Communists in order to oppose Nehru's China, Kashmir and Pakistan policy. It is this struggle that took him tragically into Jammu and Kashmir. He died under suspicious circumstances in prison and became a martyr in the eyes of large sections of his countrymen.

A heightened spiritual self always enhanced Syama Prasad's political greatness. Das Gupta does well to present extracts from the letter he wrote from the jail in Kashmir. He reproduces pages from his diary notes he wrote in January 1946. Suffice it to quote for our purpose, a paragraph from the letter:

O Lord create within me the throb of a new heart. Give me the strength to call you and you alone, and this is all my prayer. I take leave for this night with this thought in me. Let the All-Good God kindle the auspicious flame in all hearts. I do not want to harbour in my mind any ill will or dirty feeling, I know in my heart of hearts that the lamp of my life may suddenly go out any day. I have no sorrow on that account. Only before that I would like to prepare my mind by surrendering myself to God. (p. 59)

Manoj Das Gupta is not a professional historian. He is not a cultural critic in the conventional sense of the term. Nor does he claim to unravel unknown aspects of Syama Prasad or the turbulent history of India, before and after the partition. But as

this booklet shows, he is an extremely fine storyteller, objective and impassioned at the same time. He is able to make fascinating connections between biography and history. It is to be hoped that he will take time off from his many responsibilities to write and speak more on notable aspects of the Ashram history that intersect with the history of the nation.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

(2)

It is quite rare that the unique life of a personality like Syama Prasad Mookerjee is fully grasped through a memorial lecture. It is also rare that a person has lived a life that did not have even a single deviation from what he professed or believed. Neither is it common for a person, outwardly associated with national level politics to be selected by none other than the Mother Herself as Chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Committee. And Syama Prasad accepted this invitation without any hesitation. He summoned a Convention shortly. Many such instances one is sure to come across while reading the book *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: A Pure and Manly Life* by Shri Manoj Das Gupta.

Purity and manliness—the two basic values that adorned Syama Prasad's highly developed character—have given the exceptionally brilliant and talented personality a rare effulgence. The book describes in as much detail as possible the way Syama Prasad negotiated the confrontations, sufferings and criticisms even from his colleagues without any compromise or fumbling. Straightforwardness was always the mainstay of this multifaceted genius. The author has described these to us, analysing the anecdotes of Syama Prasad's life, showing how this noble person always clung to this rare virtue, even allowing his life to become, not a bed of roses, but on the contrary a thorny terrain.

Though a politician in his later life, Syama Prasad was basically an educationist and loved to be in the world of academics. The practice of reading lots and lots of books since his childhood, his love for his own mother tongue, Bengali, and the effort to make it a compulsory subject in the University curriculum during his tenure as Vice Chancellor and his relentless labour to bring in development in the functioning of the University during the same period are very nicely described in the book.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee's differences with the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru on the Kashmir issue and the resultant resignation from the Cabinet have been dealt with in much detail and many relevant documents have been referred to in this connection which help to give the reader a very clear view of the episode. Here the quotes from the various letters exchanged between Syama Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru are very topical and help the reader to find out what exactly was the situation that led Syama Prasad to take the decision to resign.

Especially mentionable and interesting are the translated pages from Syama Prasad's diary that have been incorporated at the end of the book. They speak about the inner person. Here the reader notices that Syama Prasad Mookerjee was essentially a spiritual man.

Thus, in spite of being the text of a talk delivered on a particular occasion, the book has become an important document on Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Shri Manoj Das Gupta deserves our respect and indebtedness as the author of such a nice book.

GOUTOM BANERJI

On Reading

At the top of the head or above it is the right place for yogic concentration in reading or thinking.

* * *

It is quite natural to want to meditate while reading yogic literature—that is not laziness.

The laziness of the mind consists in not meditating, when the consciousness wants to do so.

* * *

For one who wants to practise sadhana, sadhana must come first—reading and mental development can only be subordinate things.

* * *

If the power to meditate long is there, a sadhak will naturally do it and care little for reading—unless he has reached the stage when everything is part of the yogic consciousness because that is permanent. Sadhana is the aim of a sadhak, not mental development. But if he has spare time, those who have the mental turn will naturally spend it in reading or study of some kind.

* * *

Dhyāna and work are both helpful for this yoga to those who can do both. Reading also can be made helpful.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 727, 739, and Vol. 24, pp. 1270, 1272)

দুর্গা-স্তোত্র

মাতঃ দুর্গে! তোমাকে পাইলে আর বিসর্জন করিব না, শ্রদ্ধা ভক্তি প্রেমের ডোরে বাঁধিয়া রাখিব। এস মাতঃ, আমাদের মনে প্রাণে শরীরে প্রকাশ হও ॥

বীরমার্গপ্রদর্শিনি, এস! আর বিসর্জন করিব না। আমাদের অখিল জীবন অনবচ্ছিন্ন দুর্গাপূজা, আমাদের সর্ব কার্য অবিরত পবিত্র প্রেমময় শক্তিময় মাতৃসেবারত হউক, এই প্রার্থনা, মাতঃ, উর বঙ্গদেশে, প্রকাশ হও ॥

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

HYMN TO DURGA

MOTHER DURGA! When we possess thee, we shall no longer cast thee away; we shall bind thee to us with the tie of love and devotion. Come, Mother, manifest thyself in our mind and life and body.

Come, Revealer of the hero-path. We shall no longer cast thee away. May our entire life become a ceaseless worship of the Mother, all our acts a continuous service to the Mother, full of love, full of energy. This is our prayer, O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.

Sri Aurobindo

(Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta and approved by Sri Aurobindo)

With Compliments from Well-wishers